

# Cultivating Atrocities

French Sugar and Beverage Giant Castel Group Linked to the Funding of Brutal Militias in Central African Republic

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## SUMMARY

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French giant Castel Group is the third-largest wine producer worldwide, the second-largest brewer in Africa, and a major bottling partner for Coca-Cola in Africa. Behind the scenes, however, a subsidiary of Castel Group has conducted business with violent armed groups responsible for mass atrocities in order to protect its market shares.

According to The Sentry's investigation, in late 2014, amid political and security upheaval, Castel Group subsidiary Sucrerie Africaine de Centrafrique (African Sugar Refinery of the Central African Republic, or SUCAF RCA) negotiated a security arrangement with an armed group, the Unité pour la paix en Centrafrique (Union for Peace in the Central African Republic, or UPC). Through this tacit agreement, UPC leaders committed to secure SUCAF RCA's factory and sugar cane fields and to ensure free movement on key roadways necessary for the provision of supplies. SUCAF RCA also secured UPC support in trying to assure the company's monopoly on sugar distribution in several prefectures, including through the forced seizure of smuggled sugar, particularly from Sudan. To protect its market, SUCAF RCA set up a sophisticated, informal system to finance the violent militias through direct and indirect cash payments, as well as through in-kind support in the form of vehicle maintenance and fuel provision.

Since their creation in late 2014, UPC militias, led by self-proclaimed General Ali Darassa, have committed mass killings, abductions, torture, child soldier recruitment, and sexual and gender-based violence. The United Nations (UN) has reported that the UPC militias committed mass atrocities that may constitute war crimes and crimes against humanity. Reporting by The Sentry shows that Castel Group's subsidiaries, SUCAF RCA and its Paris-based parent company Société d'Organisation de Management et de Développement des Industries Alimentaires et Agricoles (Food and Agricultural Industries Management and Development Company, or SOMDIAA), as well as SOMDIAA's security contractor, retired French General Bruno Dary, have been regularly informed of the egregious human rights violations committed by the UPC. The investigation found that, despite this knowledge, SUCAF RCA management still provided financial and logistical support to criminal groups, primarily but not exclusively the UPC, for more than six years, thus helping to fuel armed conflict in CAR.

## SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

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- France's national antiterrorism prosecutor's office should launch an investigation into the potential complicity and criminal liability of Castel Group's subsidiaries—primarily but not exclusively the Paris-based SOMDIAA and the CAR-based SUCAF RCA—in war crimes and crimes against humanity.
- The prosecutor's offices of the International Criminal Court (ICC) and the Central African Special Criminal Court (SCC) should undertake a review of the evidence presented in this report and open an investigation into the alleged war crimes and crimes against humanity committed by the UPC and their enablers.
- The United Nations, European Union, United States, and United Kingdom should investigate and, if appropriate, designate for sanctions the network of individuals and entities with links to the Castel Group subsidiaries highlighted in this report who are allegedly fueling mass atrocities and profiting from state capture in CAR.

Read the report: <https://thesentry.org/reports/cultivating-atrocities/>

