



Committee on International Justice and Peace

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April 11, 2014

The Honorable John Kerry
Secretary of State
2201 C Street
Washington, DC 20520

Dear Secretary Kerry:

I have the pleasure to send you a copy of a letter in French and English that our Committee on International Justice and Peace received from the Catholic Bishop's Conference of the Central African Republic. (The English translation is theirs.)

The bishops highlight five urgent requests centering on the needs to improve security, to rebuild state authority, to build social cohesion by supporting the Religious Leaders' Platform, and to provide immediate emergency aid supplemented by more medium term assistance.

The bishops are particularly concerned about what they see as a growing effort towards the partition of the Central African Republic by Seleka militia. They are moving to the north and northeast to establish and hold control over the area. In this regard, they remain critical of the MISCA and Sangaris troops for their inability to stop the violence, disarm the various militia groups, and establish CAR government control over the entire country. They make the argument that MISCA troops from neighboring countries are more interested in securing their own borders with CAR than stopping the violence that threatens these same border regions.

Our Committee is grateful for the recent meeting that the State Department, led by Deputy Assistant Secretary David Gilmore and a number of staff from various offices at State, held with the three members of the Religious Leaders' Platform, and for the support that State Department gave to the CAR delegation. Related to this meeting, I am encouraged that the State Department is organizing a visit to Bangui of a delegation of American religious leaders, including His Eminence Theodore Cardinal McCarrick. I hope the visit will further the work of our brother religious leaders in CAR to calm tensions and end the violence that has had a serious impact on a quarter of the country.

Lastly, I want to express my thanks for the collaboration that State Department officials have extended to the United States Bishops' Conference and Catholic Relief Services in support of the faith leaders and the people of CAR. Much remains to be done to end this crisis and respond to the urgent needs of a population that has suffered too long.

Sincerely yours,

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Most Reverend Richard Pates
Bishop of Des Moines
Chair, Committee on International Justice and Peace

Encl.



To the United States Catholic Bishops
United States Conference of Catholic Bishops
3211 Fourth Street NE
WASHINGTON DC 20017-1194

Dear Brothers in Christ,

The Central African Conference of Catholic Bishops (CACCB) took her responsibility before God and the history taking into consideration the serious military and political crisis in which the Central African Republic sunk into since December 10th, 2012. The impacts of this crisis are critical as far as social cohesion is concerned at all levels. Some analysts, especially international media want us to slip into religious and sectarian conflict. But we say no to such manipulation.

For sure we wonder about the real intentions of the leaders of the Seleka coalition which is made of 90% of mercenaries from Chad and Sudan who are Muslim. We were much concerned about their *modus operandi*. We made our concern known to the then President of the transition in a letter which we addressed him on April 23rd, 2013. The observation was staggering. While part of the Muslim population was largely spared from the looting, our institutions were subjected to systematic theft, desecration, looting and ransacking and even some of our pastoral agents were under psychological pressure. We lived with this fact while promoting crisis resolution through dialogue and reconciliation. It is in this perspective that the platform of religious denominations has been established.

Days passed, yet there was no improvement in the daily living of Central Africans to the extent that some Central Africans have decided to set-up groups of self- defense in order to defend and protect their violated honour. These *anti-balaka* groups only reactivated a long fight against insecurity, arm-robbery and the Chadian cattle herders (Mbarara, Houda, Algamba) who have no regard for indigenous peasants. We have thus fallen into logic of retaliation and counter-retaliation by two armed groups. At this stage of the conflict, there was a lot of confusion as to turn the anti-balaka into a Christian militia and seleka into Muslims. We also protested against such an amalgam that does not truly reflect the realities on the ground. It is unfortunate that from the two communities, some people refuse to follow the logic of peace, forgiveness and reconciliation and favour rather chaos. It should be remembered, the violence that we are witnessing with impotence are not confined to a single

community. It is misleading and unfair to speak of ethnic and religious cleansing. Unless it is proved beyond reasonable doubt, Muslims are not an ethnic group. Therefore sociology and ethnology cannot be reinvented just in the defense of uncertain cause. It is equally unlikely to evoke religious cleansing. Indeed most of the Internal Displaced Population (IDP) in camps established in the city of Bangui are mostly made of Christians who are sometimes a hundred yards from their home, but do not feel safe to live there. There is no violence against Lebanese Muslims. In towns such as Bangassou, Christians and Muslims are involved in preventing conflicts. In Boali, Carnot, Berberati, Muslims have been hosted and kept safe in Catholic Churches.

The real problem facing the country is that of insecurity. How can one explain to national and international opinion that the 2127 UN mandate is not vigorously implemented by the international forces? The UN resolution speaks of disarmament, but Sangaris and MISCA troops want to establish confidence within the population, that is to say, the "cantonment of armed men with their weapons". It happened several times that some of these Seleka rebels came out from their barracks in Bangui and committed atrocities against the civil population. Moreover it is now a common occurrence to see columns of seleka rebels retire with arms and luggage in the North where some of their leaders threaten to divide the country into two. Given the interference of the international community in the management of the Central African crisis, this threat should be taken seriously. Furthermore we note and condemn the abuses by certain sections of anti-balaka against civil Muslims. We are fighting for the implementation of the rule of law and against impunity. To this effect, the State authority must be deployed without delay throughout the nation.

