

UN probing alleged killings by CAR forces, Russia mercenaries

UN official says the body is investigating the incident involving CAR troops and 'other security personnel'.

In mid-2021, UN experts deployed to CAR expressed strong concerns over reports of 'grave human rights abuses' by Russian mercenaries contracted to support government forces [File: Barbara Debout/AFP]

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The United Nations is investigating the alleged killing of dozens of people in the Central African Republic last week by CAR forces and mercenaries with the Russian private military company Wagner.

More than 30 civilians were reportedly killed, some by stray bullets, in the January 16-17 operation near the town of Bria that targeted the Union for Peace rebel group, according to UN officials speaking anonymously on Friday.

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UN spokesman Stephane Dujarric said the UN mission known as MINUSCA in the country received reports of the incident involving CAR troops and “other security personnel”.

“We are currently confirming the number of casualties and displacement,” Dujarric said.

MINUSCA dispatched a human rights team accompanied by security personnel to the area, and it “continues to assess the situation, ensuring necessary measures to be taken to protect civilians”, said Dujarric.

A military source in the country suggested the fighting could still be ongoing.

“Central African forces and the Russians are committing a massacre,” the source told AFP news agency, declining to be identified. “There have been summary executions and we are talking about 50 deaths.”

‘Grave abuses’

Albert Yaloke Mokpeme, spokesman for the CAR presidency, said he had “no knowledge of this attack”.

But in mid-2021, UN experts deployed to CAR expressed concerns over reports of “grave human rights abuses” by Russian mercenaries who are [contracted](#) to support government forces.

The Wagner group is [reputed](#) to be close to the Kremlin, and critics say it takes orders from the Russian defence ministry.

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Russia, however, rejected criticism and said at the time Wagner used only “instructors” for the CAR military.

Moscow has said it has 1,135 “unarmed trainers” in the country. But local independent groups, France, and the United Nations say at least some are from the Wagner group, which now has an armed presence in several African countries including Libya and Mali.

At the last meeting of the UN Security Council on the conflict in the Central African Republic, the United States demanded that Moscow investigate the abuses blamed on the Russians.

The UN experts group – with about a dozen people sent to monitor an arms embargo on the war-torn country – has not been functioning since August 31.

Russia has blocked a renewal of its mandate, claiming its makeup is tilted towards the West and does not reflect true geographic diversity.

On Friday diplomats said the block remains in place, and Western officials say Russia sees it beneficial to prevent a renewal of the UN group’s mission.