

France Opens Probe into Assault Involving French Troops in Central African Republic



Paris, June 21 (RHC)-- Prosecutors in France have launched a preliminary probe into allegations that French soldiers deployed to the Central African Republic (CAR) physically abused two civilians or stood by as others beat them. Five troops are suspected of beating up the two locals or looking on while the men were physically abused by others at a military outpost in the capital city of Bangui in 2014.

The probe will also seek to find out why the servicemen assaulted the civilians and why no one stopped the attack, which was first reported by the French daily *Ouest-France*. A senior officer reported the incident to his superiors in late April.

Last week, French authorities opened an inquiry into “voluntary group violence” as well as sequestration and failing to help people in danger over the assault. Earlier this month, the French Defense Ministry said it suspended the five troops accused of engaging in physical abuse following their deployment to the CAR. Four other troops were subject to disciplinary action due to their failure to report the attack despite allegedly having knowledge of it.

The French soldiers in the CAR, known as Sangaris, have engaged in controversial behavior against the locals before. There are currently three other official probes underway into allegations that French soldiers sexually abused children in the CAR.

The Sangaris force was deployed to the CAR in 2013 after the outbreak of inter-communal violence that has killed thousands. The military mission is due to conclude at the end of the current year, after a progressive draw-down.

The United Nations announced in April that it has documented 108 new cases of sexual abuse committed by the French troops in the CAR mostly against minors, describing them as “sickening” and urging investigations that “leave no stone unturned.”

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