

# The Voice of Peace

News and views from areas affected by the Lord's Resistance Army in Central African Republic (CAR), Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), South Sudan and Uganda

## At a glance:

- Editorial  
p.2
- Will troubles in neighbouring states complicate the fight against LRA in DRC?  
p.3
- War in South Sudan  
p.4–5
- New LRA attacks in South Sudan: one man's story  
p.5
- Editorial: Crisis in CAR – how it started  
p.6
- Are things changing inside the LRA?  
p.7
- Ethnic tensions thought to blame as 12 elite SPLA soldiers killed  
p.7–8
- Interview: VoP speaks to a local mayor in CAR  
p.8
- Editorial: Understanding & responding to the CAR crisis  
p.9
- Guest article: Gender training in Kampala  
p.10

## INSIDE: Origins of the CAR crisis; Fighting in South Sudan; Refugees flood into Northern Uganda; Will troubles impact on anti-LRA ops in DRC? New tensions inside the LRA?



## REGIONAL SITUATION REPORT

### Oct–Dec 2013: LRA attacks continue in CAR and DRC

**CAR:** The situation in CAR is far from stable and needs robust responses from the international community, regional bodies and African Union in terms of a peacekeeping mission to protect civilians and assure that CAR does not fall back into inter-religious fighting once more.

CAR is one of the countries where in the final quarter of 2013 LRA have defected. During that period in total 26 LRA and their dependents defected in CAR, which is a big success in terms of reducing the number of LRA combatants. However, CAR had one attack in October, three in November and one in December. The level of defection seen in CAR is due to coherent collaboration between all actors such as UPDF, American advisers, local organizations and community members. It's usually community members who help LRA to defect – their contribution is really key in bringing an end to the LRA.

However, many LRA have been able to move to CAR from DRC and other LRA as well have been able to move to new areas as a result of some military pressure from UPDF. It is important to note that CAR is playing a very important role now in terms of encouraging defections. Credit goes to all local people in CAR doing this great job.

**DRC:** DRC had more attacks in November (13) compared to other months (seven in October, four in December). During this period one person was killed by LRA, 10 abducted and two returned from LRA. From early November to early December, LRA movement was mainly from the Garamba Park region to the West in the direction of CAR.

*Continued on page 2*

	DRC			CAR			S Sudan			Uganda			Total
	Oc	No	De	Oc	No	De	Oc	No	De	Oc	No	De	
2013													
Attacks	7	13	4	1	3	1	0	3	0	0	0	0	32
Abductees	0	10	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	12
Killed	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	3
Newly displaced	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	70	0	0	0	0	70
Returnees/ rescued	0	2	4	0	0	26	0	0	0	0	0	0	32

## Editorial-Opinion: Father Ernest Sugule, Editor in Chief, VoP



*'Where men have failed  
women will do it better'*

Welcome to the last edition of the *Voice of Peace* for 2013, and the first of the new year. This edition – written in the middle of instability in two of our contributing countries – is important as it focuses on the war in South Sudan and the crisis in Central African Republic. It looks at the impact of these conflicts on the wider region and on counter-LRA operations. CAR has become a country without a proper government, professional army or security agencies. A rebellion in 2012 has descended into sectarian killing, with thousands displaced. This volatile region has given opportunities to the LRA to move to new regions where AU-RTF counter operations cannot reach them. In South Sudan, competing factions of the SPLM are divided along ethnic lines, supporting Salva Kiir or Riek Machar. Uganda has unilaterally intervened on behalf of President Kiir, further complicating the fragile situation and detracting from activities against the LRA. This has given the LRA opportunities to move freely in the

region resulting in the first attack and killings in South Sudan after two years of peace.

The war in the neighboring countries has also complicated the AU-RTF's counter-LRA operations in the DRC. The LRA have been able to move to new territories such as Bongo territory in Bas Uélé, and attack and kill. On top of that some local militia from CAR have crossed into the same area where LRA are, complicating the situation further. The election of Mayor Catherine Samba-Panza as interim president of CAR has inspired many Central Africans and brought hope for peace in CAR: "Where men have failed women will do it better". The VoP sends its congratulations to Madam President Samba-Panza.

