

Financial Times: Death toll rises to 73 in Central African Republic clashes Xan Rice 10 September 2013

Fighting between gunmen loyal to

[Central African Republic](#)

's ex-president and the former rebels who ousted him has claimed more than 70 lives since Saturday, in the deadliest clashes since the coup in March.

The violence occurred in the western region of Bossangoa, the home area of the deposed president François Bozizé. The town of Bouca was attacked, along with a camp run by [Seleka, the former rebels who propelled Michel Djotodia, the country's new leader, to power](#)

. Thousands of people fled into nearby forests, and residents, peacekeepers and the government said at least 73 were killed, according to Reuters.

The fighting comes amid warnings from the EU and France that Central African Republic is on the verge of becoming a failed state like Somalia. Aid groups say the lack of medical care and widespread displacement has created a humanitarian emergency. Outside Bangui, the capital, where French troops guard the airport and African Union peacekeepers are on patrol, there is almost no security.

A presidential spokesman on Monday accused Bozizé loyalists of destroying bridges and taking revenge against the Muslim population in Bossangoa. Mr Djotodia, who has been reluctantly recognised as interim president by the international community, is the first Muslim leader in the majority Christian country. Fighters from his Seleka group, an alliance of five rebel movements, have been accused of widespread atrocities in recent months, including executions, rape and looting.

On Friday, the UN refugee agency said it was "increasingly worried" about the widespread lawlessness and safety of civilians in Central African Republic, which is one of the world's poorest countries. In a field visit to the northern region, UN staff found seven villages that had recently been burnt to the ground. At least 206,000 people, out of a population of 4.5m, have been internally displaced since December. Another 62,000 have sought shelter in neighbouring countries. (...)

The Seleka rebels, described by the ICG as a "heterogeneous consortium of malcontents", [rose up in December, seizing numerous towns](#) after accusing Mr Bozizé of reneging on a 2007 peace agreement and failing to pursue reconciliation.

[France, the former colonial power, said it would not defend the government](#)

, but the rebels agreed to peace talks after troops from neighbouring countries said they would intervene.

In March, Mr Bozizé fled to Cameroon as

[Seleka overpowered African peacekeepers, killing 13 South African soldiers,](#)

and entered the capital. Mr Bozizé, who is from the Gbaya ethnic group, the country's biggest, told French media in August that he had ambitions of returning to power. The Seleka rebels have since tried to cement control in areas where Mr Bozizé has support, causing resentment and triggering resistance.

The African Union said in July that it would form a 3,600-strong peacekeeping operation for Central African Republic to take over from a regional peacekeeping mission, known as MICOPAX. But the force still has little over 1,000 troops. Mr Vircoulon said that African and western governments had not done enough to contain the crisis.

“The international response has been very poor. It's been a wait-and-see approach rather than a proactive effort to restore security.”

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