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Hearing on the Crisis in the Central African Republic

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and International Organizations

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Chairman Smith, Ranking Member Bass, and Members of the Committee, thank you for the invitation to testify on behalf of Mercy Corps today, and for your leadership in mobilizing what has become a robust U.S. government response to the horrific and complex crisis in the Central African Republic (CAR).

My name is Madeline Rose and I am a Policy Advisor for Mercy Corps, a global humanitarian agency working in over 40 conflict or crisis affected countries in the world. Mercy Corps has worked in CAR since 2007. We have five offices, in Bangui, Bouar, Bangassou, Bambari and Rafai, managing programs ranging from emergency response and conflict mitigation, to youth empowerment and agriculture and economic development. We are proud partners of the U.S. government in CAR and globally.

If there is one message that I hope you take from this testimony, it is that resolving the current crisis in CAR will require long term commitments from the U.S. and international community. Immediate security and humanitarian assistance is urgent and needed, but will prove futile if not simultaneously reinforced by efforts to address the root causes of the country's chronic insecurity.

A VIEW FROM BOUAR

In March, I traveled to Bouar – one of the most economically and militarily strategic towns in CAR given its proximity to the Cameroonian border – to visit Mercy Corps' conflict mitigation and protection programs. The most heartbreaking meeting of my trip was one I expected to be easiest.

Mercy Corps collaborates with our local partner, the Central African Women's Lawyers Association, to provide holistic services to survivors of gender-based violence (GBV) in Bouar, which includes psycho-social counseling, community-based mediation, and paralegal assistance. Prior to this current conflict, the program included an "access to justice" element, which supported survivors of GBV seek judicial recourse for abuses committed against them, while helping to build judicial and governance capacities. During this most recent conflict, however, CAR's judicial systems have grounded to a halt.

I met a judge with whom we've partnered, and asked what challenges he faced and how the international community could be helpful. His response was simple: he asked for replacement pencils and paper, resources that had been looted and destroyed during the conflict, so that he could get back to work documenting and processing rape cases. Pencils. Conflict waged all around us. Across the street,

civilians prepared convoys to flee to Cameroon. Yet his primary request was for a pencil to go back to work and restore a semblance of justice in his community.

I tell this story because it underscores an underemphasized element of the CAR crisis: we are dealing with an extraordinarily multifaceted conflict and a humanitarian catastrophe in one of the poorest and most underdeveloped countries in the world. This means that every humanitarian activity will be more expensive; capacity building will take longer; and political and economic recovery will require long term, sustained engagement.

ROOTS OF THE CRISIS

The current crisis in CAR is the result of a long historical process. Since its independence in 1960, CAR has been plagued by poor governance, trapping the country in a cycle of conflict and underdevelopment. Political elites and rapacious neighbors have exploited the country's lawlessness and porous borders for decades, extracting the country's natural resources for personal enrichment while investing little in the future of the Central African people. A legacy of predatory state institutions and a culture of corruption and cronyism have undermined leaders' accountability to their citizens.

CAR is also chronically poor, with little natural resource wealth, and until recently, utterly neglected by the international community. Prior to this current wave of violence, close to two-thirds of the population lived on less than \$1.25 per day and the country ranked 181st on UNDP's Human Development Index of 187 countries. In a March 2012 situation report – one year before the ex-Séléka coup ousted former President Bozize – Operations Director of the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), John Ging, stated that, "CAR continues to face one of the world's worst humanitarian funding shortfalls." Further, there has been almost no concerted development action in CAR since the early 1990s beyond short-term responses to immediate, recurrent, emergencies.

The current armed conflict between the ex-Séléka rebel alliance and Anti-Balaka militia has exacerbated CAR's challenges in significant ways. Previously weak and unorganized armed groups are now emboldened. Violent sectarian divisions between civilians have been fomented, and a wave of criminality and banditry has surged across the country. The country's already weak physical infrastructure has been obliterated, and one-fifth of CAR's entire population has been displaced by violence. The government is completely broke, unable to control the violence that has been unleashed. In a country where the civil service is one of the few avenues to middle class employment, civil servants have received only one month of their salaries since July 2013.