*Father Ernest Sugule is Editor in Chief of the Voice of Peace, and head of the NGO SAIPED, based in DRC.*

## Regional situation report ...continued from page 1

One reason for so many LRA having moved to CAR could be that they feel more comfortable defecting in CAR than in DRC. During this time many attacks happened to gather food for the movement. Another new development is that the LRA have started attacking in territories where they have never attacked before, such as Bongo territory, especially in Bulumasi village.

**South Sudan:** In November there were three attacks, two people killed, one abducted and 70 displaced. This is the first attack after many years of relative peace. The attackers might have come from DRC or CAR. What has been noticed in South Sudan is the use of women and children by the LRA to spy. Many of them have been arrested. This is a new development in LRA tactics.

**Uganda:** Ever so slowly, northern Uganda has started rebuilding. Hospitals and schools have re-opened, businesses have started and investors are coming. Volunteers are pouring in from abroad to assist in the rebuilding process. It looks hopeful; but the absence of a final peace

agreement leaves the potential for more conflict lingering. Nevertheless, the north of Uganda has put its foot forward and there is a determination to see the region thrive and grow. The town of Gulu is growing and becoming ever more modern, new businesses are opening daily, even tourism is slowly returning. But the Ugandan security situation has taken a new twist with war in South Sudan.

The Ugandan Red Cross says almost 25,000 South Sudanese refugees have arrived in the country since violence erupted in December, pushing Uganda to open new refugee camps. Others have moved into Ugandan towns. This has caused friction between the locals and the refugees as many aspects of life in these towns have changed. According to Anthony Atube Omach, an Amuru District official, some South Sudanese refugees who had camped at Elegu Primary School have been relocated to stop them from encroaching on locals' land.

*Continued on page 3*

## Regional situation report ...continued from page 2

"It was creating another conflict because people felt deprived of their resources and infrastructure," Atube Omach explained. The refugee influx is stretching basic services at the Elegu and Dzaipi reception centres, in Adjumani District. Both have few toilets. The water, food, medical care and shelter supplies are also inadequate. According to UNHCR, Dzaipi has the largest concentration of refugees, with more than 32,500 people, yet it was designed to host only 400, "so most of those there have to sleep in the open with their children".

Besides inadequate basic services, concern grows over possible inter-ethnic confrontations among the new South Sudan refugees. There are fears that some may be in possession of small arms which they use for hunting and to raid peoples animals.

Ugandan President Museveni has been very active in the South Sudan conflict since it erupted in mid-December, but many Ugandans would prefer their country to remain more detached. The UPDF are now in combat in Juba again.

### Will troubles in neighbouring states complicate fight against LRA in DRC?

DRC borders nine countries and a number of rebel groups from other states are known to be operating on its territory. The LRA and another Ugandan group, the ADF, are just two. The recent violence in CAR and South Sudan has taken attention away from the ongoing regional struggle against LRA, and this has given the group time and freedom to manoeuvre in what remains a highly volatile region.

With the defeat of the M23 rebel group in DRC's North Kivu province (for which credit should be given to both the Congolese army, FARDC, and the regional UN force, MONUSCO) the army is now turning its attention to the ADF.

The ADF is reportedly moving northwards to Oriental Province, where the LRA is also operating. This has raised fears that the two groups could make an alliance: unlikely but not impossible. First, given the distance that separates the two groups it would be difficult to communicate and coordinate activities. Second, ADF ideology and command structure are different from those of the LRA. The ADF is essentially an Islamic

Even though the UPDF reportedly re-took Bor in Jonglei State from the rebel groups, many lives have been lost and, as Ajedra the state minister for investment stated, an estimated 2.2 trillion Ugandan shillings has been lost due to the conflict. Is it improving the lives of Ugandans? How will Museveni explain to the families of those returning in coffins, or even parliament? And when Kiir departs, how will ordinary Ugandans live in harmony with the Nuer? Mediation would have portrayed a better image of the president's involvement.

