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C.Africa to Probe Claims of Abuse By Troops, Russian Forces

By AFP

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UN experts have sounded the alarm over alleged "major rights violations" by Russian forces sent to shore up the CAR's beleaguered armed forces. **EPA**

The Central African Republic described UN information about abuse by CAR troops and Russian forces as "denunciations," but promised to investigate them.

Government spokesman Ange Maxime Kazagui, in a statement late Monday, said President Faustin Archange Touadera had received a report from the UN peacekeeping mission MINUSCA.

In it, the mission detailed abuses committed between December 2020 and April 2021 "that seriously accuse national and bilateral forces," he said, referring to CAR troops and their Russian military supporters.

The allegations include "arbitrary/extrajudicial executions, torture, sexual violence, cruel,

inhumane and degrading treatment (and) arbitrary arrest," his statement said.

UN experts in March had sounded the alarm about allegations of "major rights violations" by Russian forces sent to shore up the CAR's beleaguered armed forces.

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Kazagui, whose statement was dated April 30 but was issued on national radio on Monday, said the government "was not informed at any moment about an investigation or investigations being carried out on its soil."

"The government considers this document as being mere denunciations," he said.

"However, given the seriousness of the allegations against the defense and security forces and allied forces... the government has instructed the minister of justice to open a judicial inquiry, in conformity with the law."

MINUSCA spokesman Vladimir Monteiro told AFP, "There isn't a report, but we did give the government information to draw its attention to certain facts."

Public prosecutor Eric Didier Tambo said the justice ministry had issued instructions to set up a "special commission of inquiry" which would bring in the country's three prosecutorial services.

Russia has since 2018 openly supported the Touadera regime, which only controls about one-third of a deeply poor country wracked by partisan and communal strife.

Most of the territory is divided among numerous armed bands.

Under a bilateral defense accord, Russian paramilitaries from the Wagner Group, a shadowy private military company, operate in the CAR. Their official status is to train the country's army.

They were joined last December by hundreds of other Russian paramilitaries, along with Rwandan troops, who played a key role in thwarting a rebel advance on the capital Bangui ahead of presidential elections.

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