CONFLICT TRENDS OF PARTICULAR CONCERN

Three weeks after this Committee's Nov. 19th hearing on this crisis, Anti-Balaka attacked CAR's capital, Bangui, triggering a brutal cycle of retaliation killings between Muslim and Christians that continues to this day. There are five trends of particular concern we see at this time.

1. The cycle of retaliatory violence has escalated into ethno-religious cleansing. Since the December 5th attack on Bangui, ex-Séléka began to retreat north while Anti-Balaka grew in number and ferocity, exacerbating prevailing lawlessness across the country. Both armed groups, as well as other opportunistic armed actors, manipulated this security vacuum, playing on frustrations of oppressive rule

by both armed groups and deep seated mistrust and resentment between communities, to divide Central Africans along socio-economic and religious lines.

Muslims have since come under deliberate and systematic attack by Anti-Balaka militias and mobs of ordinary civilians. Meanwhile, ex-Séléka and Muslim civilians continue to commit horrific abuses and killings against Christian civilians. Despite the presence of African Union and French peacekeepers, ordinary citizens continue to engage in opportunistic violence or be instrumentalized—in particular disaffected youth—by the militia groups.

The UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) estimates that eighty-five percent of CAR's Muslim population has been forced to flee, and those remaining are at high risk of attack. They determined that the violence constitutes "massive ethno-religious cleansing," and issued a decision to assist Muslim population movements as necessary in order to save lives. This is a rare and high risk decision for the agency, underscoring the severity of the situation.

2. Insecurity, criminality and lawlessness persist across the country. Despite the presence of peacekeepers, a transitional government and revival of some economic activity, insecurity is surging. Routine killings, lootings, robberies, sexual abuses and other crimes are committed daily with impunity across the country, including in Bangui. Right now, we need to be looking forward to anticipate and prevent the next crises – which will likely be in Boda and Bambari on major axes outside of Bangui, around the mines in Bria, Ndele and the north, and among refugees and host communities across the country in the region – but current response structures will fail to prevent future crises so long as already strained peacekeeping resources fail to quell widespread lawlessness.

3. Citizens are growing impatient with the transitional government, losing faith in the prospects of legitimate civilian rule. Civil servants have not been paid, government buildings have been destroyed, and the justice system is in disarray. Civilians want to see the transitional government provide basic services, and perpetrators of crimes and abuses held accountable under law. Each day the conflict continues, youth and vulnerable populations become more hopeless about the future of their country.

4. A massive and protracted displacement crisis is developing in ungoverned and difficult to access regions. According to an April OCHA situation report, there are 325,179 refugees from CAR in neighboring countries and roughly 700,000 internally displaced. This means hundreds of thousands of Central Africans now live in ungoverned or militia-controlled regions. Ex-Séléka control the north and northeastern regions, while Anti-Balaka control most of the South and Southeast. Humanitarian actors are sparsely populated in CAR, especially in the north, and are increasingly struggling to access civilians in militia-controlled territories. Roads are rare in rural CAR, and with the onset of rainy season, many will be impassable for months.

Sunday's attack by ex-Séléka on a clearly marked Medecins Sans Frontieres (MSF) hospital in Boguila that killed 15 local chiefs and 3 MSF national staff tragically highlights this challenge. MSF was the only humanitarian organization in Boguila, a town on the main road from Bangui to Chad, and is now in the difficult position of re-assessing the security risks of delivery.

5. Popular support for ethno-religious partition of the country is increasing. On its current trajectory, partition would divide the country along religious lines, into North/South, split along major natural

resource belts and pastoralist divides. Partition would be disastrous for CAR's economy and social fabric; it would also legitimize ethnic cleansing and make reconciliation efforts more challenging.

RISK OF FURTHER REGIONALIZATION

If we fail to address CAR's crisis quickly and correctly, Mercy Corps is concerned that the situation could metastasize into a new decades-long conflict transcending the corridor from the Sahel to South Sudan – curtailing development and threatening regional stability. Displacement sites in the above-described ungoverned areas could become breeding grounds for radicalization and recruitment of disaffected youth into violence.

Between CAR and the neighboring crisis in South Sudan, two million people are newly displaced across the region, putting further pressure on already stretched local, national and international response resources. This is the precise lawlessness that attracts regional opportunists, such as wildlife poachers from DRC and Sudan, and the Lord's Resistance Army, which has moved deeper into northwest CAR in the last six months and started attacking more civilians than they have in years.

