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# AN OVERVIEW OF THE PEACE PROCESS IN CAR: CURRENT DEVELOPMENTS AND CHALLENGES AFTER THE 2019 PEACE AGREEMENT

BY ALBA MONTES REGUERO

Since its independence from France in 1960, Central African Republic ("CAR") has been struggling with an unstable context due to the unrelenting conflicts that peaked in 2013 with the coup d'état led by the Séléka rebels [1]. In 2014, a ceasefire accord was signed, and national consultations were held in 2015 during the Bangui Forum on National Reconciliation, after which peaceful elections were held [2]. However, and even though there were several initiatives to restore the peace, including seven peace efforts [3], massacres and violence continued.

During 2019, after the peace talks that took place in Khartoum, the CAR authorities and 14 armed groups signed another peace accord that, for the first time, got all the warring parties, both rebel groups and the government, together [4]. The Political Agreement for Peace and Reconciliation in the Central African Republic ("the Peace Agreement"), was signed in Bangui on 6 February 2019. This document, the latest effort to restore the peace in a fragile, unstable and damaged country, contains commitments for both the government and the armed groups, and also for the region and the international community.

Peace agreements are key elements in Transitional Justice, a set of mechanisms and processes that seek justice and reparation through truth seeking, guarantees of non-repetition, redress for victims, and holding accountable those who committed the crimes, in order to achieve a durable and sustainable peace. Apart from the agreement, two mechanisms for transitional justice were created. The Truth, Justice, Reparation and Reconciliation Commission ("Commission"), a result of a national popular consultation after the peace agreement, and the Central African Special Criminal Court ("Court"), a hybrid court created after the 2013 coup.

Regarding the Commission, although in December 2020, 11 members were nominated, as of June 2021, they still had to be sworn in and the budget for the Commission had yet to be allocated [5]. With regards to the Court, its President announced that the first trial would be held in 2021, but so far, it has yet to do so [6].



1. Rim El Gantri and Arnaud Yaliki "A Drop of Water on a Hot Stone: Justice for Victims in the Central African Republic" (International Centre for Transitional Justice, 10 March 2021) <<https://www.ictj.org/publication/%E2%80%98drop-water-hot-stone%E2%80%99-justice-victims-central-african-republic>> accessed 7 August 2021.

2. *ibid.*

3. Marcel Plichta, "The Central African Republic's New Peace Deal Is a Small Step in the Right Direction" (World Politics Review, 20 February 2019) <[www.worldpoliticsreview.com/amp/articles/27467/the-central-african-republic-s-new-peace-deal-is-a-small-step-in-the-right-direction](http://www.worldpoliticsreview.com/amp/articles/27467/the-central-african-republic-s-new-peace-deal-is-a-small-step-in-the-right-direction)> accessed 10 August 2021.

4. *ibid.*

5. UNSC Report of the Secretary-General (16 June 2021) UN Doc S/2021/571.

6. Julian Elderfield, "The Rise and Rise of the Special Criminal Court (Part I)" (Opinio Juris, 7 April 2021) <<http://opiniojuris.org/2021/04/07/the-rise-and-rise-of-the-special-criminal-court-part-i/>> accessed 8 August 2021.

Bearing in mind that the Court was established in 2015 and that its inaugural hearing was in 2018, the slow pace of the proceedings and the lack of visible results, as well as the concealment of the 21 detainees (although the disclosure of the identity it is not required by law) have been the two major criticisms of the Court [7].

The launch of the Court and the Commission is slow, and therefore both accountability and truth seeking have not been achieved yet. However, Transitional Justice does not need to start always with a truth commission and criminal liability [8]. Efforts must be made to effectively provide redress on time for victims. The longer reparations take, the older victims will get and hence, the higher the probability of these victims not being able to see and enjoy justice. In fact, forget is a common feeling amongst victims in CAR [9]. It is important to manage the victim's expectations and not perpetuate the message that "all wounds will be healed" [10]. Also, when putting the focus on the victims, and especially in the context of CAR, with huge differences between Bangui (the capital) and rural areas, it is key to distinguish between victims who live in the capital or in villages. For those in rural areas, memorialisation, compensation and reparations are the main necessities [11]. On the contrary, victims who live in Bangui have an easier access to policy making and a better understanding of Transitional Justice [12].



Despite the promising prospective improvement of the situation after the signing of the agreement in 2019 and the creation of mechanisms to achieve reconciliation through Transitional Justice, the situation in CAR remains unstable. One of the recent challenges faced by the CAR and a key event to assess the country's political stability, the success of the Peace Agreement, and the compromise amongst the several actors involved in its achievement, were the general elections held at the end of 2020 and beginning of 2021. MINUSCA (the UN Peacekeeping mission that comprises up to 11,650 military personnel and whose mandate was extended until 15 November 2021) [13], was assigned to support the CAR authorities to prepare and deliver peaceful elections [14]. However, and despite the efforts, the dynamic and the timing of the general elections have affected and damaged the peace process, opening or even creating new wounds [15].

7. Julian Elderfield 'The Rise and Rise of the Special Criminal Court (Part II)' (Opinio Juris, 7 April 2021) <<https://opiniojuris.org/2021/04/07/the-rise-and-rise-of-the-special-criminal-court-part-ii/>> accessed 8 August 2021.

8. El Gantri and Yaliki (n 1) 39.

9. Rim El Granti 'Why in Central African Republic reparations should come first' (Justiceinfo.net, 12 April 2021) <<https://www.justiceinfo.net/en/75960-why-central-african-republic-reparations-should-come-first.html>> accessed 8 August 2021.

10. El Gantri and Yaliki (n 1) 39.

11. *ibid.*

12. *ibid.* 33.

13. UNSC Res 2552 (12 November 2020) UN Doc S/RES/2552.

14. *ibid.*

15. Peter Knoope 'Central African Republic: Post-electoral crisis and the prospects for reconciliation' (2021) 31 The Institute for Peace and Reconciliation <<https://www.africaportal.org/publications/central-african-republic-post-electoral-crisis-and-prospects-reconciliation/>> accessed 9 August 2021.



Moreover, the country is currently experiencing a humanitarian crisis with no precedent. According to the last OCHA report from March 2021, “in the past five years, there have never been as many people in humanitarian distress in CAR as today” [16]. Despite the achievement of sitting together both the government and the armed groups, the slow pace of both the Commission and the Court, the deep-rooted structural problems of the country, together with the continuation of violent attacks that have weakened the State, the rise of food insecurity and the COVID-19 pandemic, amongst other factors, have shown how ephemeral and weak this potential betterment can be [17].

#### Increase of violence

Bearing in mind all the years of conflict, expecting the rebel forces to collaborate with the CAR military and the peacekeeping missions may have been “overly optimistic for both sides” [18]. In fact, not only the violence is not decreasing, but during the last months, it has increased. Despite the “immediate, complete and irrevocable cessation of hostilities and any act of violence” [19] that the armed groups committed themselves to, only three months after the signature of the agreement, attacks against civilians were carried out by combatants of the 3R, a major rebel group from the northwestern part the country [20]. Unfortunately, this was not an isolated act of violence, and since then there have been more incidents that have worsened the human rights situation in CAR, have broken the peace deal and endangered the achievement of the peace process.

According to the last Security Council report, published on 16 June 2021, between 1 February and 1 June 2021, the human rights and international humanitarian law violations in the Central African Republic have worsened meaningfully. During this period, 628 victims were affected, and there were 82 conflict-related civilian deaths. Compared to the previous reporting period, there was an increase of 40.2 % in the number of victims, of 28.4 % in the number of incidents, and a spike in conflict-related victims, doubling the number of the previous period [21]. Moreover, most of the documented human rights abuses were perpetrated by armed groups that signed the peace agreement. Apart from this, during the reporting period, there was a significant increase of 278.4 % in the number of incidents perpetrated by national deployed personnel, and of 289 % in those perpetrated by bilaterally deployed and other security personnel [22].

16. OCHA ‘Humanitarian Needs Overview, Central African Republic’ (22 March 2021) 3.

17. OCHA ‘Aperçu des besoins humanitaires, République Centrafricaine’ (2020).

18. Plichta (n 3).

19. UNSC Political Agreement for Peace and Reconciliation in the Central African Republic (15 February 2019) UN Doc S/2019/45, 14, 20.

20. OHCHR ‘Central African Republic: UN expert condemns deadly attacks, calls for greater civilian protection’, (24 May 2019) Press Release <<https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=24648&LangID=E>> accessed 6 August 2021.

21. *ibid* (n 5)

22. *ibid* (n 5)

### Humanitarian crisis and COVID-19

According to the OCHA Humanitarian Response Plan for 2021, the latest report that assesses the situation from December 2020 until March 2021 in the country, 2.8 million people, more than half of the population, are in a very vulnerable situation. Out of this figure, 1.9 million are in severe humanitarian need. The report concluded that, as of mid-March 2021, overall, there has been a worsening in the situation of displaced people, sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) cases, food insecurity, climate disasters, and rising prices amongst others [23].