The South Sudan conflict has also affected the many Ugandans who trade with South Sudan and who dominate the informal trade in the capital Juba. They have suffered heavy losses and many of the latter have returned home. Central Bank data indicates that exports to South Sudan have dropped by as much as \$40m on a monthly basis to between \$10m and \$15m. There are also fears that Uganda's involvement in South Sudan could prompt Riek Machar to support Joseph Kony in inciting renewed violence in Northern Uganda. Uganda has remained peaceful and relatively calm since 2006 and much effort has been focussed on the reconciliation and truth-telling process.

fundamentalist group while the LRA is rooted in an extreme version of Christianity. However, ADF and LRA both started in Uganda in the 1980s. They have a common goal of combating President Museveni and overthrowing the government. With growing international and regional pressure against both the ADF and LRA, a marriage of convenience should not be discounted. Similar alliances have been made in the past. The LRA has linked up with the Mbororo and elements within the Sudanese security forces.

Given the deteriorating regional picture, the LRA might also profit from refugee flows between the DRC and neighbouring countries. The war in South Sudan has taken on an ethnic dimension leading to a possibility that one ethnic group might forge an alliance with the LRA. In CAR there are reports that Kony is trying to exploit the deteriorating situation to secure resources and other supplies. Alliances might help the LRA rearm and rejuvenate, continuing their dangerous campaign in the region.

For the Congolese government complacency is not an option. In addition to military intervention the government in Kinshasa should promote peaceful means to encourage defection, working closely with regional interventions and neighbouring states.

## War in South Sudan

Fighting erupted in Juba on the evening of 15 December 2013 with an alleged mutiny carried out by supporters of former Vice-President Dr. Riek Machar. The outbreak of fighting follows a period of political tension in South Sudan. In July 2013 President Salva Kiir sacked his entire cabinet fearing opposition to his rule within his own government.

According to the Sudan Tribune, the fighting started when the presidential guard was disarmed following the order of President Kiir. However, the officer in charge of the weapons stores began to rearm the Dinka soldiers, angering a Nuer soldier passing by. This sparked fighting between the soldiers of Dinka and Nuer origin, with the latter taking control of the headquarters. The next morning the mutineers were besieged in the barracks. President Kiir immediately called it a coup attempt and claimed that it had been put down. He blamed Riek Machar for instigating the coup but the latter denied any knowledge of it and instead blamed Kiir for his dictatorial model of governance leading to the violence.

On 16 December fighting erupted in Jonglei region, again along ethnic lines. More than 1,000 people were reportedly killed and over 800 injured. A considerable number of people were internally displaced, some into the UN compound. This led to the compound in Akobo, Jonglei, being attacked resulting in the death of two Indian UNMISS peacekeepers and the seizure of Bor town by a Nuer militia group on 19 December. On 20 December 2013, mutineers took the SPLA 4<sup>th</sup> Division barracks in Bentiu and in the morning on 21 December, Maj. Gen James Koang Chuol (of the Nuer ethnic group) commander of the SPLA's 4<sup>th</sup> division defected and joined the mutineers. On the same day the 'interim government' of the former SPLA 4<sup>th</sup> Division Commander James Koang in Unity State announced itself loyal to Machar, for the first time openly declaring support to the opposition leader. In an interview on 26 December, the spokesman of the self-declared interim state government said they were under the direction of Machar.

On 22 December the fighting escalated with tank battles between defector and loyalist factions in Upper Nile. At that time, U.S. and Nigerian envoys were on their way to Juba to try to negotiate a solution. On 23 December, the army was on its way to Jonglei and Unity to retake territory. President Kiir was committed to talks with Machar without preconditions. But Machar made clear that before any dialogue Salva Kiir had to release his comrades who were under detention and let them be evacuated to Addis Ababa where they would be involved in negotiations. Kiir rejected this and still no peace deal is in sight.

On 24 December, the government of South Sudan claimed to have recaptured Bor. On 25 December, heavy fighting took place in Malakal and the rebels were controlling 4 states out of 10: Jonglei, Unity, Upper Nile and Central Equatoria. On 27 December, government forces had full control of Malakal, the administrative centre of Upper Nile. On the same day, Machar said Ugandan MiG-29 fighter planes bombed their positions around Jonglei state, condemning UPDF interference as meddling in internal affairs.

