

Vulnerability Assessment of the Christians in the Central African Republic

Dennis Pastoor

World Watch Unit – Open Doors International

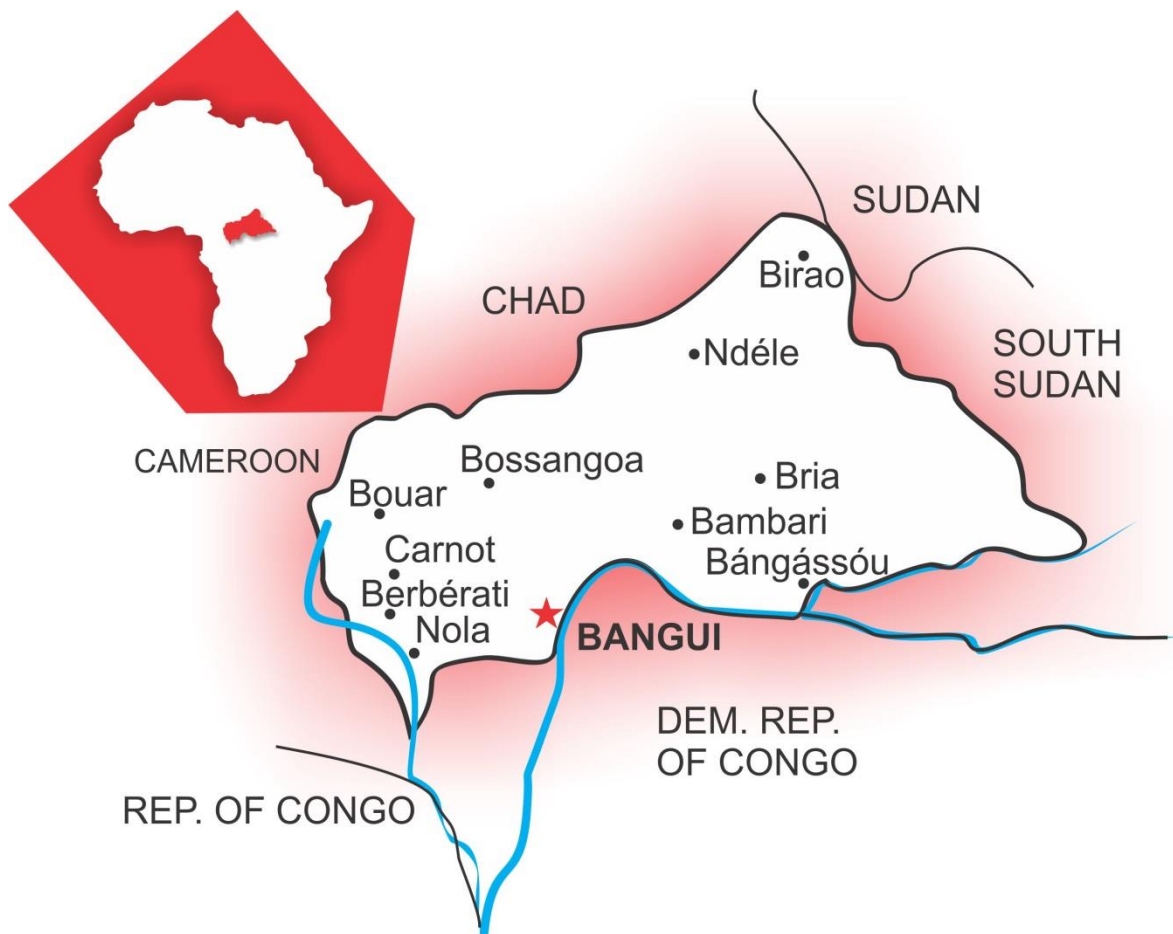


Table of Contents

I. Origins of the crisis in the Central African Republic.....	4
1.1 Brief description of the conflict.....	4
1.2 Socio-political origins.....	6
Situation of civil liberties and political rights	6
Rule of law and human rights situation	7
Political system.....	7
1.3 Main political forces in the country after the Séléka revolt.....	8
Main political actors	8
Main tensions or conflicts between government and opposition actors	9
Foreign influences	9
Role of the military	10
1.4 Social-economic origins.....	10
Economic development model.....	10
Social structure.....	11
Social-economic challenges.....	12
1.5 Main trends	12
II. Motivations and reasons behind the recent rebellion by the Séléka movement.....	14
2.1 Séléka: an organization with an Islamic agenda?.....	14
2.2 Restrictions of religious freedom under Séléka rule	17
Position on the World Watch List.....	17
Persecution engines	17
Elements of context.....	17
Types of Christianity affected.....	17
Spheres of life.....	18
Violence	18
Future outlook.....	18
III. Religious make-up of the Central African Republic.....	20
3.1 Present religions in the country	20
3.2 Religious spectrum of Islam	20
3.3 Religious spectrum of Christianity.....	20
3.4 Influence of religion in society	22
IV. Vulnerability Assessment of Christians in the Central African Republic.....	23
4.1 Environmental security, degradation and access to resources.....	23

4.2 Economic security and employment	23
4.3 Poverty and marginalisation.....	24
4.4 Political security.....	24
4.5 Vulnerability to conflict and warfare.....	25
4.6 Political repression	26
4.7 Personal security and vulnerability to violence	28
4.8 Hunger and food prices	29
4.9 Injury and disease; access to healthcare.....	30
V. Brief commentary on the true nature of the conflict in the Central African Republic	31
5.1 The main story: the vulnerability of Christians in the civil conflict in the Central African Republic	31
5.2 The secondary story: the fightings between the Self-Defence Forces (Anti-Balaka) and the Séléka Rebels.....	32
VI. Conclusions	33

I. Origins of the crisis in the Central African Republic¹



1.1 Brief description of the conflict²

In December 2012 the Seleka rebellion ('alliance' in local Sangho language) started conquering large parts of the Northeastern and Central parts of the Central African Republic. The ill-respect of a number of peace agreements by the Bozizé government with rebel movements from the Northeast finally led to the fall of the capital Bangui on March 24, 2013.

Bozizé was ousted, but the transitional government of rebel leader Djotodia was unable to provide security and stability in the country. The Seleka coalition fell apart and warlords with militia took control of every corner of the country. During the conquest and the transitional government's reign the Central African Republic turned into a failed state in which chaos and anarchy were paramount. Gross human right abuses on an immense scale were perpetrated by the rebels leaving the local population desperate.

¹ This section is partially based on a report by Margarita Dimova commissioned by the World Watch Unit of Open Doors International.

² This sub-section is the abstract from Arne Mulders' report on the roots of the present crisis in the Central African Republic.

Self-defence groups have recently been created by the local population to protect women, children and property, but every uprising has been severely suppressed by the rebels augmenting the dire fate of the local people. The Seleka rebel movement consists of about 90% Muslims and the local population is for about 80% Christian. Christians feel targeted as Muslims are spared in the atrocities; interreligious conflict is looming.

It is clear and evident that corruption and underdevelopment has led to discontent among large parts of the population and among Muslims especially. Policies that considered them as 'foreigners' in their own country, obstruction of their business interests etc. gave rise to the formation of (armed) opposition groups.

Combine this discontent with the deeply ingrained notion of what can be called 'traditional jihadist approach'³ in the mind of the Muslims in CAR and surrounding countries and one can see how the situation in CAR got out of hand. Local Muslim groups who invited their brothers from Sudan and Chad to gain political power, to subdue infidels and kaffirs (i.e. Christians) and loot as they like for their own benefit.

To limit our analysis of the situation to corruption, underdevelopment, political and social exclusion of some ethnic minority groups, who happen to be Muslim as well, does not do justice to the facts on the ground. Those 'brutal' facts are very much in line with what we have seen in neighbouring countries in recent times and over the centuries of Muslim presence in the region. There is a clear religious attitude and motivation to the conflict in CAR of which we yet have to see the end result.



³ The present day mindset of Muslims in sub-Saharan Africa has been shaped in centuries by the traditional jihadist perspective with its key notions of expansion through subjugation, the right to wage war on the unbeliever, and the racist /ethnic superior – inferior opposition. It can be seen in the Muslim Hausa/Fulani contrast with other tribes in Northern Nigeria. And since most of these tribes turned to the Christian faith through missionary enterprise, this contrast got strong Muslim-Christian religious overtones. It can also be seen in the Arab –black African contrast in the Sudan civil war. Here the Arabs were Muslim and the black Africans converted also to the Christian faith; so strong Muslim-Christian religious overtones emerged as well. In the Darfur genocide and the East-Chad near-genocide the Arab – black African contrast was paramount and the overtone with both sides Muslim was strongly racist. In the first Chad civil war the Northern Muslim – Southern Christian Sara contrast was important. The Christians in Chad still remember how they were mercilessly beaten by Muslims in their defeat. One can conclude that this legacy of the traditional jihadist perspective with strong Muslim-Christian religious overtones so prominent in the region is witnessed in the present crisis in CAR as Seleka members exempt Muslims in their gross human right abuses of the population

1.2 Socio-political origins

Situation of civil liberties and political rights

Since 2012, the Central African Republic (CAR) has appeared in news reports as one of the most troubled countries in Africa. CAR is the name of the former French colonial territory known as Ubangi-Shari, subjected primarily to exploitative colonialism. In 1960, Ubangi-Shari was decolonised and power transferred to a succession of military regimes. The volatile nature of CAR's post-colonial political system has caused substantial lagging in the establishment of basic civil liberties and political rights. Freedom House, the global watchdog monitoring political freedom, categorises CAR as a 'partly free' country with a score of 5⁴ for both civil liberties and political rights.⁵ Freedom House listed CAR among the nine countries that have marked a decline in their political freedom scores over the past year.

