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INTERNATIONAL SOS

Central African Republic: Monitor developments, minimise movement from 26-29 December around general election polling day


OVERVIEW

 Level:


Advisory

 Location:


Central African Republic

 Category:

Conflict, Political unrest, Protest/Rally, Election

 Active:

21 Dec 2020 - 26 Dec 2020

 Event Date:

27 Dec 2020

Last Updated: 21 Dec 2020 18:44 (GMT)

The table below shows the number of impacted and potentially impacted individuals and assets at the date/time the alert was issued. The counts include individuals within the impact radius of the alert and may not reflect the total number of people in each area listed.

Please log into [Tracker](#) for the latest information or [click here](#) for an up-to-date list of affected individuals and assets in the impacted area.

EXPOSURE IN IMPACTED AREA ONLY

Location	There Now	There in next 24 hours	There in next 1-7 days	There while the alert is active
Central African Republic (Extreme Risk)	0	0	0	0
TOTAL	0	0	0	0

Members should monitor developments and prepare to minimise movement **from 26-29 December** around general election polling day **on 27 December**. Tensions have spiked during the official campaign period, which will continue **until 25 December**, over fresh militia violence attributed to the newly formed Coalition of Patriots for Change (CPC) group. Members should continue to exercise heightened caution during this period. A heightened deployment forces of the UN's stabilisation mission (MINUSCA) has been reported. All related political gatherings should be avoided, and members should monitor the security situation in their location on a daily basis.

ADVICE

Relocate non-essential assignees and dependants **until at least 15 January 2021** using commercial air options, particularly if not fully confident in local security arrangements. Determine essential and non-essential staffing and have a fully up-to-date record of contact details, addresses, passport details, and phone numbers. Ensure essential and local staff are able to stand fast for a period of up to 72 hours. Proactively relocate staff from rural areas to the capital should security not be adequate at their current accommodation. Remain apprised of the location of your local national staff as election unrest may impede movement across cities and prevent them from reaching your local office or their home location, where they may choose to travel to vote.

Stand-fast provision should include the stocking of essential supplies such as food, water, medicine, fuel and cash. In-country staff should be able to stand-fast autonomously for up to 72 hours.

Managers should review relevant escalation plans now and ensure they are ready to be implemented at immediate notice. Establishing organisation-specific triggers for the evacuation of international assignees can support swift decision-making in the event of a sudden deterioration of the security environment.

Ensure that local security providers have capabilities to assist in-country and local staff during the electoral period and that manned guarding at sites or offices is reinforced, where necessary, and availability confirmed.

MORE DETAIL

Security situation

The electoral campaign had been marked by violence including attacks against politicians while campaigning and fresh clashes between militia and the security forces in localities in Ombella-M'Poko and Lobaye prefectures. The increase in fighting has been attributed to the new militia alliance dubbed the CPC, which comprises three main armed groups: the Return, Reclamation, Rehabilitation (3R), the Central African Patriotic Movement and anti-Balaka factions. The coalition is seen as loyal to former president Francois Bozize, and the government has claimed it is attempting to destabilise the country ahead of the polls in an effort to cancel or postpone the election.

The situation in Bangui has remained stable, though sporadic fighting continues in Bossembele, Yaloke (both Ombella-M'Poko), and Mbaiki (Lobaye) localities despite a reinforced MINUSCA presence along the main entry and exit roads to Bangui. On 20 December, Rwanda, through an existing bilateral military agreement sent further force protection troops to the country to protect their large MINUSCA contingent. There are also unconfirmed reports that foreign mercenaries, believed to be from Russia, have arrived in Bangui by request of the government. Violence has the potential to lead to increased communal tensions in the capital, with Bangui's restive PK5 neighbourhood and the Boy-Rabe (fourth district) and Quartier Combattant (eighth district) being flashpoints for unrest.

The opposition COD-2020 coalition has made a fresh call for the postponement of the polls due to the renewed militia violence, though the government and international partners have thus far maintained the 27 December polling date. Bozize, who has been disqualified from running, has announced his party's support for Anicet-Georges Dologuele and called on the opposition to unite around a single candidate. In-fighting within the COD-2020 remains as party leaders claim a unified opposition candidate should only be agreed should there be a second round of elections.