On 4 January intense battles involving tanks and artillery were reported on the outskirts of Bor, which by this time had changed hands three times in as many weeks. Rebels claimed that a South Sudanese army general had been killed when his convoy approaching Bor was ambushed. The SPLA advance caused panic in Bentiu. On 8–9 January, thousands of civilians fled the city, in expectation of further clashes.

The rebels became increasingly disorganized. Armed men looted stalls and shops in Bentiu's marketplace whilst rebel forces brought a tank into the town to help defend it from the anticipated government attack. Bentiu had been mostly evacuated by 10 January as residents fled fearing more fighting. Even the main hospital was abandoned. On 13 January, South Sudanese troops were advancing on Bor, the last state capital still in rebel hands, as ceasefire talks in neighbouring Ethiopia were called off for the day.

*Continued on page 5...*



## War in South Sudan ...continued from page 4

Various factors may have contributed to the escalating violence. First, political elites may have manipulated ethnic identity. This is not the first time Dinka have fought with Nuer, or other ethnic groups. Dinka are historically seen to dominate and control the country: a perception exploited by politicians in Juba. The second factor is the failure of multiple transitions. The former rebels (SPLA) have yet to become a professional army. Technical approaches to Security Sector Reform may have had some immediate results but longer-term reforms need to address the political aspect of South Sudan's security sector. For instance, 150,000 rebels were to be demobilized and reintegrated into society but just 20,000 have followed the DDR programme. In addition, the same number or more have been recruited anew. Sudanese politics has also failed to move beyond ethnicity to a national politics based on vision, good governance and leadership.

The last factor is external intervention in South Sudan and the interference of regional and international agendas such as military intervention from Kampala or Khartoum, US or Chinese diplomacy or UN peacekeeping.

Dialogue among the people of South Sudan is key to bring peace and unity in the country. The dialogue should not only be between Dinka and Nuer but between all tribes. This will give new direction to the country, new vision, good governance and equal sharing of resources. This should include different social groups, political leaders, religious leaders, civil society, customary leaders, and others at a regional, national and local level.

The potential for conflict will remain as long as communities feel marginalized with few avenues of expression or representation.

### New LRA attacks in South Sudan: one man's story

My name is Thomas Leone, I live here in Nazinga village of Ezo county. I am 39.

#### How did the LRA attack happen?

At approximately 2 a.m. on 7 November 2013, I heard people shouting and fleeing, and when I heard this I got out of my house and hid myself. Then I saw my neighbours running towards the town. When I asked them, they told me that the LRA were in the area and had attacked their house. So I also ran and found my way towards the town together with my wife.

#### What have you come to do here?

I have come to collect some food to take to my family in Nyakama camp where we have taken refuge.

#### How is life in the IDP camp?

Life is not easy for those of us who have been in rural villages and then suddenly have to uproot and flee to the towns. In town we have no available food, because in the village we had everything around our homesteads. Here we have to buy everything. That is why I have to risk coming

here in my village to collect food for eating.

#### Why do you carry this local rifle?

I take this whenever I come here so that if I come across the LRA I can scare them with it and run away.

#### Do you think you can fight someone with an automatic gun with this locally made gun?

No, but if I see him first I can have the element of surprise. But if he sees me first then it is difficult for me to overcome him. But at least this rifle is some form of deterrent. It's better than nothing.

#### For how long will you stay in town where you have taken refuge?

I know I cannot manage living in town for a long time, but also if I return to my village the fear of attacks will not leave me so I'm sure I would come back. But I will spend as little time in the town as possible because the challenges are so many. If I see that the LRA attack is not a big threat then I will return home.



Thomas with his rifle

## Editorial: Crisis in CAR – how it started

The current CAR conflict started on 10 December 2012 between the government and Séléka, meaning "union" in the Sango language. Séléka is a coalition of various armed groups originating from north-eastern CAR. The main two groups within the coalition are the Union of Democratic Forces for Unity (UFDR) and the Convention of Patriots for Justice and Peace (CPJP). Séléka also includes the lesser-known Patriotic Convention for Saving the Country (CPSK). Two other groups based in northern CAR are also part of the coalition: the Democratic Front of the Central African People (FDPC) and the Chadian linked group, Popular Front for Recovery (FPR). These groups formed an alliance due to the continued marginalization of their communities and the failure of François Bozizé's government to abide by peace agreements signed in 2007 and 2011. On 24 March 2013 the rebels overran Bangui, looting as they went, and the rebel leader Michel Djotodia declared himself president. In a regional summit in N'Djamena on 18 April, Djotodia was recognized as the transitional head of government. However, the security situation remained extremely poor with reports of over 200,000 internally displaced people, as well as human rights abuses including use of child soldiers, rape, torture, extrajudicial killings and forced disappearances.

