

The Hague, Netherlands, March 28 (Infosplusgabon) - Justice and accountability are necessary to successfully surmount the recurring cycle of violence in Central African Republic (CAR), International Criminal Court (ICC) Prosecutor Fatou Bensouda has said, reiterating her Office's commitment to the pursuit of accountability for atrocity crimes in the country.

“The fight against impunity and efforts to stabilise the country are inextricable,” Bensouda pointed out in a statement issued here on Tuesday following her visit to CAR last week when she attended the opening of a training programme for the examining magistrates and judges of the Special Criminal Court in the country.

The three-day training programme was the result of collaboration between the French National School of Administration and the Judiciary, the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA), and the ICC.

“We appreciate all efforts undertaken to restore justice in CAR, including the efforts of the Special Criminal Court,” said Bensouda, noting that the ongoing violence currently plaguing a large portion of the country, including the city of Bangui, is a reminder of how precarious the situation in CAR remains.

“Clashes between armed groups persist. The civilian population suffers from this state of instability and violence. These terrible events are a reminder of the major challenges which must be overcome in order to restore stability in CAR.

“It is heartening that the men and women of the Central African Republic have called for justice. These demands must be met. We have heard this need expressed by many, including participants in the Bangui Forum of 2015, Government representatives, members of civil society, religious leaders, refugees and members of the diaspora.

“As these voices continue to stress, there will be no peace, nor lasting reconciliation, without justice. Each of us has a contribution to make: peace, justice, reconstruction and reconciliation are all different facets of the same struggle.

“Only by cooperating and coordinating our respective efforts shall we achieve these goals. As Prosecutor of the ICC, I reaffirm that my Office will continue to play its part in accordance with its mandate under the Rome Statute,” Bensouda said.

She pointed out that her Office has always emphasised the importance of cooperation and complementarity; which is crucial to develop strong linkages between national judicial systems and the ICC.

She told CAR authorities of their primary responsibility to investigate the atrocities committed and prosecute perpetrators, with a view to ensuring that they are held accountable.

“Our efforts are solely undertaken in accordance with our mandate under the Rome Statute, bringing the added value derived from the preliminary examinations, investigations and prosecutions for which we are responsible,” she said.

With regard to the situation in CAR, Bensouda explained that at the end of 2014, following a referral by Central African authorities, she decided to open a second investigation. Since then, the representatives of the Prosecutor’s Office have been collecting, and continue to collect evidence relative to crimes committed since 1 August 2012.

“We are focusing our efforts on investigating alleged crimes falling under the jurisdiction of the ICC committed during the period in question by both parties to the conflict, namely, the Séléka and the Anti-Balaka armed groups.

“We shall fulfil our role, but we cannot address all atrocity crimes committed in CAR, and were never designed to do so,” she said.

In Bangui Bensouda had discussion with CAR President Faustin Archange Touadera besides her meetings with national authorities, civil society representatives, judicial actors and the media.

She told them that the efforts undertaken by the ICC, national authorities, the Special Criminal Court and other actors are all complementary. They all seek to ensure those responsible for egregious crimes committed in CAR are held responsible, and by so doing, hope to deter future crimes.

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