There has been an increase of internal displacements, -reaching the highest figure (724,000 people) registered since 2014-, and of refugees in neighboring countries (648,000 people) [24]. Moreover, even though SGBV cases seem to have decreased, the restriction of movements may have caused a fall in the number of cases reported, which is likely to be higher [25]. Currently, at least one case of SGBV is committed every hour [26]. Regarding the nutritional situation of CAR population, almost half of the people (2.3 million) are food insecure, which represents an increase of a 9% in relation to the same period in 2020 [27].

Another major problem affecting CAR has been the floods that occurred between October and November 2020, and that destroyed crops and houses, affecting more than 15,000 people. According to the climate change trends exposed by the World Bank Group in the CAR, the risks of river floods, heavy rainfalls, water scarcity, droughts, and wildfires are likely to increase [28]. However, in a country with a weak economical, political and social situation, the climate change threat represents another important but so far, not prioritised, challenge. Moreover, the COVID-19 pandemic has had an effect on more than 2 million people, affecting the gross domestic product, which has decreased 5.8 %. Besides, since December 2020, the prices of basic food and other non-alimentary products have increased around 60 per cent [29].

23. *ibid* (n 16)

24. *ibid* (n 16) 4.

25. *ibid* (n 16) 4.

26. *ibid* (n 16) 4.

27. *ibid* (n 16) 7.

28. The World Bank Group 'Climate Risk Profile: Central African Republic' (2021), 13.

29. *ibid* (n 16).



Figure 1: OCHA, Humanitarian Situation Update, Central African Republic, 22 March 2021



# Security Council

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15 February 2019

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## Letter dated 14 February 2019 from the Secretary-General addressed to the President of the Security Council

Please find enclosed the Political Agreement for Peace and Reconciliation in the Central African Republic, signed in Bangui on 6 February 2019 (see annex).

I would be grateful if you could bring the present letter and its annex to the attention of the members of the Security Council.

*(Signed)* António Guterres

## CONCLUSION

The 2019 Peace Agreement has had to deal with a climate of violence while trying to protect civilians. The fact that the political situation in CAR remains fragile and violent attacks have not ceased, is definitely a burden to the achievement of a long-term peace. In fact, the insecurity and human rights violations that occur in the country are the main obstacles to providing justice to Central Africans [30]. The political instability after the elections, the increase of violence in the country, as well as the negative impact of the pandemic that has exacerbated the existing humanitarian needs of the population, need immediate attention. Even though dealing with the deep-rooted causes of the conflict is something present and key in the discourse of Transitional Justice in CAR [31], focusing on this, while other more visible and urgent problems that need immediate intervention exist, may not be very realistic. Nevertheless, these issues should be tackled, as they are key for a successful achievement of the Peace Agreement.

30. *ibid* (n 1) 9.

31. OHCHR 'Central African Republic: UN expert calls for urgent commitment to end violence and boost development' (1 February 2019) <<https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=24135&LangID=E>> accessed 6 August 2021.



# Central African Republic Situation

16 February 2021

Over **109,000 persons have fled CAR** due to the ongoing conflict (estimates from host governments as of 12 February 2021), the majority across the southern border to the Democratic Republic of Congo.

Within CAR, increasing attacks against humanitarian workers and blocked key supply routes are **hampering UNHCR and other humanitarian organizations' ability to assist** the internally displaced populations.

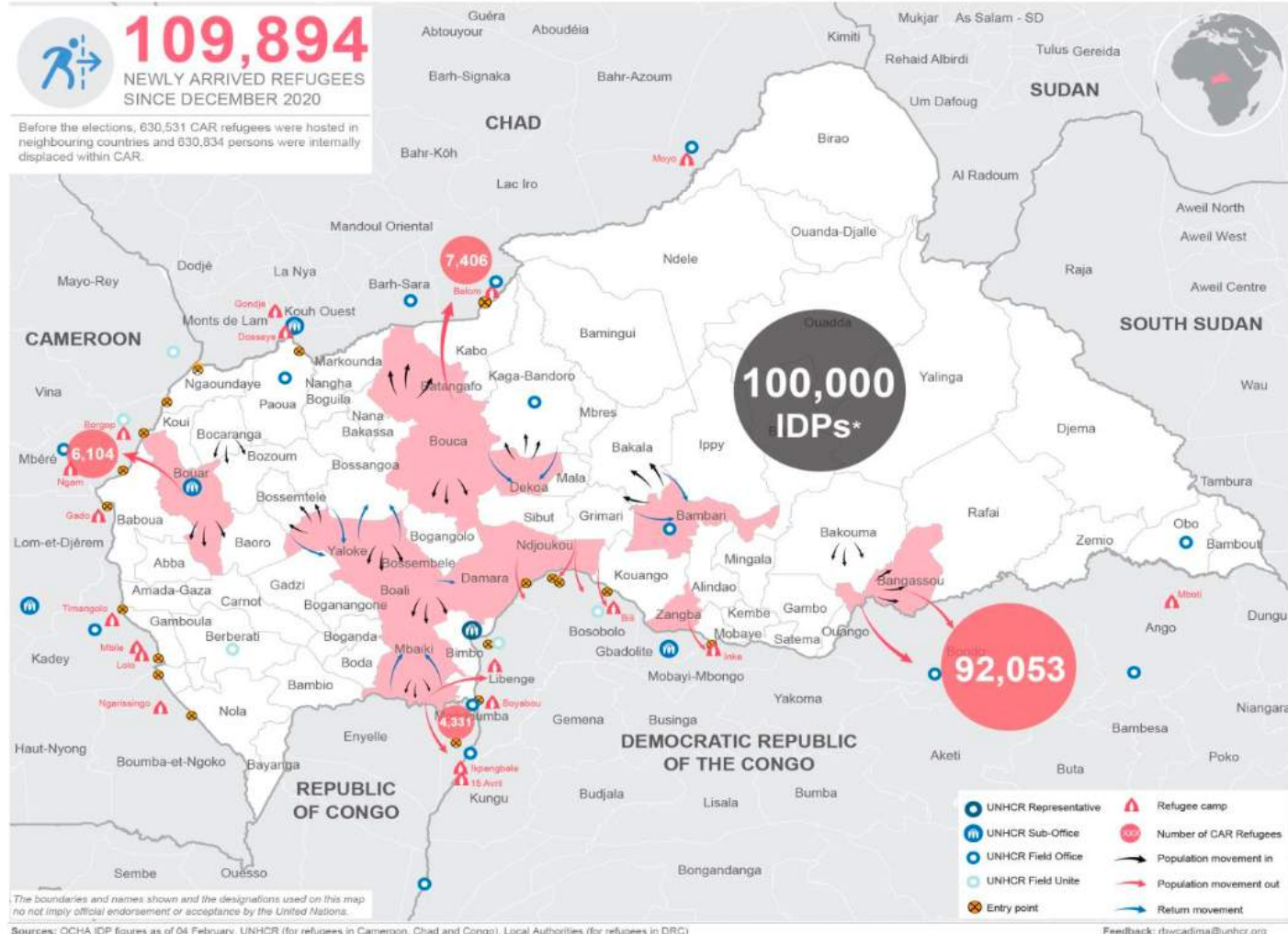
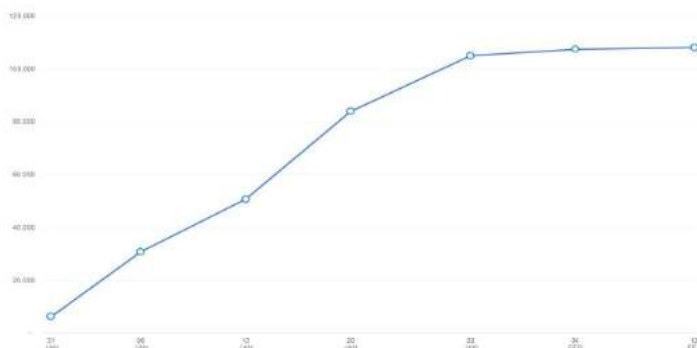
As further displacement is expected and humanitarian needs are growing, **UNHCR and its partners continue to scale up** their response to provide emergency assistance to affected populations.

## POPULATION OF CONCERN

Host Countries	New Arrivals
Cameroon	6,104*
Chad	7,406*
Congo	4,331*
DRC	92,053**
<b>Total</b>	<b>109,894</b>

\* Data as reported by UNHCR Operations as of 12 February 2021

\*\* Source: Local authorities in DRC as of 04 February 2021





## CHILD PROTECTION AND THE CHILD SOLDIERS IN CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC

BY INGRID CALVO

In 2021, the Convention on the Rights of the Child will turn thirty-two years old. Since its adoption by the UN General Assembly in November 20, 1989, 195 countries have ratified it, and it has entered into force in September of the following year [1]. This makes the Convention the most ratified human rights treaty in history.

The instrument has four fundamental objectives: the first aims at the survival, development and protection of children. The second has the objective that all measures taken aim at the children's well-being and best interests. The third focuses in equity and non-discrimination of children whether by colour, gender, religion, nationality or any other means. The fourth principle has the objective of respecting the opinions of children, valuing their autonomy as subjects of rights [2].