ASSESSMENT

Despite reports on 21 December claiming militia groups have been pushed back and that the security situation has stabilised, armed groups have retained a presence in towns such as Bossembele (Ombella-M'Poko). The situation remains highly volatile and all travel outside Bangui should continue to be deferred, particularly considering the heightened threat of militia violence.

Bozize is reportedly still in his hometown of Bossangoa (Ouham prefecture), threatened with arrest should he attempt to return to the capital. Polling day will likely see attempts to disrupt voting at polling stations, voter intimidation and fresh attacks by the CPC. These latest attacks have increased the chance of violence after election day, particularly around the planned release of provisional results on **4 January**.

The elections have an international dimension due to the involvement of multiple foreign stakeholders and the influence of CAR's neighbours, particularly Chad and Sudan, as well as former colonial power France. A reported in-flux of foreign mercenary fights to Bangui, allegedly Russian groups invited by President Touadera, as well as the reinforced MINUSCA contingent, is likely to maintain broad stability in Bangui. However, accusations of foreign involvement may be leveraged by both sides to discredit the government. This, in turn, could fuel xenophobic sentiment and increase the risks posed to foreigners. A de-escalatory trigger would be the start of negotiations between political leaders, should regional or international partners be able to bring groups to the table.

We recommend that managers relocate non-essential staff and dependants **until at least 15 January 2021**, using commercial air options and prolonging any seasonal leave out of country. Preparations should be made to ensure remaining in-country and local staff are able to manage associated risks. These include the ability to stand fast at short notice and stockpiling essential provisions sufficient for up to 72 hours, including food, water, medication, fuel and cash. Evacuation plans should take into account relevant COVID-19 restrictions, particularly at onward destinations.

Potential triggers for a deterioration in the security situation include:

- Bozize returning to the capital Bangui and inciting his supporters and/or is arrested.
- Renewed militia activity in Bangui, particularly attacks by anti-Balaka groups targeting peacekeeping forces or populations in the PK5 area (third district).
- An attack by ex-members of the Seleka rebel coalition in southern prefectures or moving towards Bangui.
- An actual or attempted assassination of a senior politician or military official.
- An increase in xenophobic rhetoric leading to attacks on foreign institutions or nationals.
- An increase in protests degenerating into looting or affecting movement and safety in main cities.
- A military mutiny or an attempted coup.

WHAT WE ADVISED YOUR PEOPLE

Defer all travel due to restrictions related to COVID-19 and the potential for violence during the electoral period.
Non-essential assignees and dependants should depart using commercial air options. Bangui's M'Poko International Airport ([BGF](#)) has resumed operations, with services slowly normalising. Ensure compliance with COVID-19 restrictions in force at the onward destination.

In-country staff

Avoid all gatherings due to the risk of unrest. International assignees should minimise movement from 25-29 December around polling day, while local national staff should exercise vigilance, particularly at flashpoint locations such as polling stations, during the vote. All staff should refrain from discussing the current political situation, apart from with trusted contacts.
In the event of spontaneous gatherings, where possible to do so safely, move to a secure location, such as your residence, accommodation, or office and remain there until the situation has stabilised. Do not attempt to cross roadblocks, as this may prompt a hostile response from protesters.
Stock essential provisions of food, water, medicine, fuel and cash to be able to stand fast for at least 72 hours in the event of a sudden deterioration of the security environment.
Movement in the capital should be restricted to the city centre. Avoid peripheral neighbourhoods, where the potential for unrest is greater, especially the third district, where the restive PK5 quarter is located, as well as the fourth, fifth, sixth and eighth districts. Foreign nationals should avoid these areas, while local nationals based in these neighbourhoods should exercise caution due to a heightened risk of violence around the elections.
Ensure a robust communication plan is in place, including primary and alternative modes of communication. Register with your embassy and relevant warden networks to ensure the timely dissemination of information in case of an emergency.
Security incidents are liable to trigger the sudden but temporary closure of Bangui M'Poko International Airport. Only conduct travel to the facility upon confirmation of flight schedules.
Monitor our Central African Republic alerts for updates.

ASSISTANCE



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