

Statement

WITNESS STATEMENT

WITNESS INFORMATION:

Nationality(s): Central African Republic

Religion: Christian

Language(s) Spoken: French, Sango

Language(s) Written: French, Sango

Language(s) Used in Interview: French and English

Occupation:

Place of Interview: BANGUI, CAR

CAR-OTP-2068-0222



[REDACTED]

Names of all persons present during interview: [REDACTED]

Signature(s): [REDACTED]

WITNESS STATEMENT

Procedure

1. I was introduced to [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] and I was told that they are Investigators with the Office of The Prosecutor (OTP) of the International Criminal Court (ICC). I was introduced to [REDACTED] and I was told that he is a Trial Lawyer with the OTP of the ICC. I was introduced to [REDACTED] and I was told that she is an interpreter for the ICC.
2. My lawyer, [REDACTED] was present during the interview of [REDACTED] at my request.
3. The investigators explained to me what the ICC is and described its mandate. They explained the role and mandate of the OTP within the ICC.
4. The investigators explained to me that they are investigating events that took place in Central African Republic from 1st August 2012 until present. I was informed that the OTP is contacting me because they believe I may have information relevant for establishing the truth.
5. I agreed that the interview would be conducted in English and interpreted into French. I fully understand and speak French.
6. The investigators explained to me that I do not have to answer to their questions. The investigators explained to me that they are seeking to find out the truth. I agree to tell the truth and that my answers to their questions are as complete as possible and reflect the best of my knowledge and recollection.
7. I was informed that any information I give to the OTP, including my identity, may be shared with the parties of the proceedings at the ICC; in particular the Judges,

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[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Accused persons, the Counsel of the Accused and the legal representatives of the victims.

8. The investigators have explained to me the reasons and importance of keeping my contacts with the OTP confidential, which I fully understand.
9. Having understood all the above issues, I confirmed my willingness to answer the investigators' questions.
10. The investigators explained to me how the interview was going to be conducted. I was told that I needed to be as accurate as possible in my account and that I should state when I do not know the answer to or do not understand the question. I understand that I need to distinguish between what I have experienced or seen myself and what I have heard or learned about from someone else.
11. I was told that at the conclusion of the interview, I would be asked to sign a written statement after having had the opportunity to review it, make any corrections, or add additional information.

Education and background

12. I was born on [REDACTED] I attended both primary and secondary school in [REDACTED] I started [REDACTED] graduated [REDACTED] after my studies were disrupted for two years. [REDACTED] [REDACTED] studies were complete.

13. [REDACTED]
14. [REDACTED]

- [REDACTED]
- [REDACTED]
16. [REDACTED] United Nations Security Council Resolution 1612, which established a monitoring and reporting mechanism concerning serious violations of children's rights in conflict areas. [REDACTED] a number of partners and UN agencies including MINUSCA, the World Food Program, Save the Children and War Child. [REDACTED] receiving funding from UNICEF.
17. One of the main objectives of [REDACTED] ESF, was to remove children from armed groups in the Central African Republic, including the Anti-Balaka and Seleka, as part of ESF's mandate to protect children's rights.

Detection of child soldiers in the Seleka

18. [REDACTED] However, because of the security situation UNICEF advised us not to go there anymore. A Muslim National NGO then took over from [REDACTED] I do not remember the name of this NGO.
19. In September 2014 ESF received information from the Head of Service of Social Affairs, Regional Direction in BODA [REDACTED] that the Seleka were using children as soldiers in BODA. ESF evaluated this information by visiting BODA. [REDACTED] We observed that there were children who were integrated with the Seleka and established that it appeared to be correct. We conducted this assessment overtly with the full knowledge of the local authorities and also the local Seleka and at no time were we under threat. [REDACTED]

Detection of child soldiers in the Anti-Balaka

20. ESF has an office in MBAIKI and during the crisis in 2013 and 2014. UNICEF had identified an Anti-Balaka commander, Alfred YEKATOM aka ROMBHOT, who had recruited children in his movement. We learned that the same Anti-Balaka group



[REDACTED]

controlled PK9 in OMBELLA-MPOKO prefecture and the LOBAYE prefecture generally. The children entered the movement from the 5th December 2013 when the Anti-Balaka attacked BANGUI.

