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Bureau of African Affairs, U.S. Department of State

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International Organizations**

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Thank you very much Chairman Smith, Ranking Member Bass, and Members of the Subcommittee for the opportunity to testify before you today on this most important subject. We are deeply concerned about the continuing insecurity, humanitarian crisis and human rights violations across the Central African Republic (CAR). We are working closely with our European allies, the United Nations, and the African Union to press for stability, the respect of human rights and the restoration of democratic governance in CAR.

The crisis in the Central African Republic began in December 2012 when Seleka forces, a loose coalition of four rebel groups, under the command of Michel Djotodia, began their violent trek from the northeast region of the country toward the capital city of Bangui, which I had been following from neighboring Cameroon. After rejecting the power-sharing arrangement that had been brokered in January in Libreville, Gabon, by the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS), Seleka rebels were able to take the capital Bangui, by force on March 24. President Bozize fled the country, and Djotodia declared himself president, suspended the constitution, and dissolved the national assembly. After significant pressure from the region, Djotodia chose to abide by the ECCAS-brokered arrangement with opposition leaders. This agreement and a second ECCAS summit in April led to a new power-sharing arrangement, the drafting of an interim constitution, and the swearing-in of Djotodia as interim President of the Transition in August. In accord with agreements brokered by ECCAS, Djotodia also promised to hold elections by February 2015.

Djotodia has never had strong command and control of his own Seleka forces and has been unable to sustain them in the field with salaries and stipends. With the collapse of the former national armed forces, the Central African Armed Forces (FACA), and the absence of any other meaningful government authority outside of the capital, relatively autonomous Seleka commanders – including Chadian and Sudanese militia leaders with groups of loyal fighters under them -- have become criminal enterprises preying on local populations. Seleka's targeted violence – including murders, rapes, robberies, looting and burning of villages has created inter-religious tensions in a country that had previously enjoyed excellent Christian-Muslim relations. These Seleka abuses, in turn, have given rise to primarily Christian self-defense groups that have sought to kill both Seleka fighters and CAR Muslims, creating a dangerous dynamic of inter-religious hatred and tension that risks spiraling out of control. For example, fighting in Bossangoa and Bangassou between Seleka and local defense militias in September and October 2013, although primarily an anti-Seleka backlash, has the potential to lead to large-scale atrocities.

The United States, along with others in the international community, have publicly condemned Seleka's overthrow of the government from the very beginning. In early April, as a matter of policy, the United States government decided to suspend direct assistance to the CAR central government, but allowed support for programs operated by non-governmental organizations (NGOs). These programs provide for humanitarian assistance throughout accessible areas in CAR, and combat trafficking in persons, and civilian protection in support of the counter-Lord's Resistance Army campaign.

So far, the conflict in the CAR has internally displaced nearly 400,000 people and forced approximately 68,000 new refugees into the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), the Republic of the Congo, Cameroon, and Chad. This has brought the total number of CAR refugees in neighboring countries to over 220,000. During Seleka's advance on Bangui, hospitals, schools, and warehouses were looted and entire villages destroyed. Today, Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) have little to no access to clean water, schools, or health services. The ongoing conflict and displacement raises particular concern for the protection of civilian populations. Food security is a growing concern as many farmers missed the planting season due to the violence. U.S. government partners continue

to try to reach these populations with life-saving assistance, but are constrained by lawlessness and banditry. In Fiscal Year 2013, the U.S. government provided more than \$24 million in humanitarian assistance in CAR to support programs providing food and non-food items, health services, access to clean water, and more. The UN Humanitarian Air Service, supported by USAID and the State Department, continues to provide access to affected populations that are otherwise inaccessible. On September 25, the State Department announced an additional \$6.2 million contribution to respond to the needs of new refugees in neighboring countries.