Civilian rule in CAR was short-lived – from 1993 until 2003, when a military coup overthrew President Ange-Félix Patassé's government. General François Bozizé, who led the coup, was later elected president in 2005 and re-elected in 2011. *De facto*, CAR is not an electoral democracy. The presidential office controls the parliament and judiciary.



Both of Bozizé's mandates were forcefully contested by various rebel groups, including the trans-boundary Lord's Resistance Army and other nebulous rebel groups from the North and neighbouring countries. At the end of 2012, Séléka⁶ initiated a violent process to oust Bozizé's government and seized the capital Bangui on March 24, 2013, together with most of CAR's provinces. Upon Bozizé's flight in March 2013, rebel leader Michel Djotodia suspended the constitution and inaugurated himself as president of the transitional government.⁷ This transfer of power is sixth in CAR's post-colonial history. Officially, the next round of elections is to be held in 17 months and is likely to bring about further turmoil.

⁴ Based on a system of 1 to 7, 7 being 'not free at all'.

⁵ Freedom House. 2013. *Freedom in the World 2013: Central African Republic* <<http://www.freedomhouse.org/country/central-african-republic>>

⁶ An alliance of Muslim rebel formations, its name signifying 'coalition' in Sangho.

⁷ Tendai Marima. 2013. 'New Big Man, Old Politics: The Challenging Road Ahead for CAR's Djotodia'. *Think Africa Press* <<http://thinkafricapress.com/central-african-republic/new-big-man-old-politics-challenging-road-ahead-CARs-djotodia>>

Rule of law and human rights situation

The Ibrahim Index of African Governance indicates a serious decline in CAR's ranks for safety and rule of law – from 39 (out of 100) in 2008 to 24.9 in 2012, even before the political turnover.⁸ CAR's current government led by Michel Djotodia is accused of having no control over the rebels who continue marauding.

Even before the Séléka insurgency, impunity in CAR was widespread. Extrajudicial executions, large-scale looting, as well as arbitrary amnesty granting and false imprisonment, were the norm. The police force lacks professionalism, resources and training, while the public prosecutor is far from independent.⁹ The severity of these socio-political malaises has increased substantially since Séléka seized power.

Apart from targeting civilians, Séléka combatants have been attacking officers from Forces Armées Centrafricaines (FACA) – CAR's national army. In one reported incident from April, eight FACA members' bodies were recuperated from the outskirts of Bangui.¹⁰

The high levels of impunity create ample grounds for the proliferation of all types of human rights abuses¹¹. A report, published in September 2013 by Human Rights Watch, qualifies and quantifies the types of violations, perpetrated mostly by members of Séléka, in Bangui and throughout the country. Among the human rights violations documented are the intentional killing of civilians and the razing of more than 1,000 homes resulting in an exacerbated IDP situation (400.000 IDPs and 1.6 million facing a lack of means of livelihood).¹²

Political system

The official institutional framework of the state is a presidential republic. Constitutionally, the president is head of state and government, which has its own executive leader – the prime minister. *De jure*, there exists separation of powers with both government and parliament having legislative power.¹³ CAR's history shows that more often than not government changes and transfers of power occur through violence and coercive negotiations. The last two presidents were installed as a result of a violent process. The current head of state, President Djotodia, dissolved CAR's constitution after the March 2013 coup d'état. Top-level political decisions are thus made in a lawless vacuum, offering minimal avenues for cooperation with external forces or civil society involvement.

⁸ Ibrahim Index for African Governance. 2013. 'Central African Republic 49th/52' <<http://www.moibrahimfoundation.org/central-african-republic/>>

⁹ Based on interview with an anonymous ICRC worker who focuses on civilian protection during complex emergencies, and worked in Bangui between June and August 2013.

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 13

¹¹ CAR has already experienced ICC involvement in its domestic judicial affairs due to the country's incapacitated judicial system. In 2004, local authorities contacted the Office of the Prosecutor (OTP) of ICC requesting investigation of crimes committed during political strife, which had remained unaddressed by the national judicial system. Upon assessment of the situation, the prosecutor initiated investigations on a number of crimes, including sexual violence, committed with impunity by different rebel groups.

¹² Human Rights Watch. 2013. "I Can Still Smell the Dead": The Forgotten Human Rights Crisis in the Central African Republic, p. 5 <<http://www.hrw.org/reports/2013/09/18/i-can-still-smell-dead-0>>

¹³ Central African Republic. 2004. *Constitution de la République Centrafricaine*, Titre III – Du pouvoir exécutif, Titre IV – Du pouvoir législatif.

As is noted in a background article in the Dutch newspaper *NRC*, “The Central African Republic has been a chronically unstable country from the start, with coups and mutinies outweighing elections in number. However, residents have never experienced violence on this scale. The French ran their colony which was rich with gold, diamond and uranium like a company. This fusion of state power and business interests created the precedent of the person in power having a licence to profit from the exploitation of raw materials.”¹⁴

1.3 Main political forces in the country after the Séléka revolt

Main political actors

The main actors on CAR’s political stage are political, military and rebel forces. Their interactions are entangled in a complex web of power struggles to set national agendas for regional development, put forward political leadership and gain access to mineral mining areas.

In September 2013, president Michel Djotodia officially disbanded Séléka and allegedly integrated former rebels into the national army.¹⁵ However, ex-Séléka rebels continue to conduct attacks on civilian population. As of December, conflict throughout the country persists – in Bangui, as well as Bouca and Garga in the northwest, and Mbaiki in the southwest.

The country’s political environment of distrust, splintering and mutiny in the higher echelons of power has prematurely terminated each and every of its leaders’ ambitions. A month after his self-proclaimed inauguration, Djotodia succumbed to pressures from regional leaders to create a *pro forma* authority – a transitional council – that had to formally name him interim president. No foreign political leaders have officially recognised Djotodia’s government, but France has committed to sending troops in case of continued violence.

¹⁴ Koert Lindijer, “Raw hatred is given free rein”, *NRC Handelsblad*, 07/12/2013, <<http://www.nrc.nl/nieuws/2013/12/01/raw-hatred-is-given-free-rein-in-central-african-republic/>>.

¹⁵ BBC. 2013. ‘Central African Republic clashes: ‘Thousands flee villages’, 16 October <<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-24550561>>

Main tensions or conflicts between government and opposition actors



President Djotodia comes from the northeastern part of CAR, where most of the country's Muslim minority live. He is the first Muslim president of the largely Christian nation-state and as such is likely to continue promoting the interests of his religious group and his smaller ethnic one – the Gula people. Djotodia has to align his decisions with the former Séléka rebels' demands, especially in terms of providing compensation for their continued support.

It remains unclear how and if rebel disarmament was actually carried out and what proportion of the combatants were transferred to national armed forces. Séléka's continued attacks indicate incomplete disbandment and a certain lack of leadership coordination.

Foreign influences

As a former French colony, CAR has had continued French involvement both in its independent development and its crises. It was with France's backing that Bokassa initially came to power – proof that the former colonial metropole still has some discretion in approving CAR's political leaders. Djotodia has already officially sought assistance from France and the EU in stabilising the country.¹⁶ On 14 October, French President François Hollande announced plans for increased military presence in CAR due to the deepening of the conflict.¹⁷ This is not France's first intervention in the country's affairs – former President Bozizé was defended from northern rebels' attacks by French troops in 2006. Currently, the French military, following a United Nations agreement, is intervening in the CAR to halt the the continuation of lawlessness and anarchy.

The US, in particular, is reluctant to support France with direct involvement but encouraged prompt deployment of the African Union-led International Support Mission in the Central African Republic (AFISM-CAR), recommending bilateral cooperation.¹⁸ In September, the AU demanded more assistance from the international community in resolving the crisis. Its

¹⁶ Al Jazeera. 2013. 'CAR rebel leader to review mining deals', 29 March
<<http://www.aljazeera.com/news/africa/2013/03/2013329224619165732.html>>

¹⁷ Reuters. 2013. 'France to boost troops in Central African Republic as crisis deepens', *The Guardian*, 16 October <<http://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2013/oct/16/france-boost-troops-central-african-republic>>

¹⁸ Jacqueline Burns. 2013. 'Statement & Questions by the United States of America', Human Rights Council 24th Session, Geneva, 25 September.

1,100-strong troops, part of the MICOPAX mission, are mostly funded by the EU.¹⁹ The Economic Community of Central African States (CEEAC) is also looking for funds to expand its current military presence in CAR, which is a member state. Uganda has had previous security involvement in the country in an attempt to contain Joseph Kony's LRA, but that initiative was also channelled through CEEAC mandate.