21. Early in July 2014, UNICEF obtained this information from their staff that had travelled to PISSA and witnessed themselves that there were children integrated with the Anti Balaka and that they saw children at Anti-Balaka checkpoints. Having verified this information UNICEF staff met with ROMBHOT in PISSA.
22. UNICEF then approached [REDACTED] in MBAIKI. [REDACTED] requesting that [REDACTED] is presently in BANGUI [REDACTED]
23. [REDACTED] Field staff could report in writing or by telephone. Information on the [REDACTED] activities and psycho-social support issues would be shared with the public but information of incidents of children rights violations were treated as confidential [REDACTED]
24. [REDACTED] reported that he intended to visit ROMBHOT. He was asked by UNICEF staff in MBAIKI to meet ROMBHOT in PISSA to find a way to retrieve these children. The UNICEF focal point was [REDACTED]
I believe it was his team that initiated the discussion with ROMBHOT and made it possible for ESF to meet with him.
25. At that time I knew of ROMBHOT and that he was FACA soldier. [REDACTED]
[REDACTED] BANGUI. I was aware that he was a leader in the Anti-Balaka. He started with the Anti-Balaka movement in BANGUI and then later moved to PISSA.
26. ROMBHOT's area of control/influence in 2014-2015 included the route from BANGUI - PK9 - SEKIA - BOSSONGO - PISSA - MBAIKI. It also included the route from PISSA - MBATA - BOUCHIA - BATALIMO - MOUNGOUMBA and the villages situated south of MBAIKI in the BALE-LOKE area. ROMBHOT would visit villages on the route MBAIKI to BODA but he did not spend much time there and left the area under the command of one of his "Lieutenants". I do not know the name of this person. ROMBHOT's elements are still present in PISSA where they await the DDR process. [REDACTED]



- [REDACTED]
27. [REDACTED] The conflict was still ongoing at this time. We did not have a mandate to do this on our own and had to formalise a contract with UNICEF. Before we could receive any funding for the project we needed to submit a project plan and sign a Memorandum of Understanding.
28. The partners in this project were UNICEF, the Ministry of Social Affairs and ESF as the executing partner. We did not just need financial support but also psycho-social support, capacity building in dealing with children from armed groups, support for gender based crimes and protection for orphaned children.
29. The project was supposed to be led, implemented and monitored by the Ministry of Social Affairs. They however did not have the capacity to do so. The ESF took over this role under the supervision of the Ministry of Social Affairs. The project was funded by UNICEF.
30. [REDACTED]
31. After consultations with UNICEF and the ESF focal point, ROMBHOT agreed to send his Secretary General to all the villages to make an assessment of the number of children that were recruited in the Anti-Balaka so that we could be sure that we accounted and retrieved all the children. I do not recall the Secretary General's name.

Travel to PISSA to meet ROMBHOT

32. On [REDACTED] August 2014 [REDACTED]
33. [REDACTED]
34. [REDACTED]
35. I saw children at the SEKIA checkpoint and stopped. I saw six children playing at the checkpoint. The Anti-Balaka were mostly youths from my area so they did not give me any problems when I got out of the vehicle. I greeted the children and played with them. I had a general conversation with the children and asked them



[REDACTED]

what they were doing there. They told me that they were Anti-Balaka. The children were not armed but some of them were wearing FACA uniform. They were all wearing fetishes (*gris-gris*). I estimated their ages to be between 10-18 years old. I did not want to ask too many details as the other armed Anti-Balaka were standing with us. We later had opportunities to speak to these children after they were moved to MBAIKI.

36. The security at the PISSA checkpoint seemed to be higher as this was where the Anti-Balaka had their base. I saw 7 children at this checkpoint. Two of the children were manning the barrier. They were not wearing uniform and the others were hanging around the gendarmerie. Some were dressed in FACA uniforms and others in civilian clothing. I did not talk to them.

[REDACTED]

37. [REDACTED]
[REDACTED] There were four Anti-Balaka elements with ROMBHOT. [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

38. [REDACTED]
39. [REDACTED]
40. [REDACTED]
41. [REDACTED]



[REDACTED]

4th August Ceremony in PISSA

42. On the 4th of August 2014 a ceremony was arranged at the PISSA town hall for the retrieval of children who were recruited by the Anti-Balaka in PISSA and surrounding areas. [REDACTED]

43. [REDACTED]
the town hall in PISSA on the 4th August. It was established that children who did not have families in the surrounding villages were identified and informed by the Anti-Balaka Secretary General to report to the PISSA town hall. Those other children affected remained with their respective families in the villages. There were 60 children [REDACTED]

44. The ceremony was attended by the Regional Director of the Ministry of Social Affairs for OMBELLA-MPOKO and LOBAYE prefectures, Mrs. SEREMANDJI [REDACTED] a representative of the Mayor of PISSA, [REDACTED] ROMBHOT [REDACTED] Anti-Balaka elements, and the children. [REDACTED]

45. [REDACTED] ROMBHOT [REDACTED] told them that the ESF project was an opportunity for them to find something better than what the Anti-Balaka could offer them. He warned them to listen carefully to what the ESF representatives had to say. He told them that they could not come back to the Anti- Balaka and told his elements in the town hall not to allow them to return.

46. ROMBHOT committed to free the children under his command and not to re-enrol them if the conflict reignited. He also signed a contract document to this effect. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]



[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

47. [REDACTED]
48. [REDACTED]
49. [REDACTED]
50. [REDACTED]

51. [REDACTED]

52. [REDACTED]

Ceremony on the 5th August in MBAIKI

53. [REDACTED]



[REDACTED]

54. ROMBHOT however did not attend as the Congolese Colonel from MISCA threatened to arrest him if he attended as there was a restriction order against him. Instead some of ROMBHOT's Anti-Balaka "lieutenants" attended. I do not remember their names.