We continue to call on all armed groups in this conflict – primarily the Seleka and an increasing number of self-defense groups -- to refrain from violence, including attacks against innocent women and children. Establishing civilian protection in Bangui and the countryside is a prerequisite to a more substantial international presence in addressing the ongoing humanitarian, human rights, and political crisis. In order to help restore peace and ensure civilian protection throughout the country, we strongly supported the adoption on October 10 of UN Security Council resolution 2121, which expressed the Council's support of the African Union-led International Support Mission in the Central African Republic (MISCA).

We believe MISCA is the best mechanism for quickly addressing the ongoing violence in the CAR. Establishing a secure environment is necessary for the provision of humanitarian assistance and for an eventual political transition to take place. To help MISCA deploy in as rapid and effective a manner as possible, the Department of State has identified and is now in the process of notifying Congress of our intention to provide logistical, non-lethal equipment, training, and planning assistance to MISCA. We are closely coordinating with our international partners who are supporting MISCA. We continue to urge countries in the region, as well as the broader international community, to assist in facilitating the mission's rapid deployment.

While we continue to receive credible reports of human rights abuses against civilians, we know that these reports, alarming as they are, are almost certainly not comprehensive. The lack of access to significant parts of the country is deeply concerning. We continue to receive reports from credible international human

rights NGOs that humanitarian workers in the CAR assisting victims of the crisis have been physically harassed, intimidated, beaten, and killed by Seleka rebels. Individuals suspected of committing these crimes are unlikely to face justice while insecurity and instability reign. It is important that all reports of human rights violations be investigated and violators be brought to justice. Therefore, we have supported the UN Security Council decision to reinforce the mandate of the UN Integrated Peacebuilding Office in the Central African Republic (BINUCA) in order to monitor and report on the human rights situation.

We support the Council's decision for BINUCA, as part of its mandate to investigate human rights abuses, to report to the UN Security Council regularly on individuals or groups who are responsible for serious human rights abuses. Furthermore, we also strongly support the UN Human Rights Council's decision in September to establish an Independent Expert to monitor the human rights situation. The State Department along with USAID is examining potential assistance for monitoring, atrocity prevention and/or transitional justice.

Furthermore, we believe the international community must continue to demand that the transitional CAR government end any and all support to the Seleka rebels; exclude rebels responsible for human rights abuses from the reconstituted military, gendarmerie, and police; and abide by the agreements that established the transitional government, including abiding by the electoral timeline of February 2015 and the ban on members of the transitional government contending for office. The United States also co-sponsored a September 2013 resolution with African nations in the UN Human Rights Council (HRC) that called for adherence to the electoral timeline. The Department of State will seek opportunities to express support for this timeline both bilaterally and multilaterally, understanding that security needs to be restored throughout the country and the new constitution needs to be completed in order for elections to be feasible.

We also continue to work to address the crisis in CAR with our regional and international partners through the International Contact Group(ICG) for CAR. On November 8, as part of our continued commitment to working with the international community to find an immediate solution aimed at ending the violence and creating stability in the CAR, the State Department Senior Advisor for CAR traveled to Bangui for the first time to participate in the third meeting of

the ICG. The African Union chaired the third Contact Group meeting in Bangui, with more than 40 countries represented, including many regional states and a handful of non-African countries. The Contact Group released the Bangui Declaration, which calls for the international community to strengthen the AU-led MISCA military mission and support the CAR political transition roadmap. It also expresses alarm over the current humanitarian crisis and calls for robust international donor support. During the meeting, Republic of the Congo President Sassou, who has led ECCAS' efforts to respond to the crisis in CAR and restore stability, stated his strong opposition to delaying national elections beyond 2015 and voiced his support that transitional government officials not be allowed to stand for elections.

The United States led the discussion calling for President Djotodia to reverse his plan to integrate 3,500 former Seleka rebels into the CAR security forces and another 1,500 additional Seleka rebels to be recruited as law enforcement officers and park rangers. We emphasized that Djotodia's plan to include large numbers of unvetted and functionally illiterate Seleka fighters was a clear violation of United Nations Security Council Resolution 2121, which calls for a professional, balanced, and representative (by ethnic group, region, and religion) national military force. We strongly oppose the trend of authoritarian leaders in the CAR using the military as an instrument of personal power instead of an instrument of national defense for all citizens.