The signature and ratification of human rights treaties is paramount. Ratification entails that the member states have recognised those rights as valuable hence, they intend to put them into practice. Despite the widespread ratification of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, it still remains a challenge for the States to put into practice the policies they have committed to.

1. UN General Assembly, Convention on the Rights of the Child, 20 November 1989, United Nations, Treaty Series, vol. 1577

2. Ibid.

The Convention applies to all children, that is, anyone under the age of eighteen, unless the legislation of the signatory country determines an earlier age. According to Marta Pais [3], the definition of a child is important because it interferes with their status and consequently their rights, such as in case of law violation committed by a child. The state can also interfere if the child is the victim of crime. If a child is anyone under the age of 18 years, age of consent, will set the definitions of crimes such as sexual abuse.

The Convention, however, entered into force without sufficiently addressing some crucial issues, one of them is the issue of children in armed conflicts. Although the Convention defines children as humans/individuals under the age of 18, it also sets the limit for recruitment to 15 years old.

This flaw can be understood by the very functioning of international law [4]. The majority of States must accept the text of the Convention, so they can commit as duty bearers and, based on that, apply the practical measures stipulated by the document.

To build consensus among member states, the texts must reach a common ground. According to Pais, most signatories agreed that the minimum age to join armed forces should be 18, but the US and the USSR wanted to keep it at 15 due their domestic practices.

In addition, legislation prior to the Convention, such as those referring to the International Humanitarian Law, has as reference the 15-year limit for entering armed conflicts [5]. The Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict [6] was an attempt to remedy this contradiction. The Optional Protocol entered into force in February 2002, distinguishing between voluntary recruitment, forced recruitment and the enlistment of children who decide to join the armed group [7]. This document aims to prevent the participation of children under any circumstances by setting the age of 18 as the minimum age for participation in armed conflict.

This measure is intended to protect children from participation in conflicts, since the Optional Protocol signatory countries are duty bearers and must take the necessary measures to prevent the recruitment of minors. The Convention just applies to States, it is however their responsibility to protect children and prevent their capture and recruitment by non-state forces within their borders.

There are mechanisms that monitor the measures taken by signatory states, however it is not possible to guarantee what was agreed upon in the treaty, will be put into practice in the domestic sphere. This challenge is even greater in countries which are currently in civil war, such as the Central African Republic. This country is a signatory to the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Optional Protocol, but it faces serious challenges to curb the issue of children being recruited into armed conflict [8].

3. Marta Pais, 'The Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Work of the Committee' [1992] 26(16) Israel Law Review

4. Ibid.

5. Marta Pais, 'The Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Work of the Committee' [1992] 26(16) Israel Law Review

6. UN General Assembly, Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict, 25 May 2000

7. Ibid.

8. Victor H. Mlambo, Siphelele Mpanza, Daniel N. Mlambo. Armed conflict and the increasing use of child soldiers in the Central African Republic, Democratic Republic of Congo, and South Sudan: Implications for regional security' [2019] 19(2) J Public Affairs



After the events of 2012 where the Seleka group overthrew the Bozize government, the situation in the country deteriorated and the civil war forced a large part of the population to flee their cities and towns. Approximately 60% of the CAR's territory is still controlled by armed groups [9]. With the weakened state power, the country faces a state of exception where its own internal laws are of little value. In this context, it is unrealistic to expect that the State will be able to put into force International Law treaties that protect human rights, and more specifically the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

The CAR has been a signatory to the Convention since 1992, and signed the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict in September 2010, ratifying it in September 2017. The signing of a treaty demonstrates the intention of the State and the ratification expresses the commitment to take steps to fulfill those rights. However, the country's political instability makes it difficult to turn international commitments into locally enforced law.



"The Central African Republic has been a signatory to the Convention since 1992"

The armed conflict forces the population to seek asylum and refuge in neighbouring countries bordering the CAR, such as Democratic Republic of Congo, South Sudan, and Cameroon. Such countries often do not offer better conditions than their country of origin, as they also suffer from internal conflicts. To escape violence, the population also migrates internally, leading to a significant increase in displaced population [10]. This aspect affects the drafting of minors since children have to migrate, aggravating chances of losing their caregivers, their homes and getting injured. Forced migration due to violence and poverty makes the population even more exposed.

According to a UNICEF report, it is estimated that armed groups have captured around 10,000 children across the country [11]. The fragmentation of the State and, consequently, the relaxation of laws, leaves the most fragile part of the population, i.e. children the most vulnerable. They, in turn, become easy prey for armed groups. Children are not only captured for combat, but also to be used as suicide bombers and messengers while girls are forced into prostitution and marriage [12].

9. UNICEF. (2014). Children in crisis in Central African Republic: A four month progress report. UNICEF.

10. Victor H. Mlambo, Siphesihle Mpanza, Daniel N. Mlambo. Armed conflict and the increasing use of child soldiers in the Central African Republic, Democratic Republic of Congo, and South Sudan: Implications for regional security' [2019] 19(2) J Public Affairs

11. UNICEF. (2014). Children in crisis in Central African Republic: A four month progress report. UNICEF.

12. Amnesty International. (1998). International campaign launched against the use of child soldiers. News Release ACT 76/01/98. Amnesty International, London.



Despite the international awareness of the problem, official states also use child labor for combat. Moreover, the rescue of these children from non-state forces is more complex because it involves negotiation with different actors belonging to armed groups. The capture of children is a frequent practice due to the low maintenance cost and ease of recruitment, as they are often completely helpless [13].

The situation of children is also latent in refugee camps. The precariousness of security, living conditions and perspectives in these places often makes children see armed groups as an opportunity for a better life. These groups, in turn, take advantage of the precarious conditions these children face and use refugee camps as possible places to recruit or abduct children.

Most of the recruited children have no alternative. Either they are forced into combat by the armed groups or by the circumstances they are subjected to [14]. The voluntary enlistment mentioned by the Optional Protocol takes into account children who see no other option for survival than to join the groups. Extreme poverty and orphanhood are important vulnerability factors to which children become easier targets.

The issue of voluntariness is controversial because when there is no alternative for survival, it is not possible to talk about choice. Children who seek out armed groups do so searching for survival and protection [15]. When children are rescued, their reintegration into their communities is complex. The recruitment of children, whether actively participating in combat or not, stigmatises them as dangerous, as if they had lost their status as children [16]. The non - reintegration of children is another traumatising factor. Recruitment, combat, absence from family, caregivers and community are aspects that cause severe psychological stress to a child. The reunion with the family is often difficult, as the whereabouts of the relatives are often unknown.

According to UNICEF, the government of the CAR, in 2020, recognised the ongoing problem with child soldiers and developed a national protection code. This document prohibits the recruitment and use of children by armed forces and emphasises that children already in association with such groups should not be treated as adults [17].

### THE RECRUITMENT OF CHILDREN, WHETHER ACTIVELY PARTICIPATING IN COMBAT OR NOT, STIGMATISES THEM AS DANGEROUS, AS IF THEY HAD LOST THEIR STATUS AS CHILDREN.

13. Divya Singh, 'When a child is not a child: The scourge of child soldiering in Africa' [2007] 7(1) African Human Rights Law Journal

14. Ibid.

15. Ibid.

16. Ibid.

17. UNICEF (2020). United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund Press Release. Retrieved: <https://www.unicef.org/press-releases/central-african-republic-nearly-370000-children-now-internally-displaced-amidst>

As the division in the country remains, children are directly affected by the feelings of hatred that the different disputing groups nurture towards one another. Some of them, due a personal feeling since commonly an opponent group victimised their family members. This is one of the reasons that may drive a child to voluntarily join armed groups. They want to take revenge for the death of a loved one and destruction left in their communities. The Séléka group and the Anti - balaka are characterised for their religion, the first is almost entirely muslim and the latter christian, adding religion sectarianism into the reasons of hatred and revenge [18].

UNICEF and partnerships have released more than 15,500 children from armed groups since 2014 until the current year. However, the institution does not have enough resources to maintain the rescued children in reintegration programmes, what impairs their reintroduction in society [19] . The ongoing instability prevents children from being safe from being recruited. As long as there is a civil war where their labour is useful, children will be targets of armed forces and groups.

Governmental effort is essential in order to release and reintegrate child soldiers and ensure that peace, governance and rule of law are respected, in order to provide full protection to the country's children [20].