In terms of economic influence, Chinese and South African firms have vested interests, having been granted licences to conduct gold, diamonds, oil and uranium exploration. While resource exploration might appear secondary to solving CAR's current humanitarian emergency, in future foreign influence is likely to be dictated by mining trends. CAR is rich in mineral resources, but due to instability little exploration has been carried out so far.

Role of the military

Numerous reports point out the inadequacy and unprofessionalism of the Forces Armées Centrafricaines (FACA). In the past, the military had a more important role in the political life of the country, carrying out mutinies and coups that resulted in regime change. While military leaders have often become heads of state or government in CAR,²⁰ the current influence of its national army is severely diminished by the integration of Séléka rebels, who are said to have overrun it. The military is incapable of containing violence, as the deadly clashes between rebels and civilians in the Northwest on October 8 demonstrated.²¹

1.4 Social-economic origins

Economic development model

As a result of decades of political instability, a landlocked geographical position, and prevalence of subsistence agriculture, CAR is one of the world's least development countries. Based on GDP growth, however, the country is performing reasonably well – 4 per cent in 2012.²² Still, in its 2013 Human Development report, the UN Development Programme (UNDP) places CAR in the 'low human development' category, ranking it 180th out of 187 countries included in the study.²³

The CAR economic development model is based on subsistence agriculture, limited forestry and mining. The agricultural sector is responsible for over 50 per cent of GDP, while diamonds, timber and cotton are the most exported goods. Despite these exports, the current

¹⁹ AFP. 2013. 'AU urges international community to do more in C. Africa', 20 September <<http://news.yahoo.com/au-urges-international-community-more-c-africa-132646013.html>>

²⁰ Please refer to 1c.

²¹ Associated Press. 2013. 'Army: Central African Republic Clashes Kills 30', *Time*, 8 October <<http://world.time.com/2013/10/08/army-central-african-republic-clashes-kills-30/>>

²² World Bank. 2013. 'Data: Central African Republic' <<http://data.worldbank.org/country/central-african-republic>>

²³ UNDP. 2013. 'Central African Republic. Human Development Report 2013. The Rise of the South: Human Progress in a Diverse World' <<http://hdrstats.undp.org/images/explanations/CAF.pdf>>

account of the country has almost doubled since 2007 to reach -\$180 million.²⁴ The IMF has been involved in budget reforms since 2009, but little tangible improvement has been achieved even though CAR was given full IMF and World Bank debt relief.²⁵ With low levels of development and a track record of inadequate budget management, the country is heavily reliant on overseas development aid and does not have much capacity for unassisted economic development. In 2011, for example, CAR received aid amounting to 10.5 per cent of its gross national income.²⁶ Mismanagement of funds is closely linked to CAR's shifting political leadership and inequalities in access to resources are exacerbated by patrimonial networks operating within the government.

Social structure

CAR has a diverse set of ethnic and religious groups within its territory. Linguistically, most of the population belongs to the Ubangi group. The numerous members of the Banda group reside in the southern and central parts of the country, while the northeastern region is home to peoples of Nilotic origin as well as two indigenous non-Muslim sultanates. A small population of various Pygmy groups inhabit the southern and western parts of CAR, while the North is home to various nomadic pastoralists.²⁷ The national language – Sangho, which is an African-based Patois – is widely spoken and has had some contribution towards mitigating the polarisation of ethnic differences.²⁸ In formal political life, references to ethnic belonging have been deemed unacceptable, but informal association along ethnic lines persists. The social fabric of the CAR, however, is deeply damaged by enduring conflict and gives rise to high levels of mistrust even within homogenous communities. Although ethnic differences have had increased salience when used by colonial powers and post-colonial leadership, it is religious differences that are now increasingly coming to the fore as causes for tangible rifts in CAR society.

Another important cleavage in the country's social life derives from its citizens' residence – urban populations are perceived across the board as socio-economically superior to provincial²⁹ ones. This tension accentuates the 'distance' of the centralised CAR state from the majority of its peoples – over 60 per cent of whom live in the periphery.³⁰

Although primary education enrolment has been quite high (over 90 per cent) over the past decade, little emphasis at the policy-making level has been made to modernise the education system. Due to the re-ignition of conflict in 2012, 70 per cent of primary school students did

²⁴ Macro Economy Meter. 2013. 'Central African Republic' <<http://mecometer.com/whats/central-african-republic/current-account-balance-total/>>

²⁵ Central Intelligence Agency. 2013. 'The World Factbook: Central African Republic' <<https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ct.html>>

²⁶ Global Humanitarian Assistance. 2013. 'Central African Republic' <<http://www.globalhumanitarianassistance.org/countryprofile/central-african-republic>>

²⁷ Reliefweb. 2007. 'Central African Republic: Major ethnic groups in CAR (as of 2007)' <<http://reliefweb.int/map/central-african-republic/central-african-republic-major-ethnic-groups-car-2007>>

²⁸ Charles Henry Morrill. 1997. *Language, culture, and society in the Central African Republic: the emergence and development of Sango*, Doctoral dissertation, Indiana University.

²⁹ The idea of 'peasant' or 'provincial' identity, tied to capacity for social mobility, appears to be rather strong in CAR.

³⁰ Bierschenk and de Sardan. 1997. 'Local Powers and a Distant State in Rural Central African Republic', p. 444.

not return to school, mostly out of ‘fear of violence’.³¹ A report published by UNICEF in September points out that more than half of the schools in the country have been destroyed during the crisis.³² For the majority of CAR’s children and especially girls, access even to primary education is now problematic.

The northern part of CAR has an indigenous Muslim population dating back centuries. This was however a very small segment of the population of CAR at independence (1960). Increased desertification and the rich natural resources of CAR have resulted in a large immigration of Muslims from mainly southern Chad and Sudan in the last decades. As the majority of these Muslims have been entering the country throughout the years as foreigners, the Central African government has not been favorable to give them identity and birth papers. The parallel with Ivory Coast is coming up where Muslims from northern regions and foreign descent were not accepted as citizens.

Social-economic challenges

The biggest socio-economic challenge of CAR are the millions of people who are in urgent need of food, protection, health care and other life-saving services.³³ While political leaders are busy securing their mandate in government, most of the population, especially outside Bangui, does not have access to basic services that can later guarantee a minimal level of individual and national socio-economic sustainability.

In the longer-run crucial physical infrastructure investment is vital to reviving an economy in deep decline and crisis. Such investment will be difficult to secure in a context that is considered highly unfavourable. CAR is ranked 183rd out of 185 countries in terms of ‘ease of doing business’, with a -2 change in rank from 2012 to 2013 – CAR is among the countries where doing business is most difficult.³⁴ The legitimacy of CAR’s volatile government is likely to have a negative impact on foreign donors’ preparedness to provide post-conflict recovery and development aid.

1.5 Main trends

- CAR’s government and population are faced with an active, unruly rebel organisation that operates with impunity throughout the country. Séléka’s cadres are likely to continue recruitment, making the rebel forces more difficult to defeat. CAR is facing spiralling violence, retaliation from rural, ethnic and religious communities that oppose Séléka, as well as continued looting from bandits and disenfranchised youth. The restoration of order is of utmost importance in addressing the current violence trends in CAR.

³¹ UNICEF. 2013. ‘A step back: The impact of the recent crisis on education in Central African Republic’, Joint education assessment <<http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/EC%20CAR%20-%20Impact%20crisis%20on%20education%20-%20Evaluation%20Report%20EN.pdf>>

³² Ibid.

³³ Lisa Schlein. 2013. ‘Central African Republic: Chaos Prevents Life-Saving Aid From Reaching Needy’, *Voice of America*, 18 October <<http://allafrica.com/stories/201310190241.html>>

³⁴ Doing Business. 2013. ‘Ease of Doing Business in Central African Republic’ <<http://www.doingbusiness.org/data/exploreeconomies/central-african-republic>>

- International involvement appears inevitable. A UN resolution on CAR has just been adopted and a foreign peacekeeping intervention will potentially reshuffle power alignments. The restoration of peace and normalisation of political affairs will take time and CAR will suffer a compromise in its sovereignty and potentially – a new wave of post-colonial French paternalism. President Djotodia will seek international and domestic allies in his attempts at ensuring political survival.
- Low literacy rates, combined with ubiquitous unemployment, make youth easy targets for all types of (Islamic) militant discourse and co-optation, particularly in the northern parts of the country.
- The economy came to a standstill. Séléka is stealing the natural resources at a large scale with Chadian complicity. The economic decline that has gripped the underdeveloped country creates a highly unfavourable climate for foreign direct investment, which has the potential to resuscitate the economy. A workforce that is traumatised by conflict and lack of access to education and training will be more dependent on external assistance than ever.
- Killing, looting and raping occur at an unseen scale, leading many commentators to speak of genocide. Beyond the scale of the violence, normalisation of violence is a huge challenge. The psycho-social effects of protracted conflict on the population produce difficulties in establishing a national consciousness and consolidating stateness. Moreover, internally displaced people (IDPs) are said to constitute 10 per cent of CAR's population and might rise if security remains absent
- Reconstruction and restoration of state-provided services will be challenging even in the middle term (Séléka destroyed all basic municipal birth administration files), unless substantial financial commitments are made by the international community. A trend of reluctance to provide extensive aid exists, and CAR's IDP population, alongside with other vulnerable groups, is likely to be impacted the most by it. Subsistence livelihoods have been disrupted and for a large section of the population a return to regular economic activities will take more than a few years.