PRIORITIES FOR INTERNATIONAL RESPONSE

While the current situation is horrific, it is not hopeless. There are promising examples of community based protection and peacebuilding across the country, including in Bambari where local Imams and Priests have negotiated peaceful co-habitation for their communities, and in Bouar where integrated Muslim and Christian schools have re-opened. Humanitarian, development and peacebuilding organizations have the commitment and absorptive capacity necessary to scale up their operations if additional funding is made available.

However, support must increase. There is a real danger that international attention will wane now that the UN peacekeeping mission, MINUSCA, has been authorized, and in a few years we will see a Central African state that is every bit as fragile, underdeveloped, and incapable of preventing a crisis like the one we are discussing here today. We see five priorities, each of which must be met and addressed simultaneously.

- 1. Restore security and reinforce civilian protection immediately.** MISCA and Sangaris peacekeeping forces have not been able to restore security. Even with the anticipated EU reinforcements, the enormity of the challenges will outstrip capacities. The most urgent priorities include:
 - generating impartial peacekeepers to replace the 850 Chadian peacekeepers withdrawn;
 - increasing the number and capacity of police and civilian units within MISCA;
 - immediately instituting a peacekeeper vetting system using the UN Human Rights Due Diligence Policy and ensuring trainings in international humanitarian law, do no harm, and proactive civilian peacekeeping for all incoming peacekeepers, and
 - keeping the humanitarian response independent of the peacekeeping operation as MISCA transitions into MINUSCA to ensure that all communities can be reached with impartial assistance.

Ensuring that a broad, inclusive national dialogue focused on the key issues of the future of the country takes place before elections is also a key priority. Among the most fundamental underpinnings of CAR's chronic insecurity is the perception amongst elites and civilians alike that politics is a zero sum, winner-

takes-all process. We strongly oppose efforts to accelerate elections towards February 2015 if such process would exacerbate risks of violence against civilians or undermine legitimate peace prospects. It is critical, as noted in UNSCR Res 2149 authorizing MINUSCA, displaced persons and refugees must be registered and included in this process, lest they become further disenfranchised.

Importantly for Congress, this also means authorizing funds to cover U.S. contributions to the recently authorized UN Peacekeeping Mission in the CAR, MINUSCA. In this light, we urge Congress to fully fund the President's FY2015 Peacekeeping requests, including the Peacekeeping Response Mechanism. Even if the PKRM is not used in CAR, rapid response funding structures are necessary in the absence of supplemental appropriations bills, as we've now seen with Mali and the CAR.

2. Support peacebuilding and reconciliation initiatives. The deployment of military and police alone will not suffice to ensure peace and security. As CAR's senior most religious leaders, Imam Omar Kobine Layama, Archbishop Dieudonné Nzapalainga, and Reverend Nicolas Guérékoyame-Gbangou stated on their visit to Washington DC, we "must disarm hearts and minds simultaneously as we take weapons away." There are many new initiatives that warrant investment, and a need for global donors – including the U.S. – to ensure coordination so as to not overwhelm local capacity.

Initiatives should integrate conflict mitigation and tolerance building – focused on youth, religious communities, women – assets protection for displaced populations, livelihoods, and media. In the west, for example, Mercy Corps is partnering with the Bouar Inter-Religious Platform to help restore social cohesion by facilitating inclusive, community-led processes to address grievances and rebuild intercommunal tolerance and increase economic cooperation across lines of division and. The western region of the country holds the best prospects for reconciliation so efforts there should be protected and scaled up as an example for national recovery.

3. Fulfill urgent humanitarian needs. The degree of human suffering is staggering. 2014 Global Humanitarian appeal is only 28% funded. In recent weeks, the International Committee for the Red Cross and UNHAS have cancelled flights due to lack of fuel. Traveling by road is impossible to many parts of the country, such as Bambari and the southeast, due to fighting in the Grimari area. Cancelling flights makes these destinations completely unreachable.