1. Amnesty International. International campaign launched against the use of child soldiers. (1998) News Release ACT 76/01/98. Amnesty International, London.
2. Mlambo, V. H. and others. Armed conflict and the increasing use of child soldiers in the Central African Republic, Democratic Republic of Congo, and South Sudan: Implications for regional security' [2019] 19(2) J Public Affairs
3. Pais, M. 'The Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Work of the Committee' [1992] 26(16) Israel Law Review
4. Singh, D. 'When a child is not a child: The scourge of child soldiering in Africa' [2007] 7(1) African Human Rights Law Journal
5. UNICEF. Children in crisis in Central African Republic: A four month progress report. (2014) UNICEF.
6. UNICEF. United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund Press Release (2020) Retrieved: <https://www.unicef.org/press-releases/central-african-republic-nearly-370000-children-now-internally-displaced-amidst>
7. UN General Assembly, Convention on the Rights of the Child, United Nations, (1989) Treaty Series, vol. 1577
8. UN General Assembly, Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict, (2000)
9. UN Security Council. Final report of the International Commission of Inquiry on the Central African Republic (2014)

*"As long as there is a civil war...children will be targets of armed forces and groups."*

18. UN Security Council (2014) Final report of the International Commission of Inquiry on the Central African Republic

19. Ibid.

20. Victor H. Mlambo, Siphesihle Mpanza, Daniel N. Mlambo. Armed conflict and the increasing use of child soldiers in the Central African Republic, Democratic Republic of Congo, and South Sudan: Implications for regional security' [2019] 19(2) J Public Affairs

# Central African Republic regional emergency

Violence surrounding Central African Republic's presidential and parliamentary election process in December 2020 has displaced over 200,000 people, bringing the total number of uprooted Central African nationals to close to a third of the population of 4.7 million. People have fled inside the Central African Republic, as well as into exile in Cameroon, Chad, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Republic of the Congo.

To enable targeted and timely protection and assistance for people of concern and in support of the Governments and other partners, as well as in anticipation of further deterioration of the situation, UNHCR is scaling up its emergency response and calling for urgent financial support for its activities.



**\$164.7M**  
REQUIREMENTS

**111,437** NEW DISPLACED REFUGEES  
CENTRAL AFRICAN REFUGEES

↳ DRC: 92,053<sup>1</sup> | Chad: 8,437 | Cameroon: 6,616 | Congo: 4,331

**100,000** NEW DISPLACED  
CENTRAL AFRICAN IDPs

## Situation overview

Violence erupted in the Central African Republic between the Government and a coalition of armed groups around the 27 December 2020 election, disrupting the 2019 peace agreement and triggering a new wave of displacement. As of February 2021, more than 100,000 people are estimated to have been internally displaced within CAR<sup>2</sup>, while more than 111,000 refugees from CAR have been recorded in Cameroon, Chad, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Republic of the Congo. This influx adds to the nearly 1.3 million existing Central African forcibly displaced, bringing the total to over 1.5 million – nearly a third of the country's population.

The latest crisis is exacerbating protection risks within the Central African Republic, where violence against women and girls and a significant number of unaccompanied and separated children are already major concerns. In parallel, the number of reported forced recruitments across the country have been increasing. The main roads to Cameroon have become unsafe, preventing the cross-border delivery of vital supplies and drastically increasing the price of essential goods. The already vulnerable population in the Central African Republic is now in urgent need of food, shelter and essential household items, in addition to health care supplies and water, sanitation and hygiene services required to prevent the spread of COVID-19 and other diseases.

The situation is particularly challenging in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, where many of the 92,000<sup>1</sup> newly-

arrived refugees are spread across 40 remote localities close to the border, still within possible reach of the indiscriminate violence they fled from. New arrivals now outnumber the local population, with refugees living in makeshift shelters, without access to vital services such as education or health care. More than 19,300 Central Africans fled to Chad, Cameroon, and the Republic of the Congo. In Cameroon population movements suggest that the actual figures are higher than the number who have been registered. In Chad, refugees continue to arrive (albeit in lower numbers than at the beginning of the crisis) due to the presence of armed groups in several villages in the north-west of the Central African Republic.

The Central African Republic has for years been one of the most consistently overlooked and underfunded emergencies in the world with persistent and, at times, record underfunding, repeatedly forcing UNHCR and its humanitarian partners to reduce critical activities. This year, and this emergency, is unfortunately no different. Erupting as it did at the beginning of the year, this new crisis has temporarily put on hold voluntary repatriation and reintegration of Central Africans and forced UNHCR to urgently reprioritize and shift some of it already limited resources towards life-saving protection and assistance.

With humanitarian and protection needs growing, UNHCR is appealing for \$164.7 million (\$13.1 million of which is additional) to deliver critical protection and assistance in the Central African Republic and neighbouring countries.

<sup>1</sup> Above: Central African refugees collect non-food items at a UNHCR distribution center in Yakoma, northern DRC. © UNHCR/Hélène Caux

<sup>2</sup> Government estimate. An updated figure will be established through biometric registration supported by UNHCR.

<sup>3</sup> OCHA Central African Republic Situation Report, 9 February 2021.

# The Democratic Deficit of President Touadéra

BY MARIE LE BEUVE



Image credit: United States Institute of Peace

Faustin-Archange Touadéra has been the President of the Central African Republic (CAR) since 2016, three years after the start of the civil war in 2013. The former Prime Minister was elected in the second round of the elections with 62,71% of the votes against Anicet-Georges Dologuélé [2]. His campaign was mainly focused around security and restoring peace in the country after years of bloodshed. Essentially, he was portrayed as a peacemaker who can bridge the Christian-Muslim divide in the country as well as boost the economy [3]. Unfortunately, many obstacles lay in the road to peace and security in the Central African Republic such as corruption of natural resources, armed groups activity and lack of criminal justice institutions [4]. When Touadéra came to power, the multiple armed groups split between the Séléka and Anti-Balaka were already raging through the country. The influence these groups gained throughout the country greatly diminished and threatened the legitimacy of the government.

Touadéra inherited a broken and poor country raged by war, corruption and in desperate need of humanitarian assistance and foreign funding. The President was democratically elected (although contested by some) [5] and has always displayed a genuine eagerness to solve the security issues of his country and bring peace back to his people. He has in fact reached out to all possible mechanisms and actors to help him solve the CAR crisis: third states, the African Union, the European Union, and United Nations as well as the International Monetary Fund. Multiple actors were already active in the country and renewed their partnership with Touadéra in order to help CAR which had sunk down to the place of the second poorest country in the world [6].

1. Le Monde.fr. 2016. L'ancien premier ministre Touadéra remporte la présidence de la Centrafrique. [online] Available at: <[https://www.lemonde.fr/afrique/article/2016/02/20/l-ancien-premier-ministre-touadera-remporte-la-presidence-de-la-centrafrique\\_4869066\\_3212.html](https://www.lemonde.fr/afrique/article/2016/02/20/l-ancien-premier-ministre-touadera-remporte-la-presidence-de-la-centrafrique_4869066_3212.html)> [Accessed 11 August 2021].

2. BBC News. 2016. CAR presidential election: Faustin Touadera declared winner. [online] Available at: <<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-35623491>> [Accessed 11 August 2021].

3. United Nations Security Council, 2021. Rapport final du Groupe d'experts sur la République centrafricaine reconduit dans son mandat par la résolution 2536 (2020) du Conseil de sécurité. [online] New York: United Nations Security Council. Available at: <<https://letsunami.net/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/N2112625-1.pdf>> [Accessed 11 August 2021].

4. Ibid.

5. Atlas & Boots. 2019. Poorest countries in the world - ranked. [online] Available at: <<https://www.atlasandboots.com/travel-blog/poorest-countries-in-the-world-ranked/>> [Accessed 11 August 2021].