II. Motivations and reasons behind the recent rebellion by the Séléka movement³⁵

2.1 Séléka: an organization with an Islamic agenda?

The June 2013 report by the **International Crisis Group** about the Central African Republic³⁶, though informative, completely overlooks the religious dimension of the conflict in that country. Indeed, the characterization of the conflict in CAR as a classic struggle between an authoritarian and incompetent political leader (the now ousted President Bozizé) and Séléka (simply described as “a heterogeneous consortium of malcontents [with the regime]”) excludes any religious motivation and ignores the high number of religious casualties that were caused by the conflict.

In the executive summary, a single reference is made to “tensions between Christians and Muslims” (as a factor that fragilizes Séléka)³⁷, but nowhere in the 51 page report it is explained what these tensions consist of. The report does note, however, that Séléka’s leadership includes “many people from Vakaga and Bamingui Bangoran, **two Muslim-majority regions** of the north east.” Moreover, the report states that neighboring countries are “[concerned] about the rise of **religious fundamentalism** [in CAR].” Finally, the report describes that “much like in the provinces, the 3,000-5,000 combatants that entered the capital looted private companies, NGOs, public buildings and **religious establishments**” (p.18).

These findings are not explained by the report, nor are they considered as relevant elements to interpret the nature of the conflict. In fact, the report does not establish any relation between the latent religious tensions in the country, the strong Muslim presence within Séléka’s leadership and the high number of violent incidents targeting Christians.

In our opinion, the Crisis Group is wrong to equate Séléka as a mere coalition of groups dissatisfied with the regime, to say the least. Indeed, there are sufficient indicators that hint at the fact that Séléka has, at least in part, an Islamist agenda.

Firstly, it is essential to recognize that **Séléka’s composition is predominantly Muslim**. Although President Djotodia officially dissolved Séléka, it is worth noting that the formation was comprised of a number of other rebel groups that continue functioning. The main actors and groups belonging to Séléka are categorised and briefly described in the following table.³⁸

³⁵ This section is partially based on a report by Stella Okoronkwo commissioned by the World Watch Unit of Open Doors International.

³⁶ International Crisis Group, *Central African Republic: Priorities of the Transition*, Africa Report No203, 11 June 2013, <<http://www.crisisgroup.org/~media/Files/africa/central-africa/central-african-republic/203-central-african-republic-priorities-of-the-transition.pdf>>

³⁷ The September 2013 Human Rights Watch report “*I Can Still Smell the Dead.*” *The Forgotten Human Rights Crisis in the Central African Republic* also mentions Christians just once.

³⁸ The table presents synthesis of data, extracted from the CrisisWatch Database <<http://www.crisisgroup.org/en/publication-type/crisiswatch/crisiswatch-database.aspx?CountryIDs=%7B09F69924-3E63-461D-96FE-A0B25D54EFEB%7D>> and Janine Graf. 2011. ‘Conflict analysis – Central African Republic’, monograph, University of Kent.

Actor	Interests	Tensions	Cooperation	Main influence
President Michel Djotodia	Representing Muslim Northeast and establishing authority as first leader from that region	International community, former president Bozizé, to an extent - Prime Minister Nicolas Tiangaye	Séléka, previously Bozizé; no reports of confrontation or cooperation with parliament	Within ministerial cabinet, comprised of several family members; Séléka partially
Prime Minister Nicolas Tiangaye	Legitimising political authority, mostly among foreign donors	Djotodia and Séléka	International community, UN, AU	Diplomatic circles
Forces armées centrafricaines (FACA) [<i>Central African Armed Forces</i>]	Fluctuating, heterogeneous and opportunistic due to low morale and lack of professional training	--	Under Djotodia's command; alleged incorporation of Séléka rebels (arguable)	Minimal
Séléka – rebel coalition, comprised of FDCP, CPJP, UFDR (see below)	Heterogeneous and opportunistic; voicing grievances of peripheral areas populations i.e. political marginalisation, underdevelopment, insecurity	Supporters of former president Bozizé, self-defence groups, ethnic Gbaya communities, Séléka splinters, counter militias	President Djotodia, LRA	Nation-wide due to excessive and unpunished use of force
Popular Army for the Restoration of the Republic and Democracy (APRD)	Representing Muslim Northwest		Former presidents Bozizé and Patassé; Sara-Kaba ethnic group;	
Union of Democratic Forces for Unity (UFDR)	Representing Muslim Northeast and Gula ethnic group; diamond mining	Kara ethnic group	Former president Bozizé	
Democratic Front of the Central African People (FDPC)	Representing Muslim Northeast	Kara ethnic group, APRD, FACA	Gula ethnic group	
Convention of Patriots for Justice and Peace (CPJP)	Muslim Northeast; diamond mining	Gula ethnic group	Runga ethnic group	

The Bangui Declaration, issued and signed by CAR's most prominent Christian leaders on 6 October 2013, describes recent events in the country "of a jihadist nature" and Séléka as a coalition "90% consisting of Muslim extremists from Chad and Sudan."³⁹ The same declaration also notes: "The participation of foreigners in the Séléka, specifically Chadian and Sudanese mercenaries speaking only Arabic, must be noted." The declaration concludes

³⁹ Bangui Declaration, 6 October 2013.

warning once more that the country is “falling into the hands of extremists and religious fanatics.”

A similar interpretation of the composition of Séléka is also given by an article in *Le Démocrate*, a local Central African newspaper. In the article, the author stresses **a)** that 95% of the Séléka rebels are Muslims, and **b)** that only 10% of the Séléka rebels are actually Central African citizens⁴⁰.

Secondly, **there are writings of Séléka leaders that also hint at its Islamic agenda.** In an April 17, 2012 letter addressed to the Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC), Djotodia had requested support to institute the Sharia law though he denies writing it. In this letter, he is quoted to have said “Even if we fail to hunt Bozize, we will transform a part of the Central African Republic, Chad and Darfur into a new Islamic Republic.”

Djotodia also claims to have the support of Muslims in Sudan’s Darfur region and Chad. “After our victory, we will also help them take power in Chad,” he wrote. “We need your support, brothers. It should help us in material, money and homes. We agree that your people come to fight on our side.”

Another letter written in 2006 by Djotodia addressed to the Islamic Community of Central Africa also “openly expresses a desire to establish an Islamic state.”⁴¹ The intentions of Séléka to establish an Islamic regime are confirmed by a testimony by Jean-Bertin Dangbi, a CAR Church leader who sent a letter to Open Doors: “this regime should be an Islamic regime because all political and military leaders of the Séléka rebellion are fundamentalist Muslims from Chad and Sudan.”

It is also important to acknowledge **the complicity that exists between Séléka and a part of the Muslim minority in CAR.** Catholic Herald quotes the Catholic bishops, who previously have been involved in an interreligious platform with other Christian and Muslim leaders, warning that inter-religious unity had been “harshly tested by the deplorable complicity shown by some Muslims toward atrocities by Séléka fighters, who continued to kill, rape, pillage and ransack with impunity.”⁴² That same inter-religious platform has issued statements warning for “the nightmare of ethnic or religious war.” The Bangui Declaration also refers to attacks of Muslims civilians against Christians.

⁴⁰ « Bohong ville fantôme. Zéré, Benzambé ville fantôme, Bouca ville fantôme. Bientôt Batangafo ville fantôme. », *Le Démocrate*, No 3017, 17 September 2013.

⁴¹ Bangui Declaration, 6 October 2013.

⁴² Catholic Herald, “Attacks on Christians in Central African Republic must stop, says priest”, Catholic Herald, John Luxmoore, 15 August 2013, <<http://www.catholicherald.co.uk/news/2013/08/15/attacks-on-christians-in-central-african-republic-must-stop-says-priest/>>

2.2 Restrictions of religious freedom under Séléka rule

Position on the World Watch List

The Central African Republic (CAR) enters the World Watch List in 2014⁴³ for the first time with 67 points. The high score of the country can be explained almost exclusively by the high degree of violence against Christians caused by the rebellion of the Séléka movement.

Persecution engines

The main persecution engine in the Central African Republic is **Islamic extremism**. The internal revolution which saw the victory of Séléka, a coalition of rebels dissatisfied with the regime, and the ouster of President François Bozizé, is responsible for the high degree of pressure and violence against Christians. The Séléka movement, with no openly Islamist agenda but composed in majority of (foreign) Muslims, has ravaged the country, specifically targeting Christian properties (houses and churches) and government buildings.

Elements of context

Rebel groups and Muslims from Chad and Sudan joined forces to form a militant coalition called Séléka, which took the capital of Central Africa Republic, Bangui, on March 24 2013 and sent President François Bozizé into exile in Cameroon after a three-month uprising. The trigger of the uprising was the discontent with the authoritarian and incompetent President Bozizé. However, the high number of religious casualties that were caused by the conflict seems to indicate that Séléka has, at least in part, an Islamic agenda.