The first priority for Congress should be protecting appropriations funding for the International Disaster Assistance (IDA) and Migration and Refugee Assistance (MRA) Accounts to ensure humanitarian needs can be met throughout FY 2014 and into FY 2015. Unfortunately, the Administration's FY2015 budget request to Congress cuts IDA, the account that deals with displaced persons, by 28% from FY14 levels, and MRA, the account that deals with refugees, by 33%. The U.S. could also help by encouraging other donors to fulfill their Brussels pledges.

4. Target interventions towards the protection and empowerment of women and girls. From January-March, 70% of the cases we have received in our listening center in Bangui have been for rape. Of these cases, over 90% of these rapes have been gang rapes committed by armed actors. This is a massive increase in rape trends compared to any caseloads Mercy Corps has ever received in CAR. Worse, the migratory season is approaching, during which Central African women and families are often left at home alone as men search for employment elsewhere in the country. But this year women and girls will face abandonment in a much higher risk security context. Beyond gender-based violence, women have

been marginalized across many aspects of the response and risk being marginalized in reconciliation and recovery platforms as well.

5. Secure commitments now for staebuilding, transition and long term development. There are four major issues to address for CAR's transition: disarmament, demobilization and reintegration of combatants, security and judiciary sector reform, elections and economic recovery. These are complex issues that have failed repeatedly in CAR's history, and will require strategic thinking and long-term resources to be done well. Moreover, while these issues may seem distant, longer term development and diplomatic investments can help prevent violence *today* by giving youth and key community influencers hope, rebuilding economic ties and kick-starting local economies, and building platforms for meaningful civic engagement.

To date, the U.S. has not committed funding to the crisis beyond December 2014. This sends mixed signals to Central Africans, partners and the international community about U.S. intentions to engage in the medium-to-long term. In Mercy Corps' experience implementing over 100 conflict programs around the world, one of the clearest lessons we have learned is to build as much flexibility as possible into program design. This is especially true in CAR, where the context remains extremely fluid. Flexible, multi-year assistance is the best way to ensure a conflict-sensitive transition from relief to development.

Immediately, CAR's transitional government needs an immediate support package to pay civil servant salaries, restore basic state functions, and begin this planning process. Efforts to re-open the U.S. Embassy in Bangui should also be prioritized, and Congress should help accelerate international financial institution (IFI) engagement in CAR.

CONCLUSION

As this Subcommittee knows, 2014 marks the 20-year anniversaries of both the 100-day Rwandan genocide and the subsequent crisis in DRC that has taken 5.4 million lives and continues to this day. Consecutive U.S. administrations have expressed frustration about our collective inability to prevent such crises, and in 2010, the U.S. affirmed for the first time that the prevention of mass atrocities and genocide constitutes a core moral and national security priority to the U.S.

Within this context, the U.S. response to CAR's crisis marks an important shift in U.S. foreign policy: the alignment of political will, policy, rapid funding structures, and enhanced information-sharing and decision-making processes for the prevention of mass atrocities has indeed changed how the U.S. engages in potential atrocity situations. However, the response was too late. Despite many warning signs of the crisis, the U.S. failed to mobilize a response until mass violence was already underway.

