

**Testimony by United States Agency for International Development
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Senate Foreign Relations Committee
Subcommittee on Africa
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**“Responding to the Humanitarian, Security, and Governance Crisis in the
Central African Republic”**

Chairman Coons, Ranking Member Flake, and Members of the Subcommittee, I thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today. I appreciate your involvement in drawing attention to the crisis in the Central African Republic (CAR) and look forward to a sustained discussion on the U.S. Government’s engagement.

Since its independence from France in 1960, the CAR has been one of the poorest, most unstable countries in the world. According to the United Nations Development Program, its indicators in health, education, gender equality, income, and trade measure not only well below global averages but even remarkably below the standard for “low human development.” Successive autocratic governments punctuated by political instability and conflict have only exacerbated the effect of poverty on Central Africans.

It is in this context that the current crisis developed and because of this context that the emergency in the CAR has rapidly escalated and stymied the delivery of assistance to those most affected by it.

Since the Séléka rebel alliance seized power by overthrowing long-time President François Bozizé in March 2013, the group has killed, kidnapped, and raped hundreds; forcibly enlisted as many as 6,000 child soldiers; and engaged in widespread looting. Largely drawn from the CAR’s 15 percent Muslim minority, the Séléka alliance has increased its ranks from 4,800 to roughly 18,000 soldiers in part by incorporating Chadian and Sudanese mercenaries and preying on uneducated youth. In response, some Christian and other non-Muslim communities have formed “anti-balaka” self-defense groups, which have retaliated and further escalated tensions. While Christians and Muslims have a history of peaceful relations in the CAR and the roots of conflict are in an imbalance of power, resources, and governance, the violence we have seen in recent weeks is taking a dangerous new turn toward deliberate attacks against civilian communities along religious lines. This increasingly sectarian violence and the retaliatory cycle of killing now underway has the potential to grow much worse, with mass atrocities emerging as a real possibility.

According to the U.N. Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, as of December 9, one in ten Central Africans—533,000 people—had fled their homes; one in five—1.1 million people—do not have enough food to eat. If unaddressed, the humanitarian crisis threatens to result in a significant loss of life; continued political instability in the CAR threatens to destabilize the sub-region and potentially allow violent extremist groups to occupy ungoverned spaces in the north, in addition to elements of the Lord’s Resistance Army (LRA) already present

in the southeast. It is arguably the worst crisis in the country's history; on November 26, United Nations Deputy Secretary-General Jan Eliasson said that the CAR is "descending into complete chaos before our eyes" and presents a "profoundly important test to our international solidarity and our responsibility to prevent atrocities."

The U.S. Embassy in Bangui suspended operations in December 2012 due to instability and evacuated all U.S. personnel. Non-humanitarian assistance to the central government has been restricted as a matter of policy, with exceptions for civilian protection, health, anti-trafficking in persons, and forestry and biodiversity. Additional restrictions on our economic and security assistance to the CAR government also apply.

Despite these constraints, the United States continues to play a role in shaping regional and international responses to the crisis, and USAID is poised to lead additional humanitarian, peacebuilding and conflict mitigation efforts that build on our current humanitarian platform.

As President Obama has said, preventing mass atrocities is a core national security interest and a core moral responsibility. Although the CAR continues to slide closer to the brink of catastrophe, we still have the chance to help prevent it. Accordingly, the U.S. Government is identifying funds to support immediate violence prevention and conflict mitigation programs, among other options.

USAID is expanding the provision of humanitarian assistance to respond to the most urgent health, nutrition, protection, food security, and logistical needs in areas affected by instability. Since FY 2011, the U.S. Government has provided more than \$68 million in humanitarian assistance to populations in conflict-affected areas through small-scale, targeted programs in accessible areas of CAR. In FY 2013, USAID and State Department's Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration supported not only programs in basic nutrition, health, protection, livelihoods, water, sanitation, hygiene, and agricultural assistance, but also U.N.-led logistics and humanitarian coordination mechanisms. In addition, the U.S. Government and our partners also continue to assist those affected by the LRA in the southeast, and NGOs working in that region have reported that our presence and that of the African Union Task Force has prevented Séléka fighters from moving into southeast CAR. U.S. Government partners are also working to protect wildlife and biodiversity in the southwest to prevent income from poaching from falling into the hands of armed groups.