Christians are presently associated with what in the secular press has been termed an interfaith conflict. The majority of the Christians and their leaders however distance themselves fiercely from this. After months of violence by the Muslim dominated Séléka self-defence groups have emerged that sometimes also attack Muslims in unjustified revenge. Since the outbreak of the rebellion by the Séléka coalition predominantly composed of Muslims from CAR associated with Chadian and Sudanese mercenaries, these mercenaries only attacked Christians and non-Muslims. The desecration of Christian churches and the violence towards Christians (rape, robbery, kidnapping, torture, murder, etc.) are evidence of this.

Types of Christianity affected

The Christian population – all types of Christianity – is the most vulnerable group in the current crisis in CAR. The Catholic Church is the largest church in the country with the widest network of churches, clinics and schools. Reports state that many churches, schools and clinics have been completely looted of cars, computers and anything of any value. Any church and property belonging to ordinary Christians is a target for Séléka.

Persistent lack of political consensus and incessant violent confrontations, however, are likely to delay the establishment of such a legitimate entity that can ensure the rule of law. In the

⁴³ Publicly available on www.worldwatchlist.us and on other Open Doors websites.

meantime, sectarian violence is disproportionately affecting Christian communities that are targeted by the Muslim-led Séléka rebel group.

It is important to highlight the main tensions that exist between the country's core (Bangui and Southern provinces, Christian populations) and periphery (Northeast and Northwest, Muslim populations). Similar persecution dynamics have been observed in a number of other African countries: from Mali, through Cameroon, to Sudan/South Sudan. In CAR's case, further tensions exist among ethnic groups in the North, who sponsor and support their own rebel fractions. The staying power of the currently influential Séléka might be questionable, but its determination to target populations from the above-mentioned 'core' is undeniable.

Spheres of life

For a Christian majority country such as CAR, the degree of pressure on Christians is surprising. Due to the uprising, the freedom of Christians is restricted heavily throughout all spheres of life, though to a lesser extent in the private and family spheres. It's the community, national and church sphere that are currently under most pressure.

Violence

The levels of violence in CAR are unprecedented. In fact, CAR receives the highest possible score as far as physical violence is concerned. This score includes the killing of at least 13 pastors, and the rape of many women.

A report, published in September by Human Rights Watch, documents many types of horrendous violent acts perpetrated by members of Séléka, which primarily targets non-Muslims. According to Human Rights Watch, rebel fighters have been evicting and looting Christian rural populations. There are reports that such actions aim to 'create space' for certain nomadic communities and their cattle. Other incidents have been documented in Bangui, most notably government officials gunning down Christian vigilante defence groups (in the Bouar area in September 2013). Other human rights violations that Christians have been victims of include the intentional killing of civilians and the razing of more than 1,000 homes, resulting in an exacerbated IDP situation (400.000 IDPs and 1 million facing a lack of means of livelihood) and further marginalisation of already vulnerable communities.

Future outlook

Unless the international community with help of the African Union provides a large enough PKO, religious tensions might continue to grow. Safety, security and rule of law must urgently be restored. If that remains absent for a prolonged period, people will arm themselves for protection against the ongoing looting, rape and killing of Christians by Séléka. Groups of armed civilians could easily get involved in retaliation killings between vigilant groups vs. local disorganized remnants of the Séléka movement and local Muslims. The first of this type of conflict has already erupted in Bossangoa and Bangui, and might spread to other areas of the country. It is not unlikely that Muslims, who are in the minority in many towns and villages, will bear the brunt of this eruption.

Increasing violence could lead to foreign intervention that will expand the parameters of the conflict and introduce a host of conditionalities for the political leadership of CAR. In search of international recognition, President Djotodia will strive to re-establish the democratic electoral process, but he will have to juggle between the rule of law, democratization, and rebel or military interests. Given his call for support from the Organization of the Islamic Conference and being from the North himself is likely going to lead to favoritism of Muslims, causing further societal fragmentation and possibly – new waves of instability.

III. Religious make-up of the Central African Republic

3.1 Present religions in the country

Religion	Proportion ⁴⁴	Numbers ⁴⁵
Roman Catholic		1.386.000
Independent		824.000
Protestant		679.000
Christians (total)	76,37%	
Muslim	13%	
Traditional religions	10%	
Other	<1%	

It is worth pointing out that indigenous beliefs still dominate the religious composition of CAR's population and are often incorporated in the practices of Christian and Muslim populations.

3.2 Religious spectrum of Islam

Muslim communities have comprised a minority religious group in CAR since colonial times. There are accounts of Muslim-led slave-trading activity penetrating the country's North from Chad in the late 19th century.⁴⁶ Until recently, CAR's multi-religious society did not experience substantial tensions.

The current crisis is the first time that violence is mobilised along religious lines with Muslim groups instigating violent action. The main grievance expressed by the spokesman of Séléka is longstanding neglect and marginalisation of the predominantly Muslim regions in the North. Séléka spokesman Guy Simplicie Kodégué stressed that 'the international community [should] intervene quickly to re-establish security', drawing parallels with the situation in Mali.⁴⁷ At the same time, President Djotodia, who is also Muslim, insists that he is to defend the secularity of the state and the interests of its entire population.

3.3 Religious spectrum of Christianity

Christianity is dominant in CAR introduced by French colonisers as an imperial religion. As such, it was re-appropriated by the population of the country through a process of hybridisation with their pre-existing animist beliefs.⁴⁸ Christianity was the religion of choice for many due to its close association with powerful and respected colonial officials. Missionary groups currently operating in CAR include Baptists, Lutherans and Jehovah's

⁴⁴ Operation World.

⁴⁵ World Christian Database.

⁴⁶ Nehemia Levtzion and Randall Pouwels (eds). 2000. *History Of Islam In Africa*. Ohio University Press: Athens, OH, p. 127.

⁴⁷ Gabe Joselow. 2013. 'Central African Republic: Crisis Opens Rift Between Muslims, Christians', *Voice of America*, 11 September <<http://allafrica.com/stories/201309120514.html?page=2>>

⁴⁸ Jacqueline Cassandra Woodfork. 2006. *Culture and Customs of the Central African Republic*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press. p.35

Witnesses. Most of the country's leaders so far have been Christians, without expressing any religious domination aspirations.

According to Sudan Inland Mission (SIM), "the Roman Catholic Church began work in Oubangui-Chari, a French colonial territory, in 1894. It has expanded into a thriving work that today comprises five dioceses under an African archbishop. Protestant work began in January 1921, when Baptist Mid-Missions personnel arrived in Rafia to work among the Azande people. That same year, the Grace Brethren International Mission began its own work, followed by the Lutherans, then Swedish Baptists and Swiss Pentecostals."⁴⁹ SIM also mentions there was a mass movement towards Christianity beginning in the 1960s and 1970s. Around eighty percent of the inhabitants of CAR consider themselves "Christian."

The World Christian Database reads: "Catholic missionaries arrived in the capital city of Bangui in 1894. In 1920, Baptist missionaries from the mission organization Baptist Mid-Missions began work among the Azande. At this point, they are working in twelve different locations with the Banda, Mandja, and Nzakara. The Church of the Brethren mission came in 1921. Pentecostals from Sweden and Switzerland as well as Lutheran missionaries came in 1923. In 1956, some of the Mandja left the Baptist Mid-Mission church and formed their own independent church which they called Comite Baptist. In 1960, some of the Banda left the Church of the Brethren to form Eglise Centrafricaine. There have also been different indigenous churches started by immigrants from other African countries. Many Christian adherents were drawn to Pentecostal churches during a country wide Renewal movement in the 1990's."⁵⁰

Next to the nine Catholic dioceses in the CAR, the country is home to the following Protestant denominations⁵¹:

- *Association des Eglises Baptist Ev Centrafricaines*-This association was started as a result of a schism in 1973. There are 150 congregations with 37,500 congregants in all.
- *Baptist Committee*-This group started as a schism in 1956 when some of the Mandja left the Baptist Mid-Mission church. There are five congregations and a total of 3,000 members in all.
- *Baptist Churches of West Central African Republic*-This Church was started in 1923 by a mission group from Sweden called the Orebro Mission. The Orebro Mission of Sweden joined with the Holiness Baptists, a Pentecostal group, to form a body called InterAct in 1997. There are 712 congregations and a total of 95,400 members in all. Ninety percent of the members are from the Baya people group. Ten percent of the members are from the Mpimo people group.
- *Baptist Churches of the Central African Republic*-This group of churches was founded in 1920 by the Baptist Mid-Missions group from the U.S. There are 118 congregations and 100,000 members. Seventy percent of the members are from the Banda people group while twenty percent are from the Mandja people.
- *Central African Evangelical Cooperation*-This African Independent Pentecostal church was started in 1956. There are 288 congregations and 54,900 members in all. This started as a mission of the Worldwide Evangelical Commission which is based in Switzerland.
- *Central African Church*-This church was started in 1960 by a Banda pastor at Bouca. There was one church with 100 members. This church is dying.
- *Central African Evangelical Church*-This Protestant Evangelical church was started by the AIM mission from the U.S. in 1924. There are 267 congregations and a total of 40,000 members. Ninety percent of the members are from the Zande people while three percent are from the Kare people. Also, Sudanese refugees attend services.

⁴⁹ Central African Republic Country Profile, Sudan Inland Mission, <<http://www.sim.org/index.php/country/CF>>.

