

**CONVICTION OF JEAN-PIERRE BEMBA,
WAITING FOR THE SPECIAL CRIMINAL COURT'S FIRST INVESTIGATIONS**

The Hague/Bangui, 21 March 2016 – The International Criminal Court declared Jean-Pierre Bemba guilty of crimes against humanity and war crimes committed by his troops in the Central African Republic (CAR). For ASF, this decision concerning the former political and military leader from Congo is only the first step towards fighting against impunity and dealing with past crimes in the CAR. The Central African Special Criminal Court must rapidly initiate trials for these serious crimes and open the way for reconciliation and durable peace in the country.

This Monday, the International Criminal Court (ICC) in The Hague found Jean-Pierre Bemba guilty of crimes committed by his forces from the Movement for the Liberation of Congo (MLC) against the Central African civilian population between October 2002 and March 2003. At that time, Mr Bemba allied with the armed forces of the Central African President Patassé to fight against the rebellion movement lead by F. Bozizé.

According to the ICC, Mr Bemba knew that his troops were committing crimes against humanity and war crimes as they were murdering, raping and pillaging numerous civilians during armed operations. The Court noted that in spite of his position as a military leader and his authority over the MLC forces, he had made no attempt to prevent these crimes or reprimand the perpetrators, and that this is why he had been found guilty.

This long-awaited judgement is an important step for the victims of the atrocities committed at this time, in terms of truth-telling. But, since this chapter in the history of Central African Republic, other atrocities have been committed in the CAR that are still awaiting justice. In particular, between 2012 and 2013, the country faced a wave of unprecedented violence, causing the deaths of thousands of people and forcing whole populations to move away.

In 2015, the transitional Central African Republic government set up a Special Criminal Court (SCC) to try the serious crimes committed in the country since 2003. The creation of this Court will certainly be a key element in the CAR's search for justice and reconciliation. "The investigations of the ICC alone will not be sufficient to deal with all of the crimes that have been committed in the CAR. Unless serious investment is made in national justice, there is a very real risk that the cycle of violence, where impunity is seen as the norm, will continue. But while the Special Criminal Court does indeed exist on paper, it must very quickly become a reality", says Adrien Nifasha, head of ASF's mission in the CAR.

"The new Central African Republic government must continue to make it a priority to fight against the impunity of the perpetrators of these international crimes. In order to make this commitment real, human, logistical and financial resources will have to be mobilised rapidly and the support of the international community will be crucial", says Adrien Nifasha.

At the end of 2015, in association with a number of other international NGOs, including Human Rights Watch and the International Federation for Human Rights, along with Central African NGOs, ASF launched an appeal to donating tates for their immediate support in the establishment of the SCC (i).



ASF is present in the CAR where, with the support of the European Union, it has developed a number of projects to improve access to justice for vulnerable populations.

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(i) For more information about the joint initiative, set up by ASF and other NGOs, relating to the SCC, you can consult the following documents on the ASF website:

"CAR: more efforts needed to get the Special Criminal Court operating"
<http://www.asf.be/fr/blog/publications/car-more-efforts-needed-to-get-the-special-criminal-court-operating/>

"Recommendations for the implementation of the CAR Special Criminal Court"
<http://www.asf.be/fr/blog/publications/recommandations-for-the-establishment-of-the-special-criminal-court-in-car/>