

Beat: Miscellaneous

French journalist, 26, killed in Central African Republic

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USPA News - A 26-year-old French photojournalist has been killed in the Central African Republic while embedded with members of a Christian militia, French President François Hollande said on Tuesday, promising to use all necessary means to find her killers. Camille Lepage, a freelance photographer whose work has appeared in a number of American and French newspapers, was found dead on Tuesday when French troops searched a vehicle driven by members of the Christian anti-balaka militia near Bouar, a town in the country's west near the border with Cameroon.

A statement issued by the French presidency said Hollande had requested the immediate dispatch of a French team to the site where Lepage's body was found. "All necessary means will be used to shed light on the circumstances of the murder and to find the murderers of our compatriot," the statement said. The news comes about a week after Lepage posted a photo on Instagram along with a message that said she would travel to Amada Gaza while embedded with anti-balaka members. "We left at 3:30 a.m. to avoid the [African Union peacekeeping mission] Misca checkpoints and it took us 8 hours by motorbike as there is no proper roads to reach the village," she wrote in the message. Lepage said some 150 people had been killed by Muslim Seleka rebels in Amada Gaza since March and that another recent attack claimed six more lives. "The anti-balaka Colonel Rock decides to send his elements there to patrol around and take people who fled to the bush back to their homes safely," the journalist said in her last update. It was not immediately clear whether Lepage was killed by anti-balaka militia members or whether she was caught up in fighting with Seleka rebels. Her death follows the killings of two local journalists in the capital Bangui earlier this month, an indication of the deteriorating security situation for reporters. The current crisis in the African country began in December 2012 when mainly Muslim Seleka rebels seized large parts of the country, but recent months have seen unprecedented violence between Christians and Muslims. The conflict - in a country of just 4.4 million people - has prompted more than 290,000 people to flee to neighboring countries in search of refuge and has left 650,000 people internally displaced. Thousands of people have been killed in the recent violence and escalating atrocities. Sixteen people, including three aid workers and a number of local chiefs, were killed in the northwestern town of Nanga Boguila last month when dozens of heavily armed ex-Seleka rebels attacked a hospital run by Doctors Without Borders (MSF) in an apparent armed robbery. The Central African Republic has been through a series of coups and revolts since its independence from France in 1960. Located next to Cameroon, the African country is one of the poorest in the world, despite considerable agricultural, water and mineral resources. But corruption is rife and undermines the timber and diamond industries.

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