⁵⁰ Information retrieved from the Missionary Atlas Project, <http://worldmap.org/country.php?ROG3=CT&QryHead=Christian%20Religion&QryFld=CP_Religion_Christian>

⁵¹ Idem.

- *Eglise Evangelique des Freres*-This church was started in 1921. There are 610 congregations and 290,000 members. Seventy percent of the members are from the Baya people while twenty percent are from the Mandja people. Another ten percent are from the Karre people.
- *Evangelical Lutheran Church of the Central African Republic*-This church was started in 1923. There are 215 churches and 22,000 members in all. Ninety-nine percent of the members are Baya.
- *Evangelical Mission*-The Central African Pioneer Mission began this church in 1937. Its headquarters are in Carnot. There are fifty churches and 6,000 members in all.
- *Evangelical Revival Church*-This church was founded around 1960 as a mission of the Swiss Pentecostal Mission. There are fifty congregations and a total of 5,000 members.
- *Protestant Church of King Christ*-This church is largely made of expatriates. There are two congregations and 700 members in all.
- *Seventh Day Adventists*-This church was started as a mission of the Seventh Day Adventists in 1960. There are forty churches and a total of 4,180 members in all. Sixty percent of the members are from the Mbougou people, and fifteen percent are from the Baguiro people. Another fifteen percent are from the Baya people.
- *Union des Eglises Ev Elim*-This church was started by the Swiss Pentecostal Mission in 1927. There are 400 churches and 70,300 members. Its headquarters are in Alindao. Ninety-nine percent of the members are from the Banda people.
- *Union Federation Eglise Baptiste*-This church began as a schism group from the CAR Baptist Churches in 1978. There are 141 churches and 22,500 members.

3.4 Influence of religion in society

Constitutionally, CAR is a secular state, but in the past autocratic rulers have relied on support from religious organisations – mostly churches.⁵² According to the US Department of State's International Religious Freedom Reports, government favouritism of religion in the country has been low over the past decade.⁵³ Fundamentalist and witchcraft practices, however, are considered a criminal offense. The Ministry of Territorial Administration, with which all religious groups have to register, can use legal measures in refusing registration to groups that are considered nefarious to social cohesion, political order or public morality.

There are numerous missionary-led education initiatives throughout the country. At the same time, humanitarian assistance, delivered by faith-based organisations, has an important role to play in alleviating the negative impact of conflict. A number of news services have been reporting the vulnerable situation of some of the country's Christians. The fact that sectarian violence is often cited as the main form of conflict in CAR should mobilise a more proactive assistance approach on the part of faith-based NGOs – both local and international ones.

⁵² David Westerlund (ed). 2002. *Questioning the Secular State: The Worldwide Resurgence of Religion in Politics*. London: C. Hurst & Co, p. 14.

⁵³ All reports can be accessed at <<http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/>>

IV. Vulnerability Assessment of Christians in the Central African Republic

This section describes the application of the Vulnerability Assessment Tool developed by the World Watch Unit of Open Doors to describe the position of Christians in the **Central African Republic**.

A number of experts – both analysts and church leaders working in the field – were consulted on the vulnerability of Christians in CAR, whose opinions are included in this report. Each expert was requested to **a)** list and **b)** comment on all threats in each category for which they consider Christians are vulnerable.

This process allowed obtaining a picture of the specific threats / risks for which Christians are particularly vulnerable. In other words, this report provides answers to the following questions: **i)** to what extent are Christians suffering disproportionately in the country?; **ii)** are Christians deliberately targeted?

Threats may include physical violence, but also issues such as exclusion from basic social services. By way of illustration, for the environment, this could be an annual flood, or for personal, this could cover a high risk of landmines. There are no limits to the number of threats in any category as the only criterion is that they are effectively threatening human dignity.

Please be aware the Vulnerability Assessment is not about religious persecution or direct targeting of Christians *because of their faith per se*. The Vulnerability Assessment is about the threats to which Christians are vulnerable, regardless of the actor who is responsible for that threat. Also, whether there is a *deliberate* religious motive is not relevant for the Vulnerability Assessment. The tool simply collects and comments all the possible threats to which Christians are vulnerable, regardless of its origin.

4.1 Environmental security, degradation and access to resources

Such insecurity for CAR's Christian populations results from largely unchecked diamond mining activities across the country's two large river systems. The alluvial deposits are thinly dispersed throughout, CAR's territory affecting many local populations who reside or work in those areas.⁵⁴ Resource depletion has led to violent sectarian-based contestation of mineral rich areas.

4.2 Economic security and employment

The current crisis in CAR has diminished prospects for economic security by displacing Christian populations, destroying their sources of livelihood (often agriculture) and

⁵⁴ International Crisis Group. 2010. 'Dangerous little stones: Diamonds in the Central African Republic', Africa report No. 167, Nairobi/Brussels.

suspending regular employment, especially in government-provided service sectors such as education.

Moreover, the Muslim-dominated government of President Djotodia is likely to engage in religious favouritism when awarding civil servant positions.

4.3 Poverty and marginalisation

Conflict, looting and displacement place unbearable burdens on populations already affected by severe underdevelopment in and outside Bangui.

The suspension of education for a lot of Christian youth will later translate as inability to enter a skilled workforce and irregular employment patterns.

Continued resource exploitation in certain regions, despite the ongoing conflict, indicates little context sensitivity on the part of foreign mining firms and is likely to lead to exploitation and further marginalisation of communities. Most studies on regional warfare demonstrate that shrinking state authority makes foreign businesses deal directly with local strong men, whose protection or approval can be bought. Those who do secure equitable employment in mining have their job prospects under threat of repeated rebel attacks, such as the incident at the uranium plant in Bakuma in 2010.⁵⁵

4.4 Political security

According to senior UN officials reporting to the Security Council, the political security situation for Christians in CAR is dire. In the words of Assistant Secretary-General for Human Rights Ivan Šimonović, 'It is [...] urgent to establish a credible and legitimate national security force, composed of a limited number of both former regime security and Séléka forces'.⁵⁶ Persistent lack of political consensus and incessant violent confrontations, however, are likely to delay the establishment of such a legitimate entity that can ensure the rule of law. In the meantime, sectarian violence is disproportionately affecting Christian communities, targeted by the Muslim-led Séléka rebel group.

The latter is also confirmed by a report by World Watch Monitor, which clearly states that Christians have been deliberately targeted by Séléka⁵⁷. The report also stresses the religious dimension of the conflict in CAR once more, explicitly calling it an "interfaith conflict."

The targeted actions of the Séléka rebels against Christians are also highlighted by the Humanitarian Aid and Civil Protection division of the European Commission: "Various

⁵⁵ Christian Panika. 2010. 'C. Africa gunmen attack French uranium plant: army', *AFP*, 25 June <<http://www.google.com/hostednews/afp/article/ALeqM5gZoNJS5eQxs8a02xwkcvU3oOjaTw?docId=CNG.292e8fa616194a78a6da50c91b6f34fa.2d1>>

⁵⁶ UN News Centre. 2013. 'Senior UN officials sound alarm on multiple crises gripping Central African Republic', 14 August <<http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=45621#.U11V4dLNi8F>>

⁵⁷ "Interfaith conflict threatens to engulf Central African Republic", World Watch Monitor, September 18, 2013, <<http://www.worldwatchmonitor.org/2013/09/2712360/>>.

Christian authorities have denounced Séléka exactions such as the profanation of churches as well as looting and attacking Christians.”⁵⁸

A number of political analysts see the agenda of CAR’s current president as power usurpation, presenting the most serious obstacle in the establishment of law and order.⁵⁹ Even Séléka cadres are perturbed by the extreme violence against Christians and the impunity with which it is carried out. In a recent statement, Prime Minister Nicolas Tiangaye, who was appointed by the rebels, described the lawlessness and injustice that has gripped the country as ‘catastrophic’.⁶⁰

Former President Bozizé, whose removal Séléka aimed for, had previously accused rebel coalitions of preaching the kind of conservative Islam that is often adhered to by fundamentalists. Such accusations point towards the possible polarisation even within the Muslim community as Séléka and similar rebel groups perpetrate indiscriminate violence throughout the country. So far, President Djotodia has demonstrated moderate views in his religious references. As Pastor Nicolas Guerekoyame, leader of the Alliance of Evangelists in Central Africa, adequately summarises the ‘rise’ of Islam in CAR, ‘[t]he new authorities are not there for a religious goal but a political goal. They must present their political agenda to convince the population’.⁶¹

4.5 Vulnerability to conflict and warfare



Christian populations are the most vulnerable ones in the current crisis in CAR. It is important to highlight the main tensions that exist between the core (Bangui and southern provinces, Christian populations) and periphery (northeast and northwest, Muslim populations). Similar

⁵⁸ “Central African Republic crisis”, *ECHO CRISIS REPORT SITREP N°6*, Humanitarian Aid and Civil Protection, European Commission.

