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CAR | Clergy Targeted for Kidnapping

Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW) is concerned at the ongoing targeting of clergy for kidnapping in the Central African Republic (CAR) following reports that a Polish Catholic missionary was kidnapped in Baboua, 342 miles northwest of the capital city of Bangui on Oct. 12.

Fr. Mateusz Dzedzic was kidnapped by eight men from the rebel group Democratic Front of the Central African People (FDPC) and is reportedly being treated well. The group has demanded the release of their leader, Abdolaye Miskine, who was imprisoned in Cameroon in September 2013.

The FDPC was part of the Seleka alliance that took control of the CAR in a coup in March 2013. After a dispute with Seleka leaders, FDPC's leader Abdolaye Miskine left CAR and moved to Cameroon, where he was arrested. On May 12, United States President Barak Obama announced sanctions against those who were identified as threatening the peace, security or stability of the CAR, including Miskine.

According to Reuters news agency, the FDPC, which also refers to itself as People of Miskine, has kidnapped at least 12 people in CAR and eight in Cameroon. Reportedly the group attempted to kidnap a second missionary named Leszek Zielinski but gave up after negotiations.

The kidnapping of Dzedzic is not the first incident targeting the clergy. On April 16, the Bishop of Bossangoa, Monsignor Nestor-Desire Nongo Aziagbia, was kidnapped along with three Catholic clergymen by Seleka militants. The clergymen were eventually released near the Chadian border after the intervention of the international community.

The kidnapping of Dzedzic comes after a week of violence in Bangui, in which at least 12 people, including two UN peacekeepers, were killed, and property belonging to Christians was destroyed. Seleka and anti-Balaka leaders have called for the resignation of the transitional President and Prime Minister, as well as the reinstatement of members of their groups to political positions. The anti-Balaka forces reportedly threatened to fill the streets of Bangui until their demands are met. On Oct. 14, President Catherine Samba-Panza's office, which is mired in an embezzlement scandal, issued a statement denouncing attempts by "a coalition of negative forces" to create a "third transition," and calling for the full implementation of the UN peacekeeping operation detailed in United Nations Security Council (UNSC) resolution 2149, in order to prevent the country from being gripped by another cycle of violence. In September 2014, the UN Peacekeeping force took over the security mission in CAR in accordance with UNSC resolution 2149. The peacekeeping mission has yet to reach full deployment of 12,000

troops.

CSW's Chief Executive Mervyn Thomas said, "We are deeply concerned for the welfare of Fr. Mateusz Dzedzic and call for his immediate and unconditional release. Religious personnel should be able to carry out their work without fear of threat or violence, and CSW calls on the international community to ensure that every party to this conflict adheres to humanitarian standards with regard to the treatment of religious leaders and religious establishments. We also urge the international community to address the threat posed by transnational groups such as the FDPC, and call for the full implementation of UNSC resolution 2149 and the full deployment of the UN peacekeeping mission in CAR to assist with security and the upcoming electoral process."