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CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC | Pastor, Son Killed as Violence Erupts

Pastor Kongbo, treasurer of the Union des Eglises Baptistes (UEB), was killed Jan. 28 along with his son at their home by Seleka forces as violence erupted in the northern suburbs of the Central African Republic's (CAR's) capital city Bangui.

Two Seleka fighters were also killed on the same day by French troops following a battle between anti-Balaka forces and Seleka fighters, who were moved from military bases in the south of Bangui to a camp in the PK 11 area on the northern outskirts of the city. The Seleka fighters have not been disarmed, causing civilians in the locality to seek refuge in the church of Saint Charles de Louanda in PK 12 for fear of attack.

Since Jan. 21, there have been ongoing clashes between anti-Balaka forces and Seleka fighters supported by armed Muslim civilians in Bangui's PK5, PK11, PK12 and PK13 areas. Christian and Muslim religious leaders have appealed for calm. The CAR's senior Muslim leader, Imam Omar Kabine Layama, is visiting Europe with Catholic Archbishop Dieudonné Nzapalainga to advocate for peace and call on European leaders to assist with the reconciliation process. Walidou Modibo, imam of the Central Mosque in Bangui, has said Muslim leaders gave up calling for peace due to the atrocities being committed against their community.

As a heavily armed Seleka convoy left Bangui for the north on Jan. 26, the group reportedly threatened retaliatory attacks on Christian communities in the northern towns of Ndélé, Bria and Birao in response to anti-Balaka attacks on Muslim communities. The Seleka withdrawal has also raised fears of the possibility of a partitioning of the country along sectarian lines.

In a statement released on Jan. 27, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Navi Pillay expressed her deep concern at "the proliferation of armed groups and the explosion of common criminality which are making the situation even more chaotic and dangerous," and called upon the international community "to strengthen peacekeeping efforts" throughout the country as a matter of urgency.

On Jan. 28, the UN Security Council agreed to sanctions allowing for targeted punitive action against anyone violating an arms embargo imposed in December 2013, committing human rights abuses, undermining peace and stability or obstructing humanitarian assistance. The Council also unanimously authorized the deployment of a European Union force.

CSW's Chief Executive Mervyn Thomas said, "Our condolences, thoughts and prayers are with the family of Pastor Kongbo and with all who have lost loved ones in the last few days of fighting in Bangui. The continuing efforts of key leaders from both religious communities towards reconciliation in the face of relentless atrocities is courageous and laudable, and we join them in condemning violence committed by all armed groups. While recognizing the international community's steadfast

commitment to resolve the ongoing crisis, CSW echoes the call for the urgent and rapid deployment of sufficient peacekeepers to ensure security for the civilian population, which continues to suffer greatly. Every assistance must be given to Interim President Samba-Panza and interim Prime Minister Nazapayéké as they begin the monumental task of stabilizing the country, restoring law and order, disarming the various militia groups, encouraging reconciliation and facilitating the return of one million displaced citizens to their homes."