⁵⁹ Jacob Judah. ‘Chaos in the Central African Republic: Insurgency, Murder and Abuse’, *Think Africa Press*, 24 September <<http://thinkafricapress.com/central-african-republic/insurgency-murder-human-rights-watch-report>>

⁶⁰ Adam Nossiter. 2013. ‘Violent and Chaotic, Central African Republic Lurches Toward a Crisis’, *New York Times*, 6 August <http://www.nytimes.com/2013/08/07/world/africa/violent-and-chaotic-central-african-republic-lurches-toward-a-crisis.html?pagewanted=all&_r=1&>

⁶¹ Ibid.

conflict dynamics have been observed in a number of other African countries: from Mali, through Cameroon, to Sudan/South Sudan. In CAR's case, further tensions exist among ethnic groups in the north, who sponsor and support their own rebel fractions. The staying power of the currently influential Séléka might be questionable, but its determination to target populations from the above-mentioned 'core' is not.

Various religious leaders have condemned the actions of Séléka as targeting exclusively the Christian majority in the country.⁶² The international Christian community is also concerned with the possible plight of Catholics and Protestants in CAR.

A report, published in September by Human Rights Watch, documents many types of horrendous violent acts perpetrated by members of Séléka, which primarily targets non-Muslims. According to Human Rights, rebel fighters have been evicting and looting Christian rural populations. There are reports that such actions aim to 'create space' for certain nomadic communities and their cattle.⁶³ Other incidents have been documented in Bangui, most notably government linked forces gunning down vigilante defence groups.⁶⁴

Other human rights violations that Christians have been victims of include the intentional killing of civilians and the razing of more than 1,000 homes, resulting in an exacerbated IDP situation and further marginalisation of already vulnerable communities. In this situation, President Djotodia is very much siding with Séléka, who contributed to his coming to power.

P.R. Guerengbo, a CAR pastor, declares in a letter to Open Doors that "both Catholic and Protestant churches and Christians in general, are more vulnerable to the conflict. Muslims in occupied cities are better protected, even public servants. Moreover, Islamic leaders are respected and honoured by Séléka, in opposition to Christian leaders."

4.6 Political repression

Since the current CAR government is a mouthpiece for the marginalised northern populations, it is expected, based on how Islam normally operates, to engage in discriminatory practices towards central and southern regions, mostly inhabited by Christians. Access to decision-making power, as well as democratic electoral process might be compromised. Political power remains highly centralised and focused almost exclusively in the hands of the president.

It is worth mentioning, however, that the very means through which Djotodia obtained power in CAR signal a degree of precariousness in his position. If the current government's total neglect for religious rights and properties, particularly of Christians, increases, the international community's opinion can have a serious impact on Djotodia's legitimacy.

⁶² See, for example, Persecution International Christian Concern
<<http://www.persecution.org/category/countries/africa/central-african-republic/>>

⁶³ Human Rights Watch. 2013. "I Can Still Smell the Dead": The Forgotten Human Rights Crisis in the Central African Republic, p. 5. <<http://www.hrw.org/reports/2013/09/18/i-can-still-smell-dead-0>>

⁶⁴ AFP. 2013. 'Central Africa violence kills six', 12 October <<http://news.yahoo.com/central-africa-violence-kills-six-184750572.html>>

Although Michel Djotodia has repeatedly stressed that CAR is a secular state, he has also admitted that “some people with bad intentions want to lead the country into inter-religious conflict”⁶⁵, referring to the “Christian” anti-Balaka militias. However, Lewis Mudge of Human Rights Watch said in an email to Morning Star News that “It is clear, according to our research, that it is Christians who have been suffering under Séléka rule and Muslims have been profiting” and that Séléka agents “have not hesitated to attack Christian places of worship.”⁶⁶

Even stronger, one UN expert, quoted in an internal report by Open Doors has mentioned the possibility of a genocide against Christians in the CAR: “If we don’t act now and decisively I will not exclude the possibility of a genocide occurring in the Central African Republic,” Adama Dieng, the United Nations’ (UN) special adviser on the prevention of genocide told reporters on Friday after an informal UN Security Council (UNSC) meeting on 6/11/2013.

At the same time, regularisation of the democratic process is unforeseeable in the near future and thus political repression of communities not favoured by the current leadership will continue. Due to the highly criminalised and turbulent socio-political landscape in the country, external democratic election monitoring is limited and only one national body, Observatoire National des Elections (ONE), defends political rights and the democratic process.

Regarding freedom of expression, Reporters without Borders describe the media as ‘fragile’ and experiencing a ‘tense’ relationship with authorities⁶⁷ and thus being incapable to act as a watchdog against political repression. Repressive censorship and arbitrary punishment are carried out through an obsolete judicial system, highly susceptible to political and military elite manipulation.

⁶⁵ WNG.org, Julia A. Seymour, “Islamists continue to target Christians in Central African Republic”, 05/10/2013, <<https://www.worldmag.com/mobile/article.php?id=27863>>

⁶⁶ Morning Star News, “Christians in Central African Republic Vulnerable as Chaos Continues”, 4 September 2013, <<http://morningstarnews.org/2013/09/christians-in-central-african-republic-vulnerable-as-chaos-continues/>>

⁶⁷ Reporters Without Borders. 2012. *World Report - Central African Republic* <<http://www.refworld.org/docid/4ea561b32.html>>

4.7 Personal security and vulnerability to violence



Longstanding political instability, alongside with ubiquitous crime, violence and looting, makes Christian populations highly vulnerable. No legitimate or dependable actors can guarantee personal security.

As the most recent concluding observations of the UN Human Rights Committee point out, enforcement of the provisions of International Covenant on Civil and Political rights (CCPR) remains substandard.⁶⁸ In specific, the Committee highlights problematic areas such as impunity, enforced disappearances and summary and arbitrary executions, freedom of operation for humanitarian and aid workers and human rights advocates.

Concrete data from CAR does not appear on any UN or INTERPOL criminal surveillance reports. News reports of indiscriminate violence on the part of various rebel groups, however, indicate no attempts at investigation or prosecution. The United States State Department's Consular Information Sheet details the broad range of criminal activity that takes place during episodes of instability such as the current one. The information sheet emphasises the inadequacy of law enforcement by highlighting the need for victims to hire a vehicle in order for law enforcers to be able to travel to the crime scene.

The British Foreign and Commonwealth Office advises against any travel to CAR, outlining the pervasiveness of road banditry.⁶⁹ Road bandits, also known as 'coupeurs de routes' or 'zaraguinas' do not operate solely within the borders of CAR, but constitute an important link to a regional phenomenon implicated in transnational flows of illicit goods, mostly small arms. These intra-regional networks of economic exchange remain unpoliced and more importantly – constitute one of the most of effective modes of accumulation and employment in CAR.⁷⁰

⁶⁸ UN Human Rights Committee. 2006. *Consideration of Reports Submitted by State Parties under Article 40 of the Covenant: Concluding observations of the Human Rights Committee, Central African Republic*. CCPR/C/CAF/CO/2, p. 2

⁶⁹ FCO. 2013. 'Foreign Travel Advice: Central African Republic' < <https://www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice/central-african-republic/safety-and-security> >

⁷⁰ Janet Roitman. 2004. *Fiscal Disobedience: An Anthropology of Economic Regulation in Central Africa*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

On the macro level, CAR's territory is susceptible to regional configurations of violent mobilisation, which can have an even more devastating effect on the state's ability to exercise control functions over its body politic and defend Christian populations. In 2008, for example, Jean-Pierre Bemba Gombo, former vice-president of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and Commander-in-chief of the militia combatants of the Mouvement de Libération du Congo (MLC)⁷¹ was arrested and charged with conducting warfare within CAR.⁷²

At the micro level, chiefs are in control of virtually no state resources to exercise a meaningful role as community leaders or moderators. No provisions are made for them to have access to any form of police force, making Christian villages vulnerable to external incursions as well as unruly vigilante movements.

4.8 Hunger and food prices

According to the UN, 1.6 million people (mostly Christians) who have been affected by the conflict in CAR are in urgent need of food, protection, health care and other life-saving services.⁷³ Due to poor physical infrastructure and incessant looting, delivery of food relief is sporadic and insufficient for the vast number of Christian IDPs.

Conflict-related disruption of agricultural activities also impacts the availability of basic produce. Food prices have been on the increase since the beginning of the violent episodes at the end of last year. According to the World Food Programme, since then trade between Séléka-controlled areas and other parts of the country has been heavily interrupted, causing prices to increase tremendously.⁷⁴ Predominantly Christian areas seized by Séléka have seen a 40 per cent increase in the cost of a food basket, leading to food deficits.

Even when people do have access to basic food supplies, insecurity complicates the logistical preparation of food. The Dutch general director of Doctors Without Borders/Médecins Sans Frontières' (MSF), Arjan Hehenkamp describes the situation as follows, '[t]he church compound [in Bangoassou] is like an open-air prison. People don't even dare to go and fetch the wood they need for cooking. They don't dare to go out of that protected zone back to their houses – where they would have a roof over their heads and some proper facilities – even though their houses are sometimes only a few hundred metres away'.⁷⁵ Such extreme distrust can lead to tensions over scarce food resources even within tightly-knit communities.

⁷¹ MLC rebels were co-opted by former president Patassé in his defense during the military coup led by Bozizé.

