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March 16, 2021

The Honorable Antony Blinken
Secretary of State
United States State Department
2100 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20520

Dear Secretary Blinken:

As Chair of the Committee on International Justice and Peace and President of Catholic Relief Services (CRS), we write to ask for your leadership to cultivate international and regional partners for the goal of a unified, strategic and sustained effort to pull the Central African Republic (CAR) back from its precipitous slide into generalized conflict. As you may know, we have a close working relationship on the ground with Ambassador Tamlyn and a long history working with the Central African Republic towards a shared future for peace and prosperity.

Although CAR has been troubled by conflict for several years, the disputed December 2020 election triggered more widespread violence, fresh displacements and deepened suffering. In response, the CAR Catholic Bishops' Conference issued a statement from their General Assembly meeting that has important points regarding this violence that we highlight below.

First, the Bishops and we recognize that there are no easy answers to the complex web of rivalries, divisions and negative influences from outside the country. The Bishops also realize that CAR has few leaders with undisputed legitimacy and no institutions of government fully capable of providing nationwide social, administrative, and security services.

Second, this context has created many immediate pressing needs and challenges. Hundreds of thousands of people have lost their livelihoods many of whom are displaced requiring urgent humanitarian assistance. Basic rule of law and security are absent from most of the country. The road ahead will be a long one. We as partners must respond to these immediate needs, but it is even more important to think and act long term.

The Bishops' state that, "In the final analysis the solution to the current Central African crisis can only be internal." (Paragraph 20). This conflict will continue unabated until Central Africans themselves end it. The Bishops "... call for a dialogue that is sincere, frank, brotherly and constructive to find a peace that is just and durable that pushes back the hate, violence and the spirit of vengeance." (Paragraph 15).

In this spirit, we recommend the U.S. work with the Catholic Church, the other leaders of the Central African Inter-Religious Platform (PCRC) and other civil society institutions and invest in their long-term solutions to the CAR crisis such as peace building. We respectfully ask that you renew the partnerships with the PCRC and other members of civil society in CAR. We believe doing so will promote dialogue between the CAR government and armed groups to halt the violence and resolve the issues that continue to fuel conflict. We believe U.S. support for community-based peacebuilding programs will enable them to assist in brokering local

ceasefires, negotiating the return of the displaced, resolving local disputes and repairing the social fabric torn apart by violence and loss of life.

His Holiness, Pope Francis, visited the central Bangui mosque in 2015 and declared that “Christians and Muslims are brothers and sisters,” and that “together, we must say no to hatred, to revenge and to violence.” Later that year on World Humanitarian Day, at the Palais des Nations, Geneva, the PCRC leaders received the U.N.’s prestigious Sergio Vieira de Mello award. We should continue our support to their important efforts.

We look forward to working with you and Ambassador Tamlyn to end the suffering in CAR and to help the Central African people rebuild the social fabric of their country. We hope you will consider our recommendations and those of the CAR Bishops conference as you formulate your strategy for the country. Committee staff and CRS are prepared to work with you in this important cause.

Sincerely yours,

Handwritten signature of David J. Malloy in black ink.

Most Reverend David J. Malloy
Bishop of Rockford
Chairman of the Committee on International
Justice and Peace

Handwritten signature of Sean Callahan in black ink.

Mr. Sean Callahan
President and CEO
Catholic Relief Services