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## **CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC | CSW Welcomes Interfaith Partnership for Peace**

Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW) welcomed the creation of the Interfaith Partnership for the Consolidation of Peace (CIPP) in Central African Republic.

The interfaith partnership brings together the vital grassroots work of the National Interfaith Peace Platform, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), the Aegis Trust, the Catholic Relief Services, Islamic Relief Worldwide and World Vision. It aims to strengthen the capacity of the Central African Republic's (CAR) institutions to become promoters of social cohesion, to assist the economic development of the poorest citizens and to offer support for victims of violence and peace education.

The partnership builds on the work of the National Interfaith Peace Platform founded in 2013 by the Catholic Archbishop of Bangui, Mgr. Dieudonné Nzapalainga, president of the Islamic Council of Central Africa Imam Oumar Kobine Layama, and president of the Evangelical Alliance, Pastor Nicolas Guérékoyaméné-Gbangou. These founders have campaigned side by side since the start of the recent civil conflict and have highlighted its political and social roots, noting that religious communities had peacefully co-existed in the past and previous conflicts had not erupted on religious lines.

CAR's recent conflict assumed a religious dimension in March 2013 when Seleka, a predominantly Muslim rebel coalition, took power in a coup, suspending the constitution, dissolving the government and National Assembly and installing one of its leaders, Michael Djotodia, as president. In September 2013, Djotodia officially disbanded Seleka. Many rebels refused to disarm and sectarian violence increased. Sustained and severe human rights violations eventually resulted in equally severe retributive violence following the emergence of anti-Seleka groups commonly referred to as anti-Balaka (anti-balle AK-anti- AK47 bullets). The emergence of the anti-Balaka in December 2013 led to violence targeting CAR's minority Muslim population, which a UN Commission of Inquiry described as ethnic cleansing.

On March 30, President Faustin Archange Touadéra took office vowing to disarm fighters and to focus on peacebuilding and rebuilding the economy.

Ahead of President Touadéra's inauguration, the United Nations Independent Expert on CAR, Marie-Thérèse Keita-Bocoum, said reconciliation cannot occur without justice and 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.

CSW's Chief Executive Mervyn Thomas said, "We welcome the establishment of the Interfaith Partnership for the Consolidation of Peace in CAR, which will add much needed finances and support to the work already established by the National Interfaith Peace Platform. As President Touadéra and his government begin the work of rebuilding, disarming and reconciling the nation, we call on the international community to assist and support the establishment of the Special Criminal Court to work alongside initiatives such as the interfaith partnership."