

Open Letter from ACTED, ACF, DRC, Premiere Urgence, IRC and NRC to the UN Secretary-General for immediate action on the Central African Republic

Mr. António Guterres,
Secretary-General
United Nations

Bangui, 14 August 2017

Dear Mr. Guterres,

This Open Letter is to express our grave concern about the rapid deterioration of the security situation in the Central African Republic (CAR), and to request your office take immediate action to prevent the country collapsing into another full-blown conflict.

The wave of violence that has intensified since the beginning of 2017 has set CAR spiralling into chaos again. The crisis is now reaching the same levels seen during the peak of the conflict at the end of 2013. At that time, the UN declared a Level 3 emergency, setting in motion a global humanitarian response. We implore you to give equal attention to the crisis faced by the millions suffering in this country today.

Armed fighting is engulfing territories that had been relatively stable, including Basse-Kotto, Mbomou and Haut-Mbomou. In the past 12 months, 8 of CAR's 16 provinces have been affected by violence. Nearly 70 per cent of the territory lies in the hands of armed groups, all of whom have shown little to no interest in the protection and wellbeing of civilians forced to live under their constant threat of violence.

We are witnessing a barrage of indiscriminate attacks targeting civilians across the country. A least 821 civilians have been killed since the start of the year, while even more have suffered grave injuries as a result of being in the crossfire of battles for territory. The blatant disregard for human life in this conflict cannot be ignored.

Callous attacks against women, children and men continue to occur in areas once deemed safe by the international community. Just a few weeks ago on 11 July, an innocent baby was brutally killed in her mother's arms when two armed men entered a hospital in Zemio City sheltering displaced people.

This callous act demonstrates the utter disregard that armed groups have for humanity – no place is sacred, no person is safe.

Despite the recent visit of your Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs, Stephen O'Brien, and your Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations, Jean-Pierre Lacroix, the violence continues to spread. On 21 July, civilian homes were set on fire and a cathedral was attacked in Bangassou City. On 29 July, the violence reached once again the Batangafo vicinity resulting in approximately 20,000 newly displaced people. These are just a few recent examples of the brutality that is mirrored across the country.

Massive population movements have resulted from the fighting. Since May this year, over 100,000 people have fled their homes. This means that one in five people is now displaced or living as a

refugee in neighbouring countries – over 1 million people. Again, we remind you that we have not witnessed this level of displacement since the peak of the conflict in at the end of 2013.

The wave of violence comes on top of one of the largest humanitarian caseloads in the world. Nearly one in two people in CAR needs humanitarian aid. Over 2 million Central Africans are suffering from hunger, up from 1.5 million at the peak of the crisis. Two-thirds of the population have no access to basic healthcare – there is only one doctor available for every 22,000 people. Eight months into the year, CAR's aid appeal is only 24 per cent funded.

These figures paint a bleak picture of a nation teetering on the brink of catastrophe.

Aid workers have not been spared from the violence either. CAR is now the most dangerous place in the world to deliver humanitarian assistance. Since January, CAR has witnessed the world's highest level of violence against humanitarian workers; one third of all incidents recorded globally have taken place here.

Outright impunity has followed attacks against both civilians and aid workers.

More and more aid organisations have had to suspend operations because of violence against staff and looting of assets. Aid workers have been victims of attacks, aggressions, arrest and detention, armed robberies, compound break-ins, looting and death threats. Only last week, six Red Cross volunteers were violently killed while they held a meeting at a health facility in Mbomou. In the last three months, aid organisations have had to suspend operation because of insecurity in Kaga Bandoro, Bocaranga, Batangafo, Zemio, Bangassou, Alindao, Bria and Mobaye.

If these incidents persist, aid organizations will need to re-evaluate the risks faced by our staff and may be forced to withdraw from especially violent areas. We are painfully aware that any long-term withdrawal would increase the vulnerability of those very people whose survival depends exclusively on our presence and proximity. But we cannot operate in a country where we are the target, where our staff are continuously under fire.

These incidents are also severely hampering humanitarian response on the ground, despite the ongoing efforts to reach vulnerable people who desperately need food, clean water, shelter and medicine.

The UN peacekeeping mission's (MINUSCA) mandate to protect civilians is not being fulfilled in CAR because of insufficient human and financial resources. Humanitarian access cannot always be secured with support of the mission, and humanitarian corridors are established in a way that not all Central Africans can be reached.

In June this year, a peace deal was signed by 13 out of 14 armed groups in the country. The day after the agreement was endorsed dozens of people were killed in clashes in Bria town. We must cast aside rhetoric that peace is prevailing in CAR.

We are at an absolute loss as to what more we can do as humanitarian organisations. We call on you to take action on behalf of the people of the Central African Republic. We urge you to take the following immediate actions:

- **Ensure the UN Security Council resolutions/ recommendations are implemented**, by ensuring that MINUSCA has the financial and humanitarian resources required to fulfil its civilian protection mandate.
- **Reinforce support to the CAR government in the political, humanitarian and security sectors** - with a particular emphasis on the enhanced protection of civilians. Simultaneously reinforce support to recovery and development efforts. The situation in CAR requires a multifaceted response to meet the emergency needs of civilians while also addressing the conflict's root causes.
- **Ensure MINUSCA supports Central Africans and their representatives** in the implementation of political conflict resolution and peacebuilding processes.
- **Hold parties to the conflict accountable for their actions** against civilians, aid workers and their assets.

On behalf of the following non-governmental organisations operating in the Central African Republic:

1. ACTED
2. Action Contre la Faim
3. Danish Refugee Council
4. Premiere Urgence
5. The International Rescue Committee
6. The Norwegian Refugee Council

CC: Stephen O'Brien, UN Under-Secretary General for Humanitarian Affairs
 Jean-Pierre Lacroix, UN Under-Secretary General for Peacekeeping Operations
 Anthony Lake, Executive Director UNICEF
 David Beasley, Executive Director WFP
 Tedros Adhanom, Director-General WHO
 Filippo Grandi, High-Commissioner UNHCR
 Parfait Onanga-Anyanga, Head of Mission, MINUSCA