Image credit: Reuters

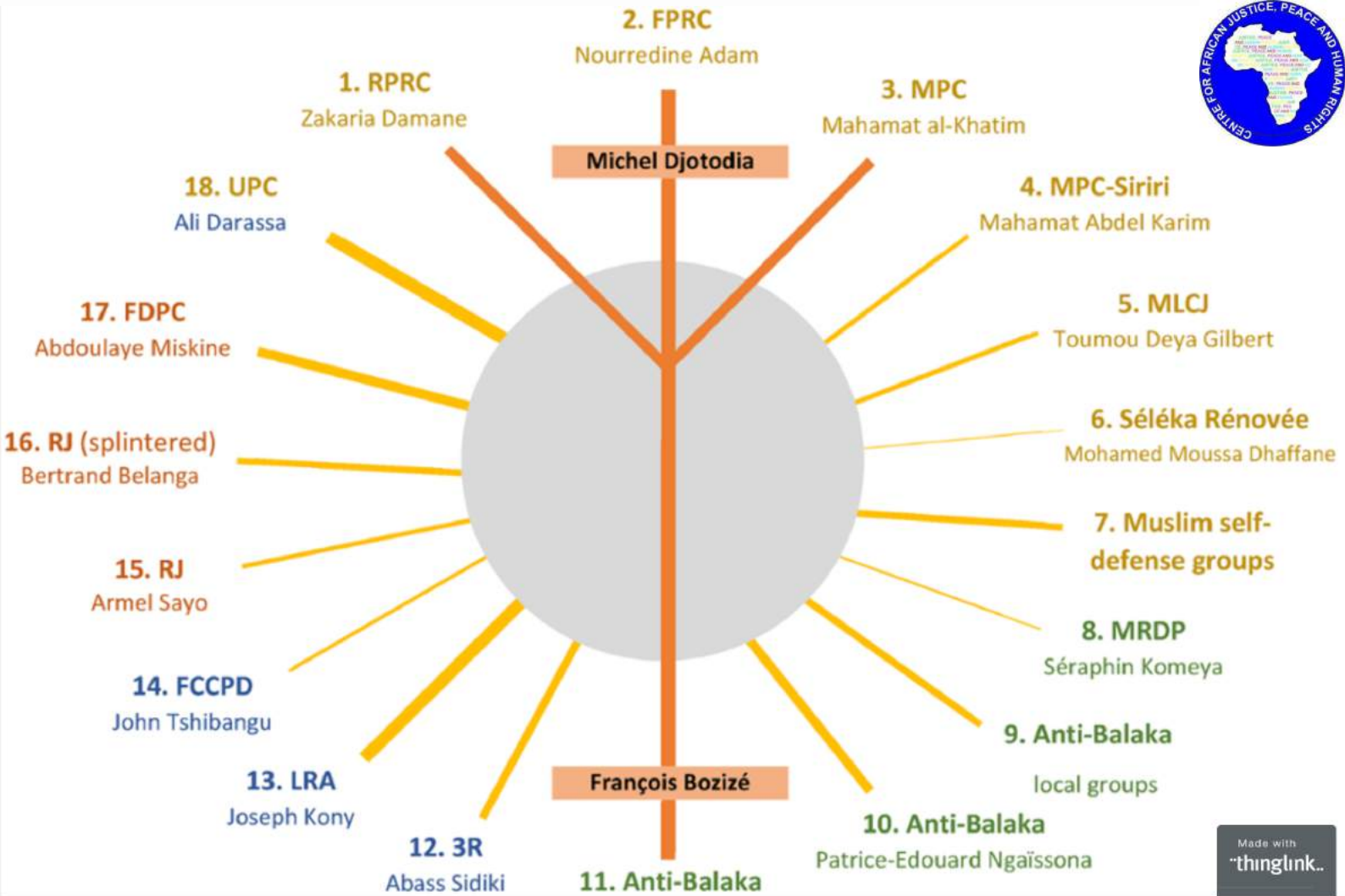
This article aims at showing that despite his democratic election, President Touadéra suffers a democratic deficit linked to multiple factors: the armed groups and the presence of foreign actors such as Russia and France. The expression "democratic deficit" may be used to denote the absence or underdevelopment of key democratic institutions, but it may also be used to describe the various ways in which these institutions may fail to function properly. Evaluations of the level of democratic deficit focus on the procedural aspects of democracy, reflected in the mechanisms of representation and decision making. Therefore, the notion of democratic deficit encompasses distortions in the flow of influence from citizens to government. As such, it is closely associated with the issue of democratic legitimacy [7].

### The Armed groups

In mid-2012, the weak political system of CAR started to crumble and the President of the time, François Bozizé, was ousted out of office by the Seleka, a Muslim oriented armed group, and installed Michel Djotodia as new president. This led to the rise of an opposition movement, the Anti-Balaka, a Christian armed group eager to take revenge on the Seleka who had killed and kidnapped members of their family. This created a civil war that has been raging up to this day and has involved up to fourteen different armed groups. Those have gained so much influence in the country that the enough project has described it as the country being "held hostage by armed actors with various profiles and motives".

The notion of democratic deficit encompasses distortions in the flow of influence from citizens to government.

6. Letki, N., n.d. Democratic deficit. In: *Britannica*. [online] Available at: <<https://www.britannica.com/topic/democratic-deficit>> [Accessed 11 August 2021].



SOURCE: [HTTPS://WWW.THINGLINK.COM/SCENE/951872700396077058?BUTTONSOURCE=VIEWLIMITS](https://www.thinglink.com/scene/951872700396077058?BUTTONSOURCE=VIEWLIMITS)

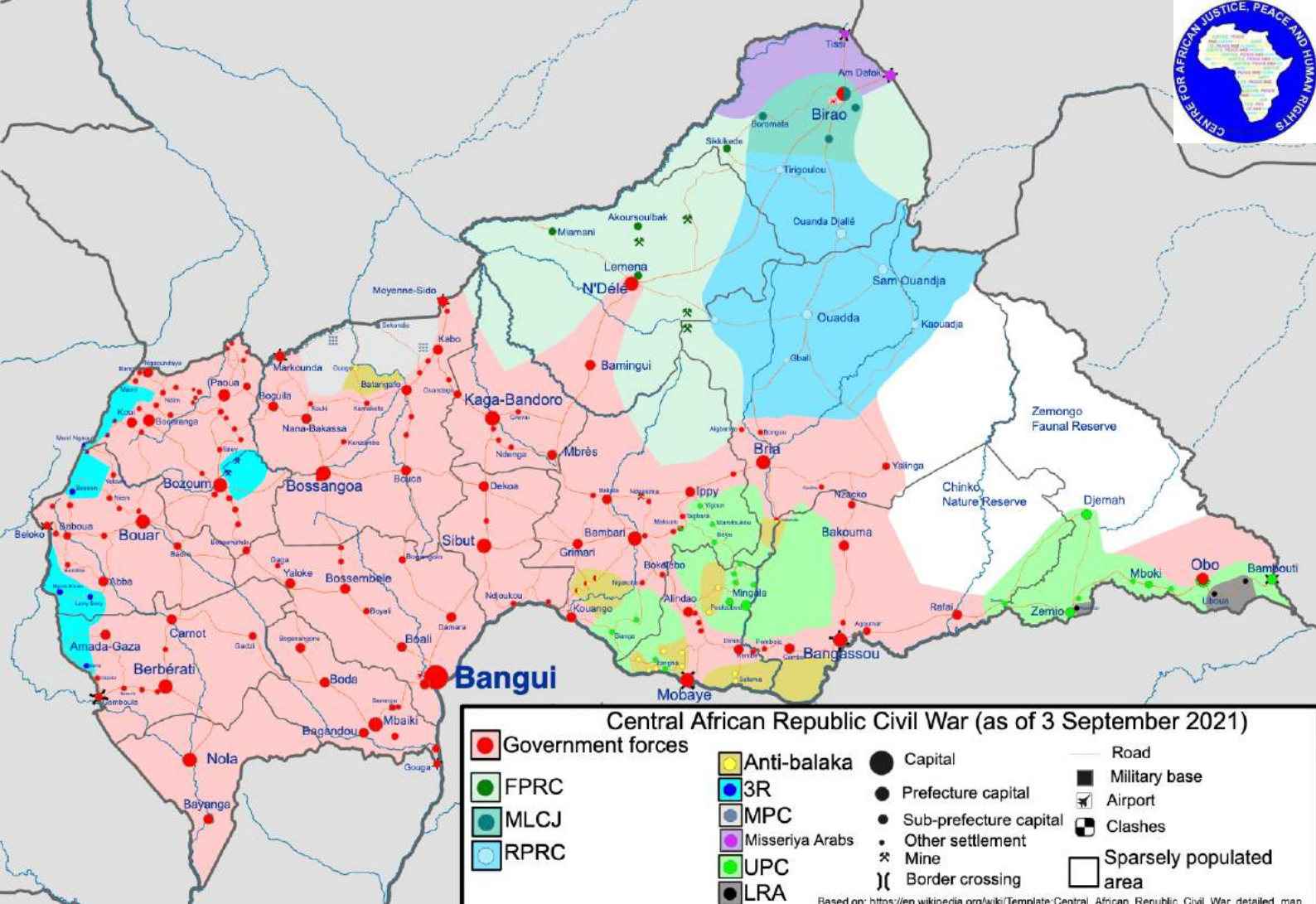
Though their origins and outward motivations may differ, these armed actors have one thing in common: they are all responsible for widespread atrocities committed against civilians, and they are all engaged in fratricidal struggles for control of the country's resources." [8] The below illustration represents the 14-armed groups and their leaders that were/ are active in CAR. The armed groups, controlled a large part of the country (about 70%) [9] and have installed a sub-economic system [10]: the people pay their taxes to the armed groups to ensure protection, depriving the state from its revenue and its territorial sovereignty [11]. As of 2021, the CAR military and government have gained back a lot of territory (see below). But to what cost? CAR, and Touadéra in particular has received help from different actors to help him solve this crisis , however, after gaining back territorial sovereignty over the armed-groups, the CAR government lost democratic legitimacy in the solving of this crisis. For the sake of this article, I will identify two main actors that led to Touadéra's loss of democratic legitimacy: France and Russia.

7. Dukhan, N., 2017. *Splintered Warfare: Alliances, affiliations, and agendas of armed factions and politico-military groups in the Central African Republic*. [online] Enough Project. Available at: <<https://enoughproject.org/reports/splintered-warfare-central-african-republic>> [Accessed 11 August 2021].

8. Anker, E., 2018. Where armed groups rule. [online] NRC. Available at: <<https://www.nrc.no/where-armed-groups-rule>> [Accessed 11 August 2021].

9. United Nations Security Council, 2021. Rapport à mi-parcours du Groupe d'experts sur la République centrafricaine conduit dans son mandat par la résolution 2536 (2020) du Conseil de sécurité. [online] New York: United Nations Security Council. Available at: <<https://undocs.org/fr/S/2021/87>> [Accessed 11 August 2021].

10. Dukhan, N., 2017. *Splintered Warfare: Alliances, affiliations, and agendas of armed factions and politico-military groups in the Central African Republic*. [online] Enough Project. Available at: <<https://enoughproject.org/reports/splintered-warfare-central-african-republic>> [Accessed 11 August 2021].