On November 10, a USAID-facilitated air shipment of UNICEF relief supplies arrived in Bangui. The commodities included 12,000 fleece blankets, 800 kitchen sets, 12,000 mosquito nets, 240 plastic mats, and more than 5,300 plastic sheets—collectively supporting an estimated 170,000 people in the northwestern CAR, one of the areas hardest hit by the conflict.

Due to the scale of underdevelopment, limited access, and the volatile security situation, the international community is not able to meet all humanitarian needs. Insecurity hinders full deployment of humanitarian teams in the field. Humanitarian capacity was already limited in the worst-affected areas of the northwestern CAR prior to the conflict, and following attacks on humanitarians, operational capacity remains low. Some NGO, UN, and government facilities have been looted or destroyed. Without sufficient security, many agencies are reluctant to restart

robust operations. At the same time, there is an acute lack of local capacity. The escalation in violence has driven many of these personnel to congregate in the capital or flee the country. The recent designation of the situation in the Central African Republic as a Level 3 emergency—the highest level—will help encourage UN humanitarian agencies and NGOs to quickly identify and allocate necessary resources to address the ongoing crisis.

Logistical constraints and security concerns greatly increase the cost of scaling up humanitarian interventions. Transporting supplies from Cameroon by road and by air is extremely expensive, and the widespread violence has dispersed the majority of the displaced into the bush, creating additional challenges for the delivery of aid. The international community is working to identify and implement creative solutions to the delivery of humanitarian assistance in CAR.

USAID is making a concerted effort to reach the CAR's most vulnerable people and to reduce the risk of violence by limiting mass congregation for aid distribution. The targeting and looting of humanitarian actors requires low-profile partner responses with creative programming options to reach the dispersed populations. We are working with our implementing partners to find a balance between expanding assistance into conflict areas and reducing the risk to humanitarian actors and beneficiaries.

Increased conflict and widespread lawlessness resulted in mounting protection risks, including indiscriminate civilian killings, gender-based violence, arbitrary detentions, and the recruitment of child soldiers, among other violations. We are alarmed by reports of increasing numbers of unaccompanied children—who are vulnerable to forced conscription into armed groups. USAID has partnered with UNICEF to implement child protection programs in internally displaced persons sites throughout Bangui, including identifying separated and unaccompanied children, referring vulnerable children to services, and providing psychosocial support. Ultimately, a drastic improvement in civilian protection is essential for preventing atrocities and saving lives.

In addition to addressing critical needs, we are also examining ways to prevent the emergence of new conflict. If French and African Union peacekeepers are able to improve the security situation, USAID hopes to take advantage of that window of opportunity to increase local peacebuilding efforts, amplify the peace messages of national, religious, and community leaders, and support community radio stations in areas suffering from a lack of information.

Additionally, close coordination between the U.S. Government and other donors, primarily the European Union (ECHO) and the United Kingdom (DFID), can facilitate targeted interventions to address the most critical needs and hopefully elicit greater impact. To enhance this collaboration, the State Department and USAID are participating in the European Union–hosted “Friends of CAR” working group, which serves as a platform for interaction and coordination among donors who are funding, or considering funding, activities in the CAR.

In the coming months, the international community will have an enormous role to play in the political transition process established in the Libreville Agreements, N'djamena Declaration, and the Interim Charter that calls for elections by February 2015 and precludes members of the current government from running as candidates. The citizens of the CAR will need to view the electoral process as credible to prevent further violence or disruptions to the political stability

that is the goal of the transition. The transitional authorities and the international community will need more information about the technical requirements needed to successfully organize the elections before deciding how best to support a credible process. USAID will continue to assess what programming in support of elections and the political transition it may be able to support as the security situation evolves.

For now, however, USAID's focus is to reach those in need and save lives. Without the international community's urgent and committed intervention, this already alarming crisis threatens to continue its downward spiral and expand the reach of its devastation well beyond the borders of the CAR.

Thank you Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Flake, and members of the Subcommittee for facilitating our assistance to the Central African people. I welcome any questions you might have.