In September 2013, Djotodia announced that Séléka had been dissolved, but in practice most of the militias refused to disband. Instead they continued to loot and steal. Indiscriminate killing, rape, destruction of villages and infrastructure were all carried out. Heavy fighting between unidentified armed groups in and around the towns of Bossembele and Bossangoa was reported in mid-September. Nearly 400,000 people were displaced, mostly to the bush, and 68,000 fled to neighbouring counties. In November, there was increasing violence largely from reprisal attacks on civilians from Séléka's mainly Muslim fighters and Christian militias called "anti-balaka", meaning 'anti-machete' or 'anti-sword'. On 4 December, the Security Council voted in favour of the resolution that UN peacekeepers and French troops present in the CAR can use all force necessary to protect the lives of civilians. On the same day, 105 bodies were collected after heavy clashes broke out between the mainly Muslim former rebels currently in charge of the country and a mix of local Christian militia and fighters. The UN resolution also imposed an arms embargo on the country and asked the UN to prepare for a possible peacekeeping mission. On 6 December, 281 bodies were collected by the national Red Cross after two days of violence in and around the capital Bangui. During these clashes, 10 armed attackers of unknown affinity attacked a French army patrol near the airport. The French troops overpowered the

gunmen, killing four of them and injuring six. This was the first military engagement of France's intervention.

Thousands of Christian civilians sought refuge at the French-held airport from the mostly Muslim ex-rebels. By 8 December, the death toll had reached 394 and by 9 December, 465 people had been killed in total. Amnesty International supported the official number of 400 dead, but estimated that as many as 1,000 people may have been killed, with many hastily buried. On 10 December, two French soldiers were killed in fighting in the capital. On 13 December, the UNHCR stated 610 people had been killed in the sectarian violence, of which 450 died in Bangui. On 17 December, the French military deployed into neighbourhoods of the capital to flush out a Christian militia that had infiltrated the area at dawn. On 26 December, six Chadian soldiers of the African Union peacekeeping force were killed in the Gobongo neighbourhood of the capital. Sectarian violence continued to escalate, and Djotodia faced pressure from regional leaders and the international community due to his apparent inability to control the situation. President Djotodia and the Prime Minister Tiangaye both resigned at a summit held in N'Djamena on 10 January. On 20 January the Mayor of Bangui, Catherine Samba-Panza, was elected as interim president.

**Next Step:** The international community is warning of the possibility of genocide. Although genocide is unlikely, widespread violence, targeting of civilians based on sectarian grounds and crimes against humanity are a daily reality for CAR's population. The international community must act now before it is too late. Reconciliation between families, neighbours, churches, civil society members and politicians is vital before the situation deteriorates further. In addition to military intervention from the West and African Union, complementary bottom-up interventions are essential to support external actors.

Christian and Muslim religious leaders are key and must work together with their communities to foster reconciliation. The CAR crisis will not just finish with the resignation of Djotodia and the election of a new president. Instead, the contributing factors to the crisis have to be addressed, such as lack of good governance, poor leadership, ethnicity, Chadian interference in CAR's internal affairs, marginalization of certain communities and the predatory political class in Bangui. The CAR crisis needs to be addressed with a multi-dimensional solution, prioritizing local voices. Inflammatory statements and a misinterpretation of the root causes of the current violence will result not only in the wrong responses but could make the situation even worse.

## Are things changing inside the LRA?

A report entitled “Loosening Kony’s Grip: Effective Defection Strategies for Today’s LRA”, published by the US-based NGO Resolve in early July 2013, argued that the Ugandan combatants who make up the LRA’s officer ranks were growing increasingly disillusioned, creating an opportunity for defection campaigns to weaken the LRA. That LRA fighters were “increasingly disillusioned” was confirmed by sources close to the LRA. There are rumours that rebel leader Joseph Kony is severely ill and losing the will to fight. Sources also claim that Kony is willing to surrender on condition of being granted full amnesty. Though the reasons influencing each combatant’s decision to escape are unique and complex, below are some of the most consistent themes for why recent defectors have decided to break ranks with Kony.