## France

France has remained very active in CAR and the latter has remained very dependent on its help, since its independence in 1960. France is CAR's biggest foreign investor and holds most of CAR's currency reserves [12]. France operated under the name of "Sangaris" which started in 2013 and ended in 2016 where 2500 soldiers came to attempt to appease the civil conflict and remain united with CAR, one of its former colonies [13]. France having many interests in CAR, as it has many companies operating in the field of natural resources (gold, diamonds, uranium) it is also to believe that the Sangaris operation aimed at protecting France's business from the armed groups. Moreover, Sangaris was increasingly criticized following accusation of sexual abuse from French troops on locals. This led France to withdraw its troops when Touadéra was elected President, hoping to save the relationship between the two countries. And indeed, France still holds troops in CAR despite the withdrawal of the military mission and funds humanitarian action.

Why are they still present? Why are they still sponsoring them? Its 300 or so troops present in CAR supporting the counter-insurgency, some in the MINUSCA (UN-led mission). Thus, despite the fact that the military mission ended, France still keeps its influence in the country and has bargaining power on the CAR government. It also pumps a lot of money into CAR for humanitarian activity as well as the maintenance of natural resources mines. Undeniably, France can threaten CAR to remove its troops at any time if the CAR government does not comply with France's request, stripping the President of his democratic legitimacy. As a result, although Touadéra was democratically elected, his decision-making is being driven by an external actor which was not chosen by the people. Eventually, on June 7, 2021, France announced it halted its aid due to CAR's government's failure to respect political opposition: 160 troops have been withdrawn and 10 million euros have been suspended [14]. The French military ministry said it considered CAR as an accomplice in a Russian-led anti-French campaign, leading us to our second factor [15].

11. Rosenhart, E., 2019. *Central African Republic: Between France and Russia*. [online] Moshe Dayan Center for Middle Eastern and African Studies. Available at: <https://dayan.org/content/central-african-republic-between-france-and-russia> [Accessed 11 August 2021].

12. Ouest-france.fr. 2016. Centrafrique. Quel bilan pour l'opération Sangaris ?. [online] Available at: <https://www.ouest-france.fr/monde/centrafrique/centrafrique-quel-bilan-pour-l-operation-francaise-sangaris-4587088> [Accessed 11 August 2021].

13. McClure, R., 2021. Amid Resurgent Violence, France Suspends Aid to Central African Republic | Geopolitical Monitor. [online] Geopolitical Monitor. Available at: <https://www.geopoliticalmonitor.com/amid-resurgent-violence-france-suspends-aid-to-central-african-republic/> [Accessed 11 August 2021].

14. Africanews. 2021. France suspends military, budgetary support to Central African Republic | Africanews. [online] Available at: <https://www.africanews.com/2021/06/07/france-suspends-military-budgetary-support-to-central-african-republic/> [Accessed 11 August 2021].

## Russia

In November 2017, Russia received an exemption on the UN arms embargo against the CAR and started supplying the country with weapons and ammunition. Russia also has an interest in the stabilization of the CAR, however, it competes with France in terms of influence [16].

Russia's arm trade with the CAR has not been well received by the international community. The embargo was put in place in order to help the country solve its crisis and to keep weapons away from already armed groups.

Although Russia claims its intentions to help restore the peace in CAR, its spreading of weapons and ammunition across the country does not necessarily support that claim, especially considering that the agreement between the two countries has remained undisclosed [17]. In the same way France is conducting its operations, Russia also has many interests in CAR's natural resources. What differs in this case is that Russia's involvement started after Touadéra was elected: he personally requested the help of this external actor. Additionally, Russia hired a private military company, the Wagner Group, for its presence in the CAR.



In itself this already represents two levels of power delegations from the elected leader: from Touadéra to the Russian government and from the Russian government to the Wagner group, diminishing Touadéra's democratic legitimacy.

The main issue arising from Wagner's group activities is that Russia's government cannot necessarily be held accountable for their actions as they are not part of the national military.

On the other hand, the CAR cannot be held responsible either as it has reached out to the Russian government for help, and not to the Wagner group specifically. This has led to the outbreak of incidents involving the Russian paramilitary organisation. The Kremlin has recently refuted the accusations of killings and lootings against the local population [18].

In this fight  
for  
influence  
between  
France and  
Russia, it  
seems as  
though the  
two powers  
have  
forgotten  
their main  
objective:  
support  
CAR...

15. Rosenhart, E., 2019. *Central African Republic: Between France and Russia*. [online] Moshe Dayan Center for Middle Eastern and African Studies. Available at: <<https://dayan.org/content/central-african-republic-between-france-and-russia>> [Accessed 11 August 2021].

16. Ibid

17. Voice of America. 2021. Russia Denies its Personnel in CAR Involved in Killings. [online] Available at: <<https://www.voanews.com/europe/russia-denies-its-personnel-car-involved-killings>> [Accessed 11 August 2021].

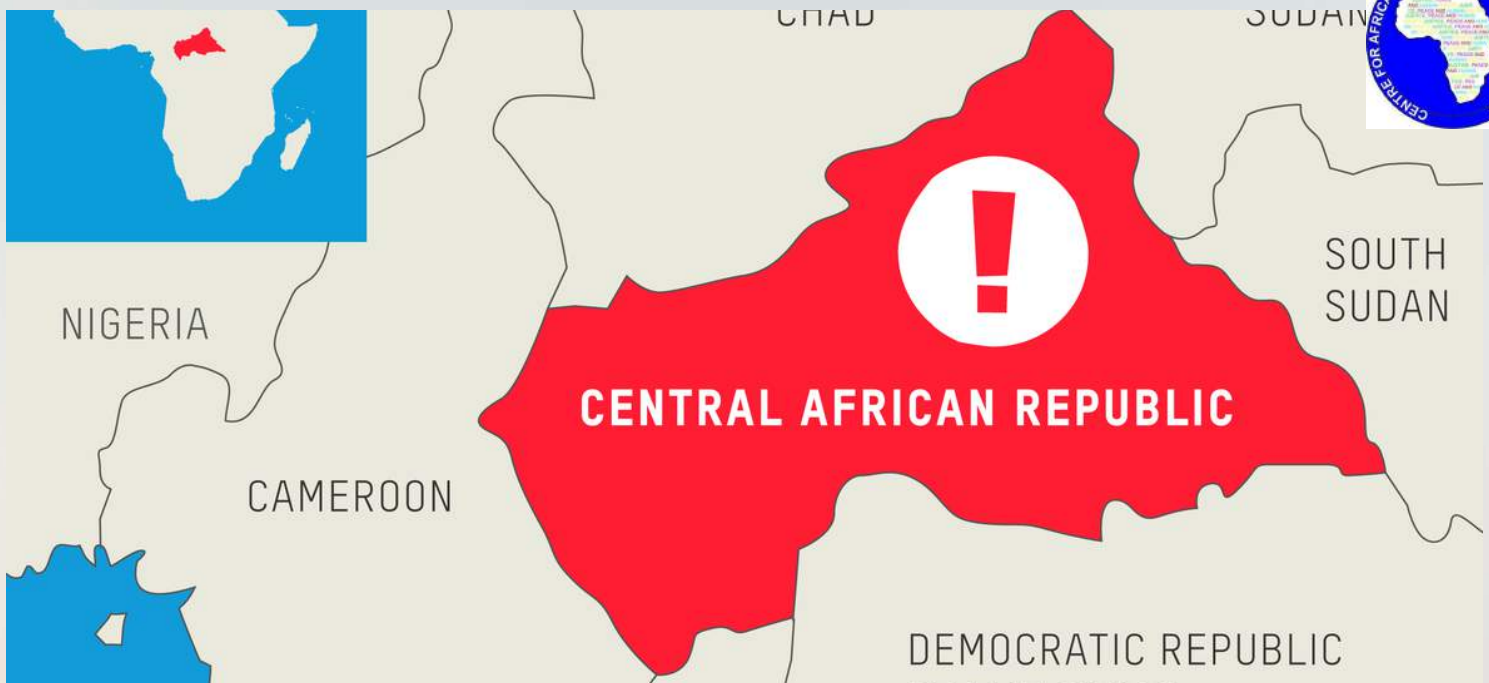


Image credit: Oxfam - <https://www.oxfamamerica.org/explore/stories/central-african-republic-plunged-into-crisis/>

In this fight for influence between France and Russia, it seems as though the two powers have forgotten their main objective: support CAR in its recovery and road back to peace. The CAR government has been awarded the middle seat, trying to meddle with both parties, but mostly, endangering CAR's fragile democracy. On one side, Russia accuses France of having meddled in the elections of 2020 (re-electing Touadéra, pro-France president) add "while" here on the other hand, France accuses Russia of 'seizing power' in the CAR with its 'mercenaries' [19].

In recent interviews, president Faustin-Archange Touadéra has declared that he has accepted and received help from countries which are CAR's friends but does not wish in any way to create another conflict between two third-parties [20].

In sum, Touadéra's efforts at bringing peace to the country and his credibility as president are being diminished in spite of him reaching out for help to resolve this crisis. Isn't it time for African solutions to African problems?

