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“I Am 100% Central African”

Identity and Inclusion in the Experience of Central African Muslim Refugees in Chad and Cameroon



INTERNATIONAL CENTER FOR
TRANSITIONAL JUSTICE

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RESEARCH REPORT

Enrica Picco

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Executive Summary

Over the past five years, the current crisis in the Central African Republic (CAR) has forced more than a million people, out of a population of a little more than four million, to flee their homes. Although the crisis follows years of political instability and state fragility, the country had never experienced such diffuse and horrific violence among communities, neighbors, and members of the same family or such deep tearing of its social fabric. Despite many international efforts to facilitate peace and stabilization, armed groups still operate throughout the country. The return of refugees—which seemed likely only one year ago—is now impossible because of increased sectarian attacks. As the country has plunged again into an acute humanitarian crisis, discussions on reconciliation and justice have been put almost completely on hold.

This research report is based on qualitative interviews with Central African refugees living in Chad and Cameroon and members of national and international organizations. More