**1) Military pressure** (or perception thereof): US-supported and Ugandan-led military operations by the AU against the LRA have drawn criticism since 2008 for a number of reasons, ranging from their failure to capture Kony to their weakness in protecting civilians from LRA reprisal attacks. However, these operations have made the day-to-day survival of many LRA groups – particularly those in CAR – difficult enough that many combatants want to give up and return home. Interestingly, one defector said he decided to escape after hearing that the AU was preparing counter-LRA military operations, demonstrating that even the perception of pressure can spark defections.

**2) Disillusionment with Kony’s promises:** Kony has long sought to distinguish the LRA from other rebel and bandit groups, holding

LRA members to strict standards of behaviour that have discouraged wealth accumulation and emphasized divinity and the ideological purity of the LRA’s mission to capture power in Uganda. However, with each day the LRA continues operating far from Uganda’s borders it becomes clearer that Kony has no viable strategy to take Kampala. Meanwhile, Kony has ordered LRA fighters to poach elephants and collect valuable ivory in northeastern Congo, some of which has been bartered with Sudanese military officers. These developments have sparked unprecedented disillusionment within the ranks of Ugandan LRA combatants, most of whom are already tired of the gruelling life in the bush.

**3) Kony’s harsh disciplinary measures:** LRA groups are scattered across a region of central Africa as large as France, often isolated from Kony. The strict discipline observed within the LRA has begun to weaken. Some officers have broken rules forbidding them from raping women or sleeping with abducted girls and women intended for Kony, while others have incurred Kony’s anger by complaining about the difficulty of life in the bush. Kony has reportedly reacted to such breaches in discipline by executing at least seven LRA officers and demoting several others in the past 18 months (including his half-brother David Olanya), sparking the defection of several others who feared for their own safety.

Though the numbers of defectors are on the increase and disillusionment is growing, reports from the CAR–DRC border indicate that some groups are still continuing their struggle. Kony’s front men Okot Odhiambo and Latufa are still abducting and killing scores in the region and have found sanctuary in the lawless borderlands of CAR, DRC and South Sudan indicating that the LRA is still a threat to stability in the region.

## Ethnic tensions thought to blame as 12 elite SPLA soldiers killed in clash

“If oil cannot mix with water, then how would you expect a Nuer to fight alongside a Dinka”. A statement made by a South Sudanese soldier as he tries to explain the perplexed situation regarding the Dinka and Nuer tribes in the SPLA. This tension recently came into play when an elite SPLA unit en route to battle in Juba was delayed due to a mechanical problem with one of their vehicles which forced it to make a pit stop. Unable to repair their vehicle in time, the unit spent the night at the junction of Mundri and Rumbek waiting for daylight to restart their journey. By morning 12 soldiers were dead and several more wounded. Subsequent events are contested.

**Version One:** In the deep of night one of the soldiers suffered a vivid nightmare, and suddenly woke screaming “fire, fire, fire!” The call to arms woke the rest of the unit who immediately went for their guns and started shooting assuming they were under attack. This is the official government report of an incident that happened in Mundri. **Version Two:** Sources close to this incident paint a different picture with claims of internal bickering between the Nuer and Dinka tribes within this particular troupe. Disagreements occurred between the two ethnic groups. As the argument became increasingly heated tempers flared; the guns did the talking.

*Continued on page 8...*

## Ethnic tensions and SPLA deaths ...continued from p.7

It is presumed that the arguments arose over going to Juba to defend the government of South Sudan.



*SPLA fighters*

Version two seems most likely. This incident, although small compared to other confrontations, sums up some of the current problems in South Sudan. The two main communities in this conflict, the Dinka and Nuer, have left a country of over 40 tribes in tatters. Petty disagreements around ethnicity and issues of marginalization and dominance have been a common bone of contention between Nuer and Dinka to the detriment of other communities and the South Sudanese population. Furthermore while the leaders of this latest onslaught enjoy tea and bread in Ethiopia in a bid to negotiate a way

forward, thousands of their people are suffering in IDP and refugee camps in South Sudan and neighbouring countries. The conditions in these camps are worse than basic and people are desperate for peace. Peace however seems to be an illusion since the war has evolved from what was first called a coup to inter-ethnic conflict within the security apparatus and government.