18. WION. 2021. *France decries Russia's 'seizure of power' in central Africa*. [online] Available at: <<https://www.wionews.com/world/france-decries-russias-seizure-of-power-in-central-africa-392409>> [Accessed 11 August 2021].

19. La Grande Interview : Faustin-Archange Touadéra. 2021. [video] Directed by A. Cléaux. Central African Republic: Youtube.

# The Worst Crisis You've Never Heard Of

An extremely poor, landlocked country, the Central African Republic has been engulfed in violent clashes between rival political factions since December 2012. The conflict affects 4.6 million people—half of them children. Thousands of children have been recruited by armed groups, and in many cases have been the victims of atrocities.



## Children are especially vulnerable during armed conflict

Insecurity and lawlessness are widespread. Children have been separated from their families, abducted, maimed, raped and killed.

# 2.3

MILLION

**Number of children affected by the crisis**

Children make up half the population

# 6,000

**Estimated number of children recruited into armed groups**

These children may be forced to fight, carry supplies and be abused as sex slaves

# 1

**Number of functioning pediatric hospitals**

Health facilities across the country have been damaged, looted or destroyed



*A counselor speaks to children recently released from armed groups at a UNICEF-supported rehabilitation center in Bria, Central African Republic*



A counselor speaks to children recently released from armed groups at a UNICEF-supported rehabilitation center in Bria, Central African Republic

## Children were struggling even before the recent conflict began

1 in 6

CHILDREN

in CAR do not survive past the age of five

24%

OF CHILDREN

are underweight due to poor nutrition

34%

OF CHILDREN

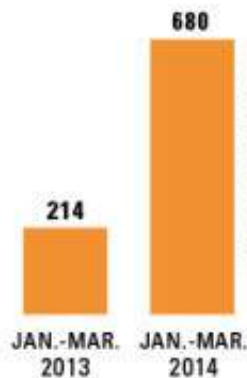
completed primary school before the conflict began

## The crisis is having a profound impact on children

70%

OF CHILDREN

have stopped going to school since the conflict began



Number of children treated for severe acute malnutrition at the pediatric hospital in Bangui has tripled since last year



A child in Bangui is screened for malnutrition

“The Central African Republic is a forgotten crisis at the global level.”

— Souleymane Diabaté, UNICEF Country Director, CAR

# Peace in CAR: A Long Road Ahead

By Tony Oweke

**Central African Republic (CAR), a landlocked nation situated within the tumultuous region of Central Africa, has been embroiled in conflict since 1997. In 2012, what could previously be characterised as sporadic conflicts contained to particular regions and surrounding elections, deteriorated into a civil war. Almost a decade later, seven peace agreements signed to mitigate the tension and provide a path to peace have failed. On February 6th, 2019 a peace agreement of unprecedented scale between 14 armed rebel groups and the Government was brokered by 6 guarantors including the African Union and the United Nations [1]. Any optimism that the Agreement for Peace and Reconciliation in the Central African Republic (APPR-RCA) would result in a ceasefire and foster the unity required to heal a nation so divided, has thus far proved to be premature.**

**Whilst the underlying causes of the ongoing conflict stem from a mixture of economic, ethnic, and religious grievances and fissures dating back all the way to 1997, The current civil war is a result of a failed 2013 coup. Seleka, an armed group comprised of largely Muslim fighters hailing from the North of the country, staged a coup against the then incumbent president Francois Bozizé [2]. While the coup eventually failed, the Seleka were able to hold onto power briefly and committed crimes against the Christian population. Armed groups formed to counter the actions of the Seleka sprouted and further contributed to the escalation of violence.**

**The conflict was briefly abated, when the United Nations through Multidimensional Integrated United Nations Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA) facilitated a transitional period between 2014 and 2016 [3]. MINUSCA has been tasked with multifaceted operations that include disarmament and stabilization, providing humanitarian assistance, promotion of human rights, and the promotion of the rule of law [4]. The aforementioned transitional period, provided for the peaceful election of a new president, Faustin Archange Touadéra. However, hostilities and violence quickly resumed, necessitating the Agreement for Peace and Reconciliation in the Central African Republic (APPR-RCA) that was signed on February 6, 2019 [5].**

1. "Mediation and Support for the Peace Process in the Central African Republic." Mediation and support for the peace process in the Central African Republic | HD Centre. Center for Humanitarian Dialogue. Accessed August 1, 2021. <https://www.hdcentre.org/activities/conflict-mediation-and-support-transitional-justice-central-african-republic/>

2. "Saving the Central African Republic's Elections and Averting Another Cycle of Violence." International Crisis Group. International Crisis Group. January 21, 2021. <https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/central-african-republic/saving-central-african-republics-elections-and-averting-another-cycle-violence>

3. "Mediation and Support for the Peace Process in the Central African Republic." Mediation and support for the peace process in the Central African Republic | HD Centre. Center for Humanitarian Dialogue. Accessed August 1, 2021. <https://www.hdcentre.org/activities/conflict-mediation-and-support-transitional-justice-central-african-republic/>

4. "Minusca Peacekeeping." United Nations. United Nations. Accessed August 3, 2021. <https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/mission/minusca>

5. "Mediation and Support for the Peace Process in the Central African Republic." Mediation and support for the peace process in the Central African Republic | HD Centre. Center for Humanitarian Dialogue. Accessed August 1, 2021. <https://www.hdcentre.org/activities/conflict-mediation-and-support-transitional-justice-central-african-republic/>



The agreement called for a ceasefire, representation of armed groups within government institutions and the national security architecture, and a process to foster judicial proceedings and reconciliation [6]. While the agreement initially led to a decrease in violence, tensions increased as allegations of non-adherence were made from both sides. Failure to meet operationalization deadlines for mixed force security and military units has undermined the implementation of the peace agreement. Moreover, the government failed to adhere to the integration of armed rebel groups and leaders into the government, instead opting to create shadow positions in government without any real authority [7]. As for the armed groups, violence between them and attacks on civilians have continued [8].

Elections held on December 27, 2020, which declared Touadéra as the winner, can be viewed as a positive development, although only 35% of the country's registered voters were able to cast a vote [9].

Moreover there have been allegations of fraud and irregularities levied by the opposition, but thus far the fallout has not resulted in widespread violence. Concomitantly, there exists a dire humanitarian crisis in CAR: two out of every three Central Africans rely on humanitarian aid to survive [10].

Figures that are particularly alarming considering CAR's relatively low population of 4 million and the resemblance of said figures to those emanating from Syria [11]. This humanitarian crisis is both born out of the conflict and reinforcing it.

In attempting to get an experts' opinion on the peace process, I managed to interview Dr. Alhaji Sarjoh Bah, the Chief Advisor on Peace, Security, and Governance for the Permanent Observer Mission of the African Union to the United Nations in New York. I asked him a series of questions pertaining to the challenges surrounding the peace agreement implementation, the humanitarian crisis, lessons learned from past agreements, and dilemmas at play in the peace agreement.

6. Ibid.

7. Pangburn, Aaron. "One Year after CAR Peace Agreement. Looming Elections Distract from Current Dangers." IPI Global Observatory. Global Observatory, March 2, 2020. <https://theglobalobservatory.org/2020/03/one-year-after-car-peace-agreement-elections-distract-from-current-dangers/>.

8. Ibid.

9. "Picking up the Pieces in the Central African Republic." International Crisis Group. International Crisis Group, February 9, 2021. <https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/central-africa/central-african-republic/picking-pieces-central-african-republic>.

10. Lister, Tim. "The Central African Republic Faces a Syria-Sized Crisis." CNN. Cable News Network, September 11, 2019. <https://www.cnn.com/2019/09/11/africa/car-aid-crisis-peace-truces-intl/index.html>.

11. Ibid.

**Q: What are your thoughts on the implementation of the peace process thus far?**

**"..It's really a combination of factors, access to natural resources, the role of foreign powers and a fairly weak central government that has not been able to bring the groups together as contributed to the current challenges that we are faced with in terms of implementing the peace agreement."**[12]



**Dr. Alhaji Sarjoh Bah:**

**"When this agreement was signed in Khartoum, it was unprecedented in the sense that you had the government and 14 armed groups signing an agreement to restore peace and stability to the Central African Republic. Given the sheer number of actors involved in terms of the signatories of the agreement, it already indicated that there would be some potential challenges in terms of implementing that agreement. I mean, you can appreciate the challenge of implementing any agreement, even if it's a bilateral one, let alone where you have one that involves 14 groups with different interests, different motivations and different imperatives, both internal and external.**

**The major challenge has been, how do you maintain the momentum? How do you maintain the interest? How do you maintain the centre of gravity around this agreement in order for it to be implemented? That is more of an aspiration and as the reality kicked in what we saw in CAR, were that some of the groups that were relatively closer to the government were more willing to implement the agreement, but others that were a bit more removed from the government in terms of either ideology, regional and ethnic configuration and religion, as this is the case of CAR, were less inclined to implement the agreement.**

**You have a situation where the government, which is the centre in Bangui, has very limited reach. I think there was an estimate at some point, I'm not sure what the figures are now, the government only controls about 30% of its territory, the rest is controlled by armed groups, and that tells you that there was a real challenge there. How do you then, you know, incentivise these armed groups to actually, you know, move away from the kind of rentier economies that they have established under the areas under their control, to operate under the national umbrella."**

**continued on page 22**

The second major area has been, how do you now create a unified, a military and a police force, or a security architecture out of these very desperate groups, different groups, different training backgrounds, and different ideology. Bringing all of that together in the context of the peace agreement to create, joint and mixed units in order to be able to start the process of developing a national defence and security force was a very crucial challenge because here, when you talk DDR and the long-term security sector reform, it was extremely difficult to really move on some of those points because of some of the reasons that I raised.