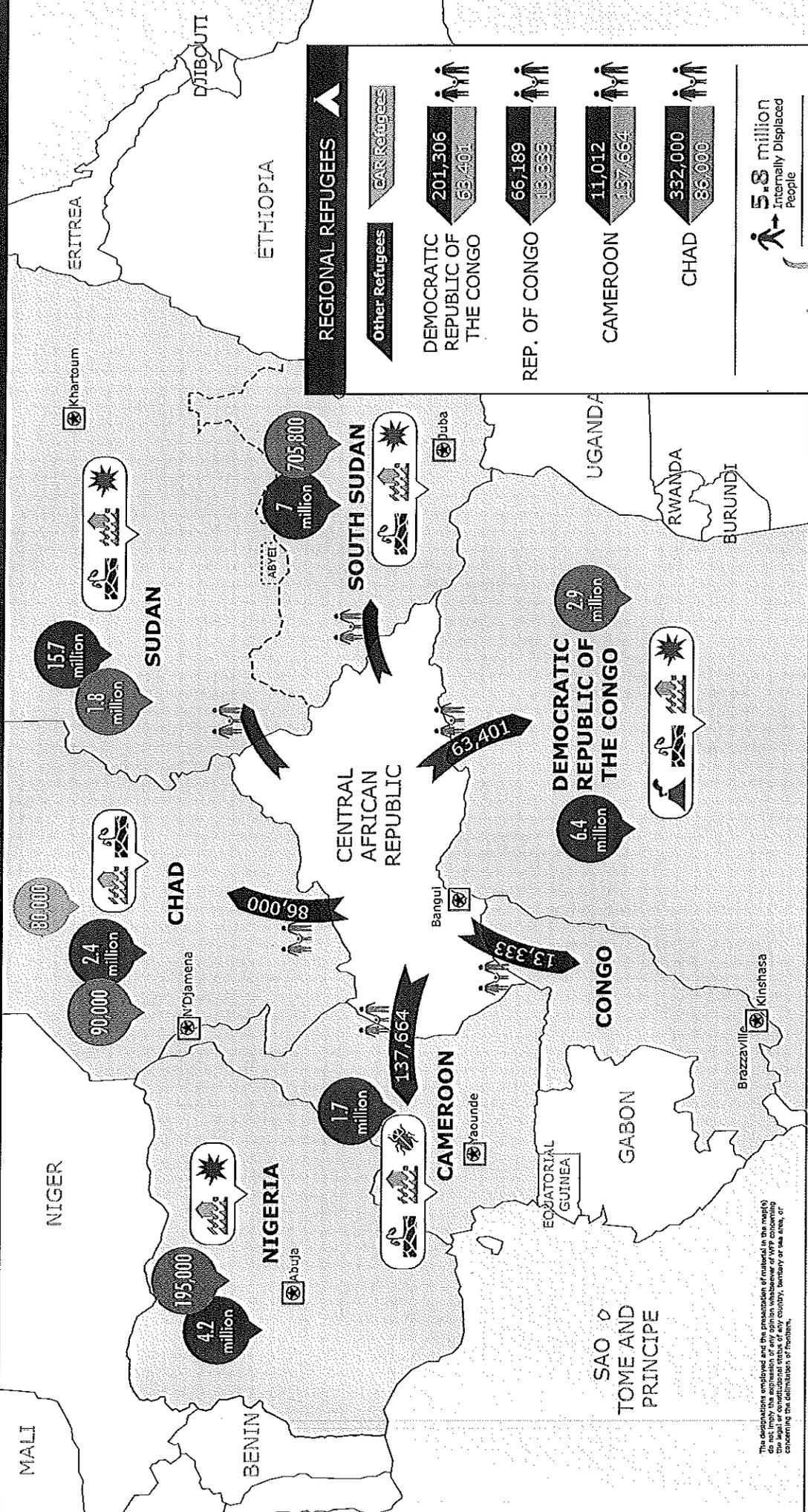
If the U.S. takes its commitment to preventing mass atrocities seriously, now is the moment to secure long term resources to support CAR's recovery. Mass atrocities prevention should not be understood only as mobilizing resources in the face of imminent or already ongoing atrocities, but rather, as investing in the infrastructure to mitigate them before they start.

There is a long road ahead for recovery in CAR, but recovery is possible and critical.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify and for your continued support to the people of the Central African Republic. I look forward to answering any questions.

Regional Cross-Border Impact of the Central African Republic (CAR) Crisis

Refugees fleeing from violence to a complex regional emergency



REGIONAL REFUGEES

Country	Other Refugees	CAR Refugees
DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO	201,306	63,401
REP. OF CONGO	66,189	13,333
CAMEROON	11,012	137,664
CHAD	332,000	86,000

TOTAL REGION

- 5.8 million Internally Displaced People
- 1.3 million Refugees Including 300,000 from CAR
- 37.5 million At risk of Food Insecurity

- Conflict
- Flood
- Drought
- Volcano
- Locust
- National Capital
- Country Office
- International Boundaries
- Undetermined Boundaries
- Abyel Region
- Refugees
- Returnees
- At risk of Food Insecurity
- Internally Displaced People

Data Created: 20 March 2014
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The organizations employed and the presentation of material in the map(s) do not imply an endorsement or approval of any country, territory or sea area, or concerning the delineation of frontiers.