Each side fights for a false sense of belonging and identity and not their country. If the people of South Sudan are to attain some kind of lasting peace ethnic politics and the manipulation of identity must be brought to a close.

## Interview: VoP speaks to a local mayor about hopes for new CAR presidency

**Good morning Madam Mayor! How can you describe the security situation now prevailing in the CAR?**

It is extremely difficult and worrying. The international community, African Union, France, EU and regional bodies are doing everything to bring peace to CAR. I want also to take this opportunity to thank Madame Catherine Samba-Panza, transitional president elect, for agreeing to bring maternal contribution to restore peace in CAR.

**Madame Catherine Samba-Panza was the mayor of Bangui until becoming transitional President. What do you think of her election?**

I am extremely happy with the election of Madame Catherine as president of the transitional government. She was elected in the second round and there were also male candidates in the race but the nation through the members of parliament trusted Mme Catherine and she was elected. This is the first time in the history of CAR that a woman holds such a high position in the country. This gives me a lot of hope that where men have failed a woman can do better.

**Upon her election Madame Catherine launched an urgent appeal to anti-balaka and former Seleka to disarm. Do you think these two groups will disarm and live like brothers and sisters?**

Madame Catherine is the mother of children. She is the mother of anti-balaka and also the mother of former Seleka. With this call, Madame Catherine is in the middle of two brothers and sisters fighting. Really she is the mother of the nation and the mother of all Central

Africans. She is our mother. All competitors must disarm and live as brothers and sisters.

**Madame Catherine, in her address, wants to stop the suffering of the people, restore the security and authority of the state. Do you think she can succeed?**

Yes, Madame Catherine will succeed. She was mayor of Bangui for a long time, she has extensive experience in politics and she knows the dynamics of the country and the various challenges. She is well placed to restore peace. She is also popular with a range of Central Africans. So she has a good chance of making some improvements.

**Madam Mayor, our last question, what advice can you give to your people and all Central Africans?**

The advice I would give is an urgent call for all Central Africans. I call them all to a mutual love, forgiveness, understanding and to focus on peace, not unnecessary violence. I call all Central Africans to support Madame Catherine Samba-Panza and her transitional government. As mayor of a town of CAR I'm glad for the election of the mayor of Bangui my colleague. I wish her success in her work and in her new role. Long live the CAR!



## Editorial: Understanding and responding to the CAR crisis

The crisis in CAR is destroying the country. The mainly Muslim Seleka rebels have clashed with Christian militia, looting and pillaging as they go. Fighting has intensified over the last few months with atrocities committed by all parties. Inter-religious conflict is increasing, furthering inter-communal tensions that are erupting in violence. The UN has beefed up an African Union mission as well as authorising French unilateral military intervention with possible EU troops deploying soon as well. International responses have centred on calls of a potential genocide. However this approach misinterprets political dynamics in CAR which could have devastating implications if the wrong policy options are implemented. Framing the conflict in terms of genocide belies deeper historical, political and social issues that have led down a path of destruction.

Historical marginalisation of mainly Muslim communities in the North of CAR has created deep resentment and isolation within these groups. In addition these groups have more in common with Chadian groups in the borderland areas who share similar customs, history and culture. In part this is due to the arbitrary nature of colonial borders that split communities into two, but also the systematic neglect by the colonial and then consecutive post-colonial regimes.

These deep-rooted structural issues have affected the social fabric of Central African society, playing into the divide and rule strategies of the political elite. Coupled with endemic corruption, chronic under development, serious poverty and the almost total lack of infrastructure it is surprising that political violence of this magnitude has not erupted before, although armed groups have been active in peripheral areas for many years.

### Possible responses

Given that the current crisis in CAR is an extremely complicated issue with structural, local and regional issues at play, it is essential that international initiatives are well coordinated and rooted in the local context.

