



3.23.16

CAR| International Community Urged to Support New President

The United Nations Independent Expert on the Central African Republic (CAR), Marie-Thérèse Keita-Bocoum called on the international community to continue supporting the country as newly elected President Faustin Archange Touadéra prepares to take office March 25.

In a statement to the UN Human Rights Council (HRC) in Geneva on March 22, following her recent visit to CAR, Keita-Bocoum applauded the progress achieved by the Transitional Government and UN Peacekeeping Mission with the support of the international community and noted the presidential and legislative elections held in December 2015 and February 2016 were largely free, fair and relatively peaceful. However, Keita-Bocoum urged the international community to continue supporting the country, saying, “There have been great steps taken, but the next six months are vital and the international community must continue to support the country, otherwise there is a risk of backsliding.”

When the Independent Expert last addressed the HRC in September 2015, CAR was gripped by inter-communal violence that broke out after the body of a young Muslim man was found in Bangui, leading to retributive violence along sectarian lines with Muslims targeting Christians, and subsequently, descending into lawlessness with anti-Balaka groups establishing roadblocks in the capital and armed groups attacking peacekeeping forces. The violence resulted in at least 130 deaths and an estimated 430 people were injured. The episode, which triggered the displacement of at least 30,000 people, occurred weeks before the start of legislative and presidential elections that were ultimately postponed, and had the potential to derail efforts to maintain peace that had been established in the capital for almost a year.

In her statement, Keita-Bocoum congratulated the peacebuilding and reconciliation efforts undertaken by the citizens of CAR and in particular, by religious communities. She noted the work of the interreligious peace platform jointly spearheaded by the Catholic Archbishop, Chief Imam and Chairman of the Evangelical Alliance, and highlighted the significant contribution made by Pope Francis’ visit in November 2015. The independent expert remarked that for the

first time in her two years as mandate holder and visiting the country, she observed Muslims and Christians greeting each other and participating in a joint meeting on access to education in the Muslim quarter of Bangui.

While celebrating the progress, the Independent Expert emphasized that reconciliation cannot occur without justice. The Special Criminal Court, adopted by the National Transition Council in April 2015, has yet to be established, and Keita-Bocoum urged the international community to continue supporting the establishment of the Special Criminal Court and the restoration of courts, prisons and the full criminal system across the whole country.

In addition to peacebuilding and re-building the justice system, President Touadéra's government will need to work on securing the physical integrity of the country, implementing the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR) program for ex-combatants and address several other challenges, including rebuilding and restoring state services and facilitating the return of refugees and internally displaced people.

Christian Solidarity Worldwide's Chief Executive Mervyn Thomas, said "We welcome the comments made by Ms. Keita-Bocoum, particularly noting the importance of maintaining international support for President Faustin Archange Touadéra and his government as he takes office at the end of this week. The implementation of the Special Criminal Court must be given priority by the new government and the international community, as establishing the rule of law and bringing an end to impunity will ensure that human rights violators are held to account, which will in turn restore confidence in state structures, strengthening the relationship between the government and all its citizens. The implementation of justice is a fundamental step in building peace and reconciling religious communities that co-existed peacefully prior to the current conflict."