



Committee on International Justice and Peace

3211 FOURTH STREET NE • WASHINGTON DC 20017-1194 • 202-541-3160

WEBSITE: WWW.USCCB.ORG/JPHD • FAX 202-541-3339

September 3, 2013

The Honorable John Kerry
Secretary of State
2201 C Street
Washington, DC 20520

Dear Secretary Kerry:

At a July 2013 meeting of African bishops in Kinshasa, I had the opportunity to listen to a moving presentation by Bishop Nestor Désiré Nongo Aziagbia of Bossangoa, Vice President of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Central African Republic (CAR). Bishop Nongo Aziagbia recounted the suffering that Central Africans have endured since the Seleka rebel forces took control of the country.

Bishop Nongo Aziagbia noted that although this was not the first armed coup d'état in Central African history, it is potentially the most threatening. Seleka forces have many foreign rebel group members in their ranks. This gives the coup the feel of a foreign occupation. Also, the Central African Seleka leaders and the foreign militia are mostly Muslim, and seem to be attacking many churches, but not mosques. Thus the coup threatens the secular character of the government and risks creating interreligious conflict where little or none previously existed.

In a letter to the French Embassy in Bangui, three Central African bishops called on France and the international community to work towards a peaceful resolution of the conflict. They urged attention to: safety, security and humanitarian assistance; respect for human rights; the proper functioning of the transitional institutions; observing the Libreville accord, especially the ineligibility of the current President and members of the transitional government to stand in the next elections; deploying AU/UN forces; beginning rapid disarmament and confinement to barracks of all combatants; proceeding without delay to repatriate all Chadian, Sudanese and other mercenaries; and obtaining a commitment from Chadian and Sudanese authorities to repatriate immediately all goods stolen and shipped to their countries. Catholic Relief Services is on the ground working on relief efforts and community protection with USAID funding. Aid funding should be maintained and expanded.

The United States and the international community have worked to end violence in Côte d'Ivoire and Mali. Instability in the Central African Republic affects not only the people of that country, but of the region. The LRA presence in CAR testifies to the lack of rule of law. These realities and the presence of vast natural resources point to a threat to the entire sub-region.

We urge you to work with the French government, the United Nations, the African Union and regional countries to meet the goals articulated by the Catholic bishops. The Committee on International Justice and Peace is ready to work with you and our Church partners in the CAR to foster peace and prosperity.

Sincerely yours,

+ 

Most Reverend Richard E. Pates

Bishop of Des Moines

Chair, Committee on International Justice and Peace