

Testimony of Assistant Secretary Anne C. Richard
Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration, U.S. Department of State
House Foreign Affairs Committee
Subcommittee on African Affairs
May 1, 2014

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Bass, and Members of the Subcommittee:

I greatly appreciate this opportunity today to brief you on the humanitarian crisis in the Central African Republic (CAR) and its spillover into neighboring countries. Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary Jackson has just provided you with a comprehensive overview of the situation in CAR and the efforts the United States government has made, working with the international community, to end the violence and help CAR move beyond this current nightmare. I would like to focus my remarks on my recent travel to Chad from April 1st through 6th and to Bangui, CAR on April 7th, and I want to highlight the work that the Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration (PRM) is doing – in coordination with our colleagues at the U.S. Agency for International Development – to address the humanitarian needs of Central Africans and others affected by the crisis.

To set the stage, let me first share with you a few sobering statistics on population displacement. Nearly one million Central Africans have been forced to flee their homes. Nearly two-thirds [603,000] are displaced within CAR while one-third [348,000] have fled to neighboring countries and thus are now refugees. They have fled to Chad (92,000), Cameroon (184,000), the Democratic Republic of the Congo (56,000), and the Republic of Congo (16,000).

Beyond numbers, each and every one of these uprooted people have stories of personal tragedy and loss, including family members killed, wives and children raped and abused, and dreams shattered.

In Chad, I traveled to the South, to areas near the border with CAR, and also toured a transit center in N'djamena. I spoke with one Muslim man who showed me photos of the mutilated body of his father. The parents of five children – including a newborn baby – told me they had lost everything. People had brought very little with them and some were using what little they had to build very rudimentary shelters to house their families.

In Bangui, CAR, I spoke to several women, all Christians and all living in extremely difficult conditions with their children at the M'Poko Airport internally displaced persons (IDP) site. While their homes were in a nearby neighborhood, they all sought protection at the IDP camp, fearing attack by armed gunmen who continued to shoot civilians.

In all my meetings, security was the number one topic of concern. From Cabinet ministers in the transitional Central African government to UN leaders to the refugees and internally displaced persons, all spoke of the need to restore security and a sense of law and order in the country. When I asked refugees why they had fled, they all mentioned fear of attack and concern for their families. In Bangui, the Minister of Rural Development said she had a program to distribute seeds to farmers, but the program would be worthless if farmers did not feel safe enough to plant their fields.

I cannot reiterate strongly enough the importance of robust U.S. government support to the African Union's Stabilization Mission in CAR (MISCA) and the new United Nations integrated mission in CAR (MINUSCA). The restoration of security is essential to creating conditions that will one day permit these one million uprooted persons to return home.

Meanwhile, the U.S. Government is committed to working with the international community to provide life-saving assistance inside CAR and in neighboring countries and to structuring our aid programs to enhance efforts to protect the displaced. During my visit to Chad, I was particularly struck by the incredible hospitality of the Chadian people and their government. They had not only opened their doors to 92,000 Central African refugees but were also welcoming the return of an equal number of Chadian migrants who had been living in CAR for decades but were no longer safe in the country. I know this same degree of hospitality has been extended by the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the Republic of Congo, and especially Cameroon which now hosts the largest number of CAR refugees at 184,000.

I was also tremendously impressed by the dedication and commitment of relief workers who, at great risk to themselves, were struggling to gain access to vulnerable populations to deliver humanitarian aid including food, water, shelter, and health care. Sadly, many relief workers have lost their lives, including three people working with Medecins sans Frontieres (or Doctors Without Borders) who were killed this past weekend in Northwest CAR. They were simply trying to deliver health care.

In Chad, newly arriving refugees were receiving only half of the recommended daily food ration because World Food Program resources are stretched so thin. Several approached me to tell me that they were not getting enough food to feed their children. In CAR, conditions in the IDP camp at the Bangui airport were deplorable in terms of overcrowding and shelter was poor. However, international and non-governmental organizations, in partnership with local authorities, were doing their best to address gaps. It was clear to me that the nearly \$67 million the U.S. government – through PRM and USAID – has provided so far in Fiscal Year 2014 to support the efforts of international and non-governmental organizations to meet the needs of Central African internally displaced persons and refugees has been money well spent.

Our work is certainly not over. Since my return, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) found it necessary to take the extraordinary step of

evacuating the last Muslim population from Bossangoa and taking them to Chad – essentially helping them to become refugees. Others in Bangui have been evacuated to safer spots inside CAR. I would stress that these are very unusual steps – considered a measure of last resort that reflects the gravity of the threats to civilians. These steps are not taken lightly given the possible unintended consequences of further entrenching the separation of religious communities in the CAR, a country which has had a long history of communal tolerance.

On April 16, the United Nations released its 2014 Central African Republic Regional Response Plan, which calls for \$274 million to address CAR-related humanitarian needs in Chad, Cameroon, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and the Republic of Congo, and an updated UN appeal for CAR alone is also anticipated. We will review both appeals and provide additional funding in the near future. Thanks to Congress, we have appropriations to do more this year but, as you know, we are contending with too many humanitarian emergencies. Unrest in CAR is happening at the same time as upheaval and violence in South Sudan and widespread conflict in Syria.

While humanitarian funding will certainly help keep people alive, let me again remind you of the plea made by refugees and IDPs during my recent visit. Above all else, they wanted a return to security and stability in CAR; they wanted conditions that would permit them to return home and rebuild their lives, homes, and places of business. This should be our highest priority as well.

Representative Smith, Ranking Member Bass, and Members of the Subcommittee: I thank you for your support and for giving me the opportunity to speak today. I welcome any questions you may have.