Then if you fast-forward into the role of external actors, a lot of people will tell you that Russia's presence and the Russian collaboration with the government in Bangui through the military support of the private security company, has actually emboldened the government and pushed them to think that there might be a military solution to the challenges that they are confronted with some of the armed groups. You will hear people from time to time, there are different opinions out there, that had the Russians not been there, the government would have been slightly more inclined to make some compromises and accommodate the various other armed groups.

But, with the presence of the Russians, what people say they observed was that the government was a bit more determined to pursue a military track instead of addressing issues through dialogue and building consensus in order to ensure that the peace agreement is implemented. It's really a combination of factors, access to natural resources, the role of foreign powers and a fairly weak central government that has not been able to coalesce and bring the groups together has contributed to the current challenges that we are faced with in terms of implementing the peace agreement."<sup>[12]</sup>



Photo credit: (Camille Laffont/AFP)

continued on page 24

12. Bah, Dr. Alhaji Sarjoh. Interview by Tony Oweke. Audio Call. New York, New York, USA. 07/28/21.

cont'd...

**Q. How has the ongoing humanitarian crisis impacted the peace process?**

“..the humanitarian impact remains a major, major challenge, and certainly is one of those issues that until and unless we are able to address the peace agreement and it is implemented in good faith, the humanitarian situation is not going to improve.”

**Dr. Alhaji Sarjoh Bah:**

“You can say the humanitarian crisis is created by the conflict on the ground. As a result, you have this large displacement of people within the country and outside of the country. In the elections that you had recently, one of the controversial issues was whether the refugees in neighbouring countries could vote, and in the end they could not vote. That became a major challenge, but then the large internal displacements, what that does over time, weakens the social fabric of the society, it deepens animosity. You’ll have newcomers moving into areas where they find themselves as IDPs, and that creates a lot of tension. In this case, as is the case of the Central African Republic, I think you have, the religious angle as well, where you have the largely Muslim communities. There has been an open hostility between the more Muslim communities and the Christian communities.

The humanitarian impact remains a major, major challenge, and certainly is one of those issues that until and unless we are able to address the peace agreement and it is implemented in good faith, the humanitarian situation is not going to improve. The two are linked to the crisis generated by the humanitarian situation. In order for the humanitarian situation to be dealt with adequately and in a sustainable manner, there has to be progress in the implementation of the peace agreement.” [13]



13. Ibid.



cont'd...

**Q. What are some of the lessons learned from the past failed peace agreements?**

"...our experience across the continent has been where you have that close partnership between the AU and a sub-regional, one of the regional economic communities, your likelihood of making progress is multiplied."

**Dr. Alhaji Sarjoh Bah:**

"One of the major lessons in terms of implementing the peace agreements in CAR has been the sheer number of groups, armed groups in the country in the face of a very weak central government.

The second major lesson, and this is not limited to the Central African Republic but it is quite pronounced there, is the presence of mineral resources that are easily accessible and that can be traded in the black market for weapons, medicine and other equipment that are required to continue the war by the armed groups has further complicated the implementation of the peace agreement. Because in the absence of some of these natural resources like diamonds and gold, some of the groups will have been slightly more inclined to make peace because then they will look to implementation of a peace agreement, as sort of yielding some sort of positive dividends for them. But in some cases here, when they look at it, when they do their calculation, they see that they are net losers if they were to give up the territories under their control. So I think the second major one is implementing a peace agreement where you have easy access to natural resources that can be traded for weapons and whatever else is required to continue the conflict becomes extremely difficult.

The third major lesson is the absence or the failure of the international community to speak with one voice. And in this case, we see here, there is a clear role of the Russians that I alluded to earlier, but also their regional neighbors. I'm not just focusing on Russia and France, which is the former colonial power that continues to play different roles, engaging different actors at different times.

The fourth challenge would be the absence of a very strong sub-regional entity. ECCAS (Economic Community of Central African States) as you know, it's not very robust as ECOWAS (Economic Community of West African States) or SADC (Southern African Development Community) is. ICGLR (International Conference on the Great Lakes Region) is a bit too broad. So the AU is a bit too removed from the issue. The AU tries to provide support, but our experience across the continent has been where you have that close partnership between the AU and a sub regional, one of the regional economic communities, your likelihood of making progress is multiplied. But when you don't have that, then you have some of the deficits that we are dealing with in CAR." [14]

14. Ibid.

continued on page 26

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Q. What dilemmas are at play within the peace process?

### Peace vs Justice

"You see the justice and peace dilemma or the question of accountability is certainly one of the, as you've said, you've allotted through your research. At what point is it appropriate to talk about justice? In other words, how do you hold the people who have committed crimes accountable whilst at the same time, you need those same people to create the Peace in CAR. But it is clearly one of those that those involved in the peace efforts there, will have to grapple with because it has to be dealt with.

You can imagine if hypothetically, you Tony, you have done X, Y, Z, but at the same time, we need you, Tony, at the table in order to foster the peace agreement and to ensure that it is implemented fully, what do we do? So there comes the question of sequencing. So could it be that we say, let us get the peace, make sure that the agreement is on solid footing, we have some of the national systems in place. And then at some point we can now talk about issues of accountability.

It's more like saying justice delayed is not necessarily justice denied, but then in the international community, you are dealing with a range of activists, human rights organisations that are really pushing to say, we want justice and we want it now. While those who are really pushing for peace are now confronted with this dilemma, because the same people that you want to hold to account the same ones that you require their goodwill, their political commitment, and the leadership of their various groups in order to push the peace process forward. So it's a serious dilemma, and I don't think it is one that anyone has a yes or no answer to." [15]

### On Local Political Interests vs International Interests

"Yes, nobody wants to stay there forever, but I also don't think it would be fair to say they (the International community) are willing to install any and everybody there so that they can tick the box and move on with business in the next conflict theatre. But in terms of the national local actors wanting to win the elections or using the elections to legitimise their hold on to power, that is perfectly correct." [16]

### On Regional Dynamics

"In the case of CAR, the role of the neighbours, without pointing fingers, varies. The interest varies, and that clearly contributes to pushing the armed groups either towards the peace process or away from the peace process. it depends on really what the calculus of the day is." [17]

15. Ibid.

16. Ibid.

17. Ibid.

## Conclusion

To state that there exists a number of obstacles protruding on the long path to peace-building in the country would be a grievous oversimplification. There are a myriad of factors at play at various levels, which although can be conceptually separated are in reality intimately intertwined and constantly feeding into each other. Creating a situation wherein a flexible multifaceted approach that combines immediate, practical solutions with more long-term oriented policies is crucial to addressing the underlying factors. Such a response needs to be coordinated at all levels of organisations: sub-national, national, bilateral, sub-regional, regional, and within the UN architecture. This in turn is facilitated by communication and aligned strategic interests of all actors involved, something that has not historically always been the case. Various regional and international actors through their own initiatives and in coalition with other actors have contributed to the peace process in CAR. These include the United Nations, African Union, the Economic Community of Central African States, European Union, and bi-lateral actors such as the United States and Russia. Thus such coordination is not a menial task.

The above interview with Dr. Bah has indicated that there are a number of factors that need to be considered and addressed to ensure lasting peace in CAR. Firstly, there is a need to ensure that the grievances of the several armed groups are addressed and incorporated into any political agreements moving forward to foster unity. Without which, armed groups are unlikely to give up control and operations over mineral-rich regions. At the same time, effective mechanisms should be put into place to try individuals and groups accused of grave crimes. Secondly, there is a need to ensure coordination between the various levels of organisation at play in the conflict as explicated above. Crucially, there is a need to strengthen the role of ECCAS and neighbouring sub-regional communities within CAR. Thirdly, there is a need for capacity-building and monitoring within the organs of the government in Bangui to ensure that structures are able to effectively incorporate the various groups and provide for effective roles. Of greatest pertinence, are efforts to mitigate the dire humanitarian situation. Renewed efforts are needed to foster dialogue between all groups to provide for the reopening of critical supply lines [18] and to ensure the safety of humanitarian workers.

In short, there is a long, bumpy road ahead in the quest to achieve lasting peace in CAR. Staying on course will depend on the commitment and alignment of many stakeholders.

18. "Democratic Gains in Central African Republic Must Be Preserved by Completing the Electoral Process, Peace Operations Chief Tells Security Council - Central African Republic." ReliefWeb. ReliefWeb. Accessed August 3, 2021. <https://reliefweb.int/report/central-african-republic/democratic-gains-central-african-republic-must-be-preserved>.



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