

## **UN Chief Wants 3,000 Troops Sent to Central African Republic In the News February 22, 2014**

From VOA Learning English, this is In the News.

United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon has appealed for international action to stop religious violence in the Central African Republic. Mr. Ban asked the Security Council on Thursday to deploy at least 3,000 more troops to the country within the coming days and weeks. He said, "When innocent civilians are being murdered in large numbers, deliberately targeted in the most brutal fashion, simply because of who they are, the world must act."

More than 7,000 African Union and French forces are already in the country. The European Union has promised to send another 1,000 soldiers. The Central African Republic is a former French colony.

This week, Mr. Ban also proposed \$38 million in financial and other aid for the AU forces. He worries the religious violence could turn into genocide. The unrest began a year ago after Muslim rebels ousted the president, Francois Bozize. His overthrow and resulting violence led to a majority Christian militia. Its members are accused of carrying out attacks against Muslim civilians. Since December, hundreds of people have died in clashes between Muslims and Christians. Tens of thousands have fled the country in the past month.

The militia men call themselves the anti-balaka. Balaka is said to be a word for knife or machete in a local language. Militia members say they came to the capital, Bangui, in December to oust the government of Michel Djotodia, the country's first Muslim president. But international forces have accused the anti-balaka of being the problem. They say its fighters are increasingly turning to attacking homes and businesses.

Some fighters are only teenagers. They have set up roadblocks on country roads, carrying weapons and demanding money. French and African troops have used force to disarm them.

The anti-balaka has been described as a loose alliance, and several leaders claim to speak for the men. Joachim Kokate represented the militia at a meeting in January. He says it is time for justice. He says those organizing theft and extrajudicial killings should be targeted, and they should answer for their acts.

Many anti-balaka fighters tell VOA they want the same treatment the Muslim Seleka rebels are receiving. That means they want food, shelter and financial aid. They also want the chance to join the national army as part of a disarmament agreement.

Some fighters consider themselves liberators of their country. Others see the conflict as becoming a battle between religious groups. But the militias are made up of both Christians and animists, people who believe that natural objects have spirits. They say they are motivated by nationalism -- not religion.

Anti-balaka leaders say they have tens of thousands of fighters.

And that's In the News from VOA Learning English. I'm Steve Ember.