UN peacekeeping alone is unlikely to achieve a sustainable outcome. UN missions tend to be constituted by states with little, if any, knowledge of the local context. Most importantly, UN missions often lack the will to use force when necessary, a prerequisite for protecting civilians. African Union peacekeeping tends to be more effective in terms of proactive military action but also in addressing contextual and African-specific issues. However, AU missions are not without shortcomings.

AU peacekeeping tends to be driven by the national political priorities of the states sending troops. Chadian troops currently in CAR as part of the AU force are having a negative effect by favouring sectarian militia as part of their national interests. Rwandan troops that are being deployed to CAR should be more effective in terms of neutral and effective peacekeeping. The EU has agreed to deploy peacekeepers to support AU and French forces, which may bear some fruit as long as operations and activities are closely coordinated and elements working for regional interests rather than sustainable peace in CAR are rooted out.

Whatever the case, international military efforts must support, consult and be in tandem with Central African actors themselves. The interim President Catherine Samba-Panza could provide a new start for CAR by addressing government inaction on the crisis. International efforts must work closely with the presidency. Furthermore, Christian and Muslim religious leaders have been working together and setting an example of cross-faith dialogue and solidarity. It is voices like these that need to be at the front of reconciliation efforts in CAR if there is to be any resolution to the current crisis.

It is vital that Central Africans themselves play a role in ending the current crisis. Local voices, those that have their communities' support and respect, must lead efforts in conflict resolution, with military action in a supporting role. Two-dimensional initiatives imposed from outside may bring short-term respite but their prospects for bringing sustainable peace are slim.

Do you have information to share? Get in touch!

CAR:

[coordojupepec@gmail.com](mailto:coordojupepec@gmail.com)

DRC:

[ernestsugule@yahoo.fr](mailto:ernestsugule@yahoo.fr)

SOUTH SUDAN:

[Frkumbomark@yahoo.com](mailto:Frkumbomark@yahoo.com)

UGANDA:

[Arlpi.interfaith@gmail.com](mailto:Arlpi.interfaith@gmail.com)

LONDON:

[ktumutegyereize@c-r.org](mailto:ktumutegyereize@c-r.org)

Connect with  
us online:

[www.c-r.org/VOP](http://www.c-r.org/VOP)

#### About our network...

**SAIPED** – *Solidarité et Assistance Intégrale aux Personnes Démunies*, DRC

**CDJPR-ARU** – *Commission Diocésaine de Justice, Paix et Réconciliation*, DRC

**CR** – Conciliation Resources is an independent UK organisation working with people in conflict to prevent violence, and active on the LRA conflict since 1997.

**FAP** – *Femme Action Plus*/CAR



## Guest article: Gender training in Kampala

Gender is key to understanding how different men and women experience conflict in distinctive ways, writes *Sanne Tielemans, Conciliation Resources' Policy Analyst*. Alongside this, it is also central to understanding why many people still value military solutions over non-violence. To explore these issues, Conciliation Resources held a gender workshop in January, following a request from local partner organisations in LRA-affected areas.

Gender is not new for our partners. Most organisations that attended specifically focus on women's needs. The workshop facilitated a shared understanding of gender and its relevance to peacebuilding work, and helped inform partners' planning for 2014. Participants exchanged experiences and explored what more can be done, or done differently.

A prominent issue at the workshop was the work to support women returnees, who face different challenges to male returnees. Women returning to their communities are confronted with a variety of issues: their husband, family

or community may have difficulty accepting them. Poverty. Trauma. Often children born in captivity have no birth certificate and so are not able to enrol at school.

A gender-sensitive approach is also valuable in assessing the protection needs of LRA-affected communities. Women often raise different or additional concerns e.g. food security. However women tend not to be heard on discussions on protection. This is usually the remit of (religious) leaders – mostly men. At the workshop we also explored variations among women (and men) e.g. rural vs. city, age, etc.

We also discussed the dangers of stereotyping and of treating sexual violence solely as a women's issue, ignoring women's contributions to peace and conflict. Last but not least we talked about engaging or working with men on 'women's issues'. It is on these issues that CR and partners will carry out further activities.



SAIPED-RDC



FEMME ACTION PLUS

(FAP)