While in Bangui, the State Department's senior advisor on CAR made it a priority to meet with local and international civil society representatives, in addition to senior government officials. One local NGO, for example, reported that ten women per day came to their Bangui offices from April to August to report being raped; since September, five women per day report being raped. Undoubtedly, the number of rapes since Seleka started its advance is much higher as stigmatization causes the majority of rapes to go unreported. This violence also continues with total impunity since not one accused rapist has yet to be brought to trial.

We have also received reports from local civil society representatives of secret detention centers run in Bangui by the so-called "Extraordinary Committee for the Defense of Democratic Gains." According to our contacts, torture is being

carried out at the Roux military camp and another location in Bangui, according to at least 15 victims of torture who have spoken to human rights groups in Bangui.

It was also obvious that fear and tension still pervades the capital as Bangui's streets at night were largely devoid of citizens. Djotodia's announcement in September that he had dissolved the Seleka force was nothing more than a smoke screen as Seleka fighters continue to carry weapons and deny the use of arms to "legitimate" law enforcement authorities whose efforts are needed to end the lawlessness in the CAR.

We are deeply concerned that Djotodia does not intend to abide by his commitment to hold elections by February 2015, but will instead continue to take other measures to delay them and further consolidate his hold on power. His nomination on October 8 of Seleka fighters to take command of 10 of 12 military regions of the country, was a worrying indication of his real intentions. The commitment of Djotodia to even the notion of a unified republic in the CAR is also in doubt. On multiple occasions in recent weeks, Djotodia has told foreign interlocutors that if pushed too hard he might lead the north in seceding from the CAR.

We will continue our diplomatic efforts to coordinate with our partners and to highlight our own commitment to helping address the issues facing the CAR. As our immediate priority, we will continue to work assertively with the French and other members of the international community to bolster efforts to establish security in the CAR. We will continue to utilize these and other engagements, including constructive consultations with the government of France in Paris last week, as a means to urge regional and international partners to provide troops, additional funding, and other support necessary for MISCA to deploy quickly into CAR. We also use these opportunities to press our international partners to join us in looking for ways to bolster responsible stakeholders in the transitional government, including Prime Minister Tiangaye, so that governance can begin to be restored to the country and we can begin focusing on holding elections by February 2015. We hope these engagements will result in increased commitment by the international community to be more engaged on issues facing the CAR.

Finally, let me also note that we remain concerned about the continued activity of the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) in southeastern CAR. This year, the LRA has continued to commit attacks against civilians across the Mbomou, Haut-Mbomou and Haut-Koto prefectures of the CAR. According to the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA), from January to September 2013, presumed LRA fighters committed 21 attacks, resulting in 33 deaths and 128 abductions in the CAR. According to UNOCHA, an estimated 21,000 Central Africans remain internally-displaced and over 6,000 are living as refugees as a result of the LRA threat. The United States continues to support efforts by the regional forces of the AU Regional Task Force (AU-RTF) to end the LRA threat and bring its top commanders to justice. AU-RTF operations have resumed in the CAR, but remain limited by the insecure environment. With the support of U.S. military advisors, we believe the AU-RTF continues to make progress to degrade the LRA's capabilities and promote defections from the LRA's ranks.

Chairman Smith and Members of the Committee, let me assure you that we remain substantively engaged and will continue to address the ongoing crisis in the CAR. There is no doubt that the international community must act quickly. A wide range of U.S. departments and agencies are working to bring to bear all of the appropriate policy tools at our disposal, and we are committed to working with our international partners to bring about peace and security for the people of CAR. We also look forward to keeping you and the Committee informed regarding our efforts in this regard. I would be glad to answer any questions you may have.