

Three UN peacekeepers killed in Central African Republic

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Rwandan peacekeepers of the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic. (Photo: AFP)

Bangui, December 26 (RHC)-- Unidentified "armed combatants" have killed three UN peacekeepers in the Central African Republic (CAR), the United Nations says, as the country prepares for Sunday's key presidential and legislative elections amid the continuation of fighting between rebels and government

forces.

"Three peacekeepers from Burundi were killed and two others were wounded" following attacks on UN troops and Central African national defense and security forces, the UN said in a brief statement. It added that the assaults took place in Dekoa, central Kemo Prefecture, and in Bakouma, in the southern Mbomou Prefecture, without providing further details.

The attacks came hours after a rebel coalition fighting the government called off a ceasefire and reiterated calls for the suspension of the elections, as well as the arrival of troops from Russia and Rwanda to shore up the government of the resource-rich country. However, the Constitutional Court on Saturday rejected final appeals by the opposition to postpone the vote.

The CAR said on Monday that Russia and Rwanda have deployed hundreds of troops to the nation following an alleged military coup plot.

"Russia has sent several hundred soldiers and heavy weapons" within the framework of a bilateral cooperation agreement, CAR's government spokesman Ange Maxime Kazagui announced on Monday, adding, "The Rwandans have also sent several hundred men who are on the ground and have started fighting."

Stephane Dujarric, spokesman for the UN secretary general, denounced the attacks on the peacekeepers, urging the CAR authorities to investigate the "heinous" assaults. He also warned that "attacks against United Nations peacekeepers may constitute a war crime."

Several powerful armed groups in the CAR accused President Faustin Archange Touadera's government of seeking to fix the elections and warned of a violent response.

Earlier, leaders of the three main armed rebel groups in the CAR formed a coalition and accused former President Francois Bozize of an "attempted coup" ahead of the elections. The rebel groups said they had invited "all other armed groups to join."

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