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CAR | CSW Urges Peacekeeping Force on Seleka Coup Anniversary

On the anniversary of the coup that brought the Seleka coalition to power in the Central African Republic (CAR), Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW) is urging UN member states to ensure the Secretary General's proposal for a significant increase in the number of peacekeepers for the country is swiftly implemented.

In the last 12 months, the CAR has had three governments and a political coup. It is currently one of the world's most precarious security and humanitarian situations.

Despite decades of instability and upheaval, the CAR had no previous history of sectarian violence, with conflicts being characterized by struggles for political power and control of resources. From Dec. 10, 2012, when fighting broke out between the Bozize government and the Seleka alliance that eventually overthrew him, local sources increasingly noted the targeting of the Christian population. Between Dec. 10, 2012 and Dec. 5, 2013, an estimated 5,000 to 10,000 mostly non-Muslims and mainly Christian people were reportedly killed by Seleka.

The targeted violence worsened after Seleka's seizure of power on March 24, 2013, ultimately leading to retributive violence by anti-Balaka militia groups, which have been responsible for significant human rights violations since December 2013, including ethnic and religious cleansing. Reports also indicate the targeting of Christian communities continues in areas out of reach of international peacekeepers and media. For example, in Bantangafo rape is being used as a weapon of war, with reports of women being raped "en masse."

Although the anti-Balaka groups have been widely described as "Christian militia", in reality they are composed of pre-existing village defense groups bolstered by former soldiers loyal to deposed President Bozize, former Seleka fighters, angry youths seeking revenge for Seleka violations, and common criminals.

Religious leaders in the CAR have condemned the violence and are actively working towards reconciliation. Following a meeting with the Archbishop and Imam of Bangui, and the President of the Evangelical Churches, UN Secretary General Ban Ki Moon said "the conflict in the Central African Republic is not about religion" and "religious and ethnic affiliations are being manipulated for political purposes." He also urged the Security Council to act quickly on recommendations for a United Nations peacekeeping operation.

CSW's Chief Executive Mervyn Thomas said, "We welcome the proposal by the UN Secretary General for the creation of an almost 12,000 strong peacekeeping force, and urge that this is assembled, resourced and sent as soon as possible to support existing peacekeepers in

bringing about desperately needed security, particularly in rural areas and the north. The government of the Central African Republic must be assisted in its efforts to restore rule of law and civil administration and to ensure that all perpetrators of violence and human rights violations are brought to justice, regardless of religion, political affiliation or ethnicity. The government must also be assisted with humanitarian assistance for displaced civilians, while local reconciliation initiatives must be encouraged and resourced.”