⁷² The Hague Justice Portal. 2011. 'Situation in the Central African Republic', Leiden University <<http://www.haguejusticeportal.net/index.php?id=6176>>

⁷³ Lisa Schlein. 2013. 'Central African Republic: Chaos Prevents Life-Saving Aid From Reaching Needy', *Voice of America*, 18 October <<http://allafrica.com/stories/201310190241.html>>

⁷⁴ IRIN. 2013. 'Looming food crisis in the Central African Republic', 22 February <<http://www.irinnews.org/report/97524/looming-food-crisis-in-the-central-african-republic>>

⁷⁵ MSF. 2013. 'CAR Violence Forces Thousands into Hiding', 18 October <<http://www.doctorswithoutborders.org/news/article.cfm?id=7115&cat=field-news>>

4.9 Injury and disease; access to healthcare



Access to healthcare services has been minimised due to displacement and Christians outside bigger towns practically have no access to adequate health services. Health centres in the provinces have been abandoned and/or looted.⁷⁶ Medical staff are reporting increasingly difficult to treat injuries as Séléka combatants become more and more brutal in their attacks.

In March, a malaria outbreak, which was the worst in several years, exacerbated the health security situation in CAR.⁷⁷ Combined with persistent malnutrition, such epidemics can have a detrimental effect on Christian populations and more severe repercussions in the long run. Sanitation and hygiene standards are difficult to observe as large populations in hiding live together in small church compounds.

⁷⁶ ICRC. 2013. 'Central African Republic: Fragility and poverty', 25 April
<<http://www.icrc.org/eng/resources/documents/feature/2013/05-24-central-african-republic-fragility-poverty.htm>>

⁷⁷ Mark Tran. 2013. 'Malaria crisis in post-coup Central African Republic as healthcare collapses', *The Guardian*, 9 July <<http://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2013/jul/09/malaria-central-african-republic-healthcare>>

V. Brief commentary on the true nature of the conflict in the Central African Republic

Rebel groups and Muslims from Chad and Sudan joined forces to form a militant coalition called Séléka, which took the capital of Central Africa Republic, Bangui, on March 24, 2013, and sent President Francois Bozizé into exile in Cameroon after a three-month uprising. The trigger of the uprising was the discontent with the authoritarian and incompetent President Bozizé. However, the high number of religious casualties that were caused by the conflict seems to indicate that Séléka has, at least in part, an Islamic agenda.

The main story to be told about the civil conflict in the Central African Republic is the extreme vulnerability of Christians to suffer hostilities, and the targeted and extreme violence of the Séléka rebels against Christians.

In the media, this story has moved to background in favour of another, less pertinent, story: the current fighting between the Séléka rebels and self-defence groups. Christians are presently associated with what in the secular press has been termed an interfaith conflict. The majority of the Christians and their leaders however distance themselves fiercely from this.

5.1 The main story: the vulnerability of Christians in the civil conflict in the Central African Republic

The Central African Republic currently undergoes a massive civil conflict that makes the whole population suffer, Christians and non-Christians. This Vulnerability Assessment of the Christians in the Central African Republic, clearly shows, however, that Christians are deliberately targeted for Muslims are left out (76% of population are Christians) and are vulnerable because they have no defence and in many cases cannot return to their home, houses and villages for insecurity and instability reasons. Moreover Christians are vulnerable because of impunity, lawlessness, absence of rule of law.

In CAR, Christians have been victims of targeted violence at intense degrees, while the Muslim minority of CAR has been left (largely) untouched. The intentions of the Séléka rebels are not only political. From the findings presented in this report, it is clear, that Séléka also has an implicit religious agenda.

Concerning the reasons for the hostilities against Christians, many factors play a role including politics, identity, ethnicity but also crime-related reasons and gender-based violence, etc. However, based on Séléka's strong Muslim *and* foreign jihadist composition (including a great number of Jihadists from Sudan and Chad), the religious dimension of the conflict cannot be excluded.

Although Séléka has been dissolved, the current government of CAR is not capable (or not willing) to put an end to the violence of the rebels. It is likely they will continue operating within the country's territory, maintaining practices of looting and instilling fear of violence among the civilian population.

5.2 The secondary story: the fightings between the Self-Defence Forces (Anti-Balaka) and the Séléka Rebels

After months of violence by the Muslim dominated Séléka self-defence groups have emerged that sometimes also attack Muslims in revenge. Since the outbreak of the rebellion by the Séléka coalition predominantly composed of Muslims from CAR associated with Chadian and Sudanese mercenaries, these mercenaries only attacked Christians and non-Muslims. The desecration of Christian churches and the violence towards Christians (rape, robbery, kidnapping, torture, murder, etc.) are evidence of this.

The fighting between Muslim Séléka and “Christian” Self-Defense Forces (called the Anti-Balaka) is one very real aspect of the conflict in CAR. In this fighting, both parties are guilty of human rights violations. Although it is also true that most Séléka members are Muslims and most Anti-Balaka members are formally considered Christians (by the Western media), their fight is not of a religious nature. The self defence forces are a political group that wants the ousted President Bozizé to return. They use many African Traditional Religious rituals and practices which are contrary to the doctrines of the Christian faith.

In the opinion of World Watch Research, this is only one aspect of the conflict. The media gives a wrong image to focus mainly on this aspect of the conflict, thereby forgetting the main story. A much larger part of the conflict is that of Muslim Séléka fighters (sometimes helped or assisted by local Muslims) who systematically target Christians, and are guilty of a great number of killings, burnings, lootings and raping.

In the media, the image is depicted as if CAR were the stage of a conflict between Christians and Muslims, and that Christians are presently embroiled in what has been termed an interfaith conflict. This is not true. A statement issued by the Bishop’s conference of CAR on 5/12/2013 reads: “We deplore the mixtures that are made about anti-Balaka and their assimilation to Christian movements. Indeed the anti-Balaka are the expression of the being fed-up of part of the population with the many abuses committed by Seleka rebels. However we reiterate that all anti-Balaka are not Christians and all Christians are not anti-Balaka. It is the same for ex- Seleka and Muslims.” This and other declarations of Christian leaders in CAR have repeatedly stated that the majority of Christians have nothing to do with these self-defence forces.

VI. Conclusions

The Vulnerability Assessment Tool seeks to identify whether Christians are particularly vulnerable to suffer hostilities, regardless of the reasons for these hostilities. As in any other civil conflict, all people can be expected to suffer, but the Vulnerability Assessment allows understanding to what degree Christians are pressured. If Christians are specifically and deliberately targeted, than this effectively makes the case that Christians are vulnerable in the context of the civil conflict in the country.

The experts that were consulted in preparation for this report clearly show that Christians are deliberately targeted for Muslims are left out (76% are Christians) and vulnerable because they have no defence and in many cases cannot return to their home, houses and villages for insecurity and instability reasons. Moreover Christians are vulnerable because of impunity, lawlessness, absence of rule of law.

Dynamics of vulnerability of Christians in the CAR has been identified in the following fields:

- Environmental security, degradation and access to resources
- Economic security and employment
- Poverty and marginalisation
- Political security
- Vulnerability to conflict and warfare
- Political repression
- Personal security and vulnerability to violence
- Hunger and food prices
- Injury and disease; access to healthcare

In these areas, CAR's Christians have been victims of targeted violence at intense degrees, while the Muslim minority of CAR has been left alone. The intentions of the Séléka rebels are not only political. From the findings presented in this report, it is clear, that Séléka also has an implicit religious agenda.

Concerning the reasons for the hostilities against Christians, many factors play a role including politics, identity, ethnicity but also crime-related reasons and gender-based violence, etc. However, based on Séléka's strong Muslim *and* foreign jihadist composition, the religious dimension of the conflict is evident.

Increasing violence will expectedly lead to foreign intervention that will expand the parameters of the conflict and introduce a host of conditionalities for the political leadership of CAR. In search of international recognition, President Djotodia will also strive to re-establish the democratic electoral process, but he will have to juggle between the rule of law, democratisation, and rebel or military interests. His role as a representative of the North will lead to favouritism, causing further societal fragmentation and possibly – new waves of instability.

Although Séléka has been formally dissolved, the current government of CAR is not capable (or not willing) to put an end to the violence of the rebels. It is likely they will continue operating within the country's territory, maintaining practices of looting and instilling fear of violence among the civilian population.

In the Huffington Post, Daniel Wagner, CEO of Country Risk Solutions, warns that the CAR “may become a template for radical political change in Africa, with militant Islamist extremists gaining greater power throughout the continent. The fear is that the CAR will become a magnet for extremists and a hub for non-state actors. With porous borders and ungovernable country, the country may just become a hide out for militant jihadists.”⁷⁸ In his analysis, Wagner refers to the influx of rebel groups from neighboring countries such as the Lord Resistance Army in the past, and currently rebels from Sudan.

If we link this with the huge amount of natural resources that CAR has, it can indeed become an interesting target for radical Islamic groups, so they can maintain a steady source of income for their Islamist agenda.

The deepening of inter-faith rifts will lead to isolation of North, bringing about the possibility of secessionist or irredentist claims and strong support for them. Such developments will also produce alignment with other similar movements in the region and on the continent. Specifically, the ongoing humanitarian crises in Chad, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Sudan will only worsen as more Central African refugees flee the violence in their homeland.

⁷⁸ “The Central African Republic: The Emerging Pakistan of Africa”, *Huffington Post*, 21/06/2013, <http://www.huffingtonpost.com/daniel-wagner/the-central-african-repub_1_b_3479865.html>