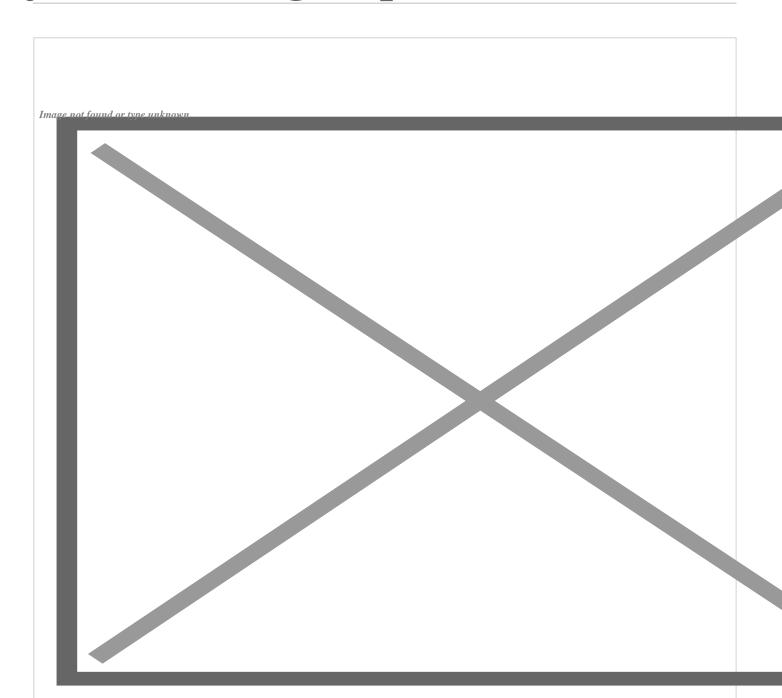# UN troops recapture CAR city from armed groups

UN peacekeeping force MINUSCA has almost 12,000 military personnel in the country. (Photo: Evelyn Kahungu / Al Jazeera)

Bangui, January 18 (RHC)-- United Nations peacekeeping troops said they have retaken control of a city in the Central African Republic captured two weeks ago by armed groups waging an offensive against the government of President Faustin-Archange Touadera.

Rebels abandoned their positions in Bangassou, 750 km east of the capital, Bangui, and fled the city following an ultimatum over the weekend from the UN peacekeeping force MINUSCA, the mission's spokesman Vladimir Monteiro said over the weekend.

"The city of Bangassou is under the complete control of MINUSCA," Monteiro said, though he added that the UN force "remains on alert" to prevent any rebel return or other actions against civilians, the state authority and UN troops.

Armed groups waging a nationwide offensive captured the city on January 3, forcing many residents to flee across the border to the Democratic Republic of the Congo. "It's a great joy," Juan Jose Aguirre, the bishop of Bangassou, told the AFP news agency following the UN operation to regain control of the city. "After 13 days' sleeping outdoors, people will be able to return to their homes," he added.

Al Jazeera's Malcolm Webb, reporting from Bangui, said: "Rwandan peacekeeping troops were deployed to Bangassou ahead of a potential operation and an ultimatum was given to the armed groups controlling the town, after which they left. "There have been reports of gunfire in the area and also reports that armed groups still control some parts of the town," he said.

"With or without small towns, they still control approximately two-thirds of the country's territory, and in it, most of its diamond and gold mines."

Lieutenant Colonel Abdoul Aziz Fall, spokesman for MINUSCA's military component, said the UN force intervened to stop attempts at looting overnight from Friday to Saturday. "The situation is calm and under control and positions that had been occupied by armed groups are no longer," Fall said.

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