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February 27, 2019

The Honorable Michael Pompeo
Secretary of State
United States State Department
2100 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20520

Dear Secretary Pompeo:

As Chair of the Committee on International Justice and Peace and President of Catholic Relief Services, we write to urge you to take full advantage of the opportunities for peace that exist in the newly signed Political Agreement for Peace and Reconciliation in the Central African Republic (CAR).

The accord is inclusive of 14 of the armed groups and the government all of whom seem to have negotiated in good faith. All the key countries in the region, along with the African Union and the United Nations support the accord. The agreement covers many elements essential to peace and security such as an end to all violence, Demobilization, Disarmament, Reintegration and Repatriation (DDRR), mixed security forces, reform of the armed services, decentralization of power to the provinces and local entities, a rational, legal and equitable exploitation of natural resources, and national and local truth, peace, justice, and reconciliation structures.

We recognize that this accord is the eighth agreement in six years; it was negotiated behind closed doors between a nascent and struggling government and armed groups whose sole legitimacy is their ability to act as spoilers. There was no input from faith communities nor civil society representatives and some within the Catholic Church view it with skepticism.

Although not perfect, in the current context, this accord represents a step in the right direction. Although it is an accomplishment, it is the easy part. Its ultimate value will be in its implementation and its impact on peace and security in the country and that impact will only be as good as the investments that go into it.

We urge the United States to join the people of the Central African Republic, regional countries, the AU, the UN, and other donor nations to invest in its implementation. We ask State Department and USAID to support:

1. The creation of a strong, well trained and disciplined army and police forces that will protect all citizens of CAR from attacks by any armed groups, be impartial in the conflict between the opposing armed groups and respect human and civil rights. These forces should work closely with MINUSCA to ensure respect of the agreement and human rights. The army and police forces cannot be allowed to become another armed group serving the interests of the government leaders themselves. They should protect the common good, the rule of law and the implementation of this agreement. The Church insists that the country needs a strong

army and security forces and that its members cannot include rebel leaders under UN sanctions.

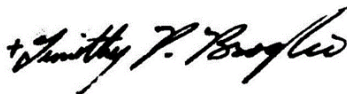
2. Inclusion and diversity in the army and police forces. All people must see themselves reflected in the ranks of the army and police forces. The formation of these forces should be one of the government's first exercises in building a national identity and social cohesion. They should be living examples of how people of different religions and ethnicity can work as one to protect all.
3. The local Peace and Justice Committees efforts to link the faith communities and civil society to this work. The Committees will be crucial in addressing the root causes of violence, breaking the cycle of violence, finding local ways to promote restorative justice and slowly building just peace.
4. The national Truth, Justice, Reparation and Reconciliation Commission. The Church also insists that those who committed serious crimes must be brought to justice to show that impunity no longer reigns.
5. Peaceful DDRR of all people who currently threaten the peace and security of the surrounding communities.
6. The Religious Leaders Platform efforts to strengthen their structure and processes and implement national and local efforts to build social cohesion.
7. Humanitarian and development assistance desperately needed to rebuild infrastructure, homes, agriculture, and commerce and to assist the displaced and refugees who want to return to their homes in peace.

The CAR is at a crucial turning point. It is situated in a particularly conflicted region where unbridled opportunism and indiscriminate violence prevail. If past atrocities like Alindao continue, the country could move from a fragile state back to a failed state. CAR can take advantage of this rare opportunity to join with the United States to secure its population and re-instill peace in the country.

We urge you to work with the Church and other religious leaders and civil society to involve them in the implementation of this accord to ensure that it serves not only the political elites who negotiated the treaty, but also the wellbeing of all Central Africans.

The Committee on International Justice and Peace and Catholic Relief Services stand ready to work with you to reach these goals.

Sincerely yours,



Most Reverend Timothy P. Broglio
Archbishop to the Military Services
Committee on International Justice and Peace



Mr. Sean Callahan
President
Catholic Relief Services