The policy chosen by the high commander of MISCA and Sangaris operation to secure the national territory raises serious concerns on our part. From all indications, it seems that each African country participating in the mission has rather chosen to secure its own borders by deploying his men at his own borders. So Chadian troops are deployed in the North-West, Cameroonians in the West, Congolese from Brazzaville in the South-West, Congolese from DRC in the South-East. This security strategy related to complicity, observed for instance between the Chadian contingent and the seleka, can become a source of great concern. Moreover, the proximity of these elements with their country of origin can encourage illegal mineral resources trafficking beyond our borders. It will be wise to open these international forces to other African countries outside the sub-region, and encourage the participation of European and American troops.

The management of this crisis and especially the repatriation of Chadian citizens highlighted the failure of the Central African State, the violations of international laws and the non-respect of our national sovereignty. In which country in the world can an army of another country cross the national borders of a sovereign country to pick its citizens while committing atrocities on civil population along their way? It is said everywhere that the return of foreigners is a voluntary process with the people's own financial contribution. Yet they omit to mention that IOM has contributed significantly to the financial organization of these returns. Who is benefitting from these organized returns? What is hidden behind it?

The Central African people welcomed the change by which the transitional president and his prime minister were forced to resign and a new president was elected. All the people foresaw signs of revival for an autonomous Central Africa released from the throes of underdevelopment and insecurity. Nevertheless the visit of the President of transition these days to Ndjamena brought into glaring light the terms of an unofficial political agreement by the Heads of State of the sub-region in favour of the rebels from Seleka coalition. These rebels are presented as friends and sovereign ministerial posts are granted to them. While resisting this diktat which is not in favour of Central African people, the Presidency bends to the pressure by appointing some rebels at ministerial and advisory positions, including some anti-balaka. We are all aware of the impact of such policy decisions on the financial aid the country can expect from some donors. Despite a failed State and the lack of strong political structure in CAR, the crisis in the country will not find a permanent solution as Chad continues interfering with its management.

We cannot build the country and deploy the State authority throughout the Nation if the payment of salaries, pensions and scholarships is not taken into consideration. It is five months now that the civil servants have not yet received their salaries. Which influence can the presidency and the government exert upon them if they are unable to fulfill their responsibility towards them? Some are of the opinion that the resolution of this crisis will be progressive, first establishing security, then tackling the issue related to development. This logic can only lead us to an impasse. We would rather consider a comprehensive process that includes both security and development. Such an approach will enable unemployed youth who are tempted by rebel movements to engage in income-generating activities that keep them away from temptation.

Thus the Central African Conference of Catholic Bishops relies upon her counterpart in the United States to advocate in favour of Central African people to the U.S. government in the following areas:

Security: MISCA and Sangaris operation have shown their limits. MISCA troops are under-equipped. MISCA and Sangaris do not respect the terms of the 2127 mandate of the Security Council of the United Nations. The support of the U.S. government to the rapid deployment of peacekeepers in Central African Republic will surely contribute in resolving the insecurity. The setting of these UN forces should take into consideration the forces already engaged in the field and their actual involvement in the crisis resolution.

State authority: for the redeployment of State authority to be effective throughout the national territory, it is wise to restore the different structures that have been ransacked and destroyed. This aim cannot be achieved without substantial financial assistance. Moreover, the issue of civil servants' salaries and pensions of retirees should be taken into consideration.

Social cohesion: the crisis has created a mutual distrust. However, the Central African Conference of Catholic Bishops and the platform of religious denominations are much involved in all that concerns social cohesion. They are developing tools that will be

used nationwide for reconciliation, forgiveness and peace building. This work needs to be recognized and reaffirmed.

Immediate emergency help: some acts of vandalism towards State structures (hospitals, administration...) and the destruction of seeds have rendered the people fragile; hence dependent on international community. Emergency assistance in the present circumstances means assisting the people with medicines, food and Non-Food Items (NFIs).

Emergency assistance in the medium term: strengthening the capacity of the civil populations to render them autonomous is a good philosophy to be promoted. In this perspective, farmers should be provided with inputs and seeds. In this case, we need to act quickly since the planting season is passing. The longer we wait the poorer the harvest become.

Confident in your brotherly concern, be assured of our prayers.

Given at the Seat of the Central African Conference of Catholic Bishops, March 2nd, 2014.

On behalf of the Central African Conference of Catholic Bishops

Most Rev. Dr. Dieudonné NZAPALAINGA Cssp
President of CACCB
Archbishop of Bangui

Most Rev. Dr. Nestor Désiré NONGO AZIAGBIA SMA
Vice-President of CACCB
Bishop of Bossangoa

