

Nearly 60,000 have fled Central African Republic violence

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Women stand in line for food aid delivered by the United Nations in the village of Makunzi Wali, Central African Republic. (Photo: Baz Ratner / Reuters)

Geneva, January 17 (RHC)-- The number of people fleeing violence in the Central African Republic (CAR) has doubled to nearly 60,000 in just a week, the UN refugee agency said. The UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) has blamed intensifying violence since a December 27 presidential vote for the sharp increase in refugees. It added that most had fled to the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) across the Ubangi River.

“The UN refugee agency is calling for the immediate end to all violence in the CAR as nearly 60,000 people have been forced to seek refuge in neighbouring countries since December, a twofold rise in just one week,” UNHCR spokesman Boris Cheshirkov told reporters in Geneva.

He said that besides those crossing into the DRC, nearly 9,000 CAR refugees had arrived in neighbouring Cameroon, Chad and the Republic of Congo in the past month, while a further 58,000 were still internally displaced. “UNHCR and partners in CAR are gathering reports of abuses by armed groups, including of sexual violence, attacks on voters and pillaging,” Cheshirkov said.

Landlocked CAR is one of the world’s poorest nations and has seen a string of coups and wars since it gained independence from France in 1960.

On Wednesday, rebel forces in the CAR mounted their closest attack yet to Bangui – which lies on the Ubangi across from the DRC – before being pushed back with the loss of a peacekeeper, the UN said. Rebels had launched an offensive promising to march on the capital ahead of the contested December 27 presidential election, in what the government called an attempted coup.

On January 4, President Faustin Archange Touadera was declared the winner of the election, although the CAR’s political opposition cried foul. The results account for only about half of registered voters, as hundreds of thousands were unable to cast their vote in areas held by rebels.

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