55. [REDACTED] various persons and guests made speeches. All the children were now present including [REDACTED] who came later on the [REDACTED] August to PISSA and who were driven to MBAIKI the next day [REDACTED]

56. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

57. At the *Centre de transit et d'orientation* we provided the children with psycho-social [REDACTED]

58. [REDACTED]

59. All the children had a full medical examination on the [REDACTED] included their individual dossiers.

60. [REDACTED] their life story, [REDACTED] their town or village of residence, how they were integrated into the Anti-Balaka, how they were treated by the Anti-Balaka, and what their role was in the Anti-Balaka. [REDACTED]

61. The children ranged between the ages of 9 to 18 years of age; there were not many in the age group 9 –15 years. [REDACTED]

62. The children generally all knew their ages and levels completed at school.



[REDACTED]

63. There were three cases where siblings (brothers/sisters) from the same family were recruited by the Anti-Balaka.

64. The children were from all over the Central African Republic, including towns and villages in LOBAYE but also remote areas in other provinces. They came to LOBAYE following the Anti Balaka as they progressed from the provinces. I recall that some came from BAMBARI and BOALI.

65. [REDACTED]

66. It appeared that the children had voluntarily joined the Anti-Balaka. None had suggested that they were abducted. Many had lost their families due to the conflict and joined the Anti-Balaka for protection, food and to avenge the killing of their families.

67. The children had varied roles in the Anti-Balaka, such as acting as cooks and spies, but also as fighters and soldiers. I recall that the youngest child fighter was 10 years old. He was traumatised and what I would describe as dangerous. He had been a fighter at the front line wearing 'gris-gris'. There were around 11-12 fighters amongst the children aged between 10 to 17 years. There were four girls, aged between 14-17, who were slaves and "wives" for ROMBHOT's Anti-Balaka "lieutenants". With "wives" I mean that they had to engage in sexual intercourse with these "lieutenants". None of them were pregnant. All this information is held at the ESF offices in MBAIKI.

68. [REDACTED]
[REDACTED] Most of the children were from territories occupied by the Anti-Balaka and recruited locally. [REDACTED]
[REDACTED] Other children were from remote areas of CAR. [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

69. [REDACTED]



[REDACTED]

Documentation of the events

70. [REDACTED] containing all information concerning the children retrieved from ROMBHOT, including their age, where they are from, and their role and position in the Anti-Balaka. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

71.

[REDACTED]

72.

Other incidents of child soldiers in the Central African Republic

73. [REDACTED] The LOBAYE was split in two – one part in which ROMBHOT was involved. The other part going toward BODA, where the Seleka were involved. We retrieved some children from there as well. Unfortunately, we were not able to identify who the commander was.

74. [REDACTED]

75. ALINDAO: the child soldiers here were part of the UPC, the group of Ali DARASS

76. MOBAYE: the child soldiers here were part of the UPC and the Anti-Balaka

77. BANGASSO: the child soldiers here were part of the Anti-Balaka and armed Muslim groups

78. ZEMIO: the child soldiers here were part of the UPC and the Sudanese Djajaweed

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

79.

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

80.

[REDACTED]

Annexes

[REDACTED]

Closing Procedure

81. I was informed that I may be called to testify before the Court. It was brought to my attention that ICC trials are held in public and explained to me that, as an exception to the principle of public hearings, the judges may apply protective measures to those testifying if circumstances require.
82. The investigators informed me of the protective measures that may apply during and after the investigation and/or trial proceedings.
83. I have nothing to add to the above statement nor do I have anything to clarify. I am available to be contacted in the future for clarifications or questions on topics not covered during this interview.

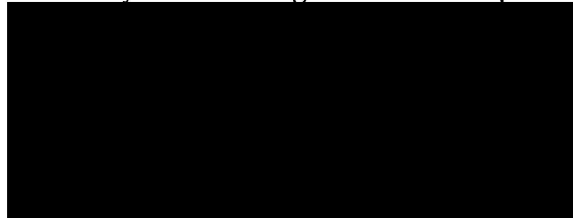




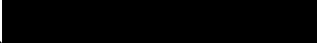
84. I have given the answers to the questions of my own free will.
85. There has not been any form of coercion, duress, threat, promise or inducement which has influenced my account.
86. I have no complaints about the way I was treated during this interview.

WITNESS ACKNOWLEDGMENT

This statement has been read over to me in French with interpretation in English and (it) is true to the best of my knowledge and recollection. I have given this statement voluntarily and I am aware that it may be used in legal proceedings before the International Criminal Court and that I may be called to give evidence in public before the International Criminal Court.



INTERPRETER CERTIFICATION

1. I,  certify that:
2. I am duly qualified to interpret from the English language into the French language and from the French language into the English language.
3. I have been informed by  that he speaks and understands the French language.
4. I have orally translated the above statement from the English language to the French language in the presence of  who appeared to have heard and understood my translation of this statement.



[REDACTED]

5. [REDACTED] has acknowledged that the facts and matters set out in his statement, as translated by me, are true to the best of his knowledge and recollection and has accordingly signed his signature where indicated.

Signed:

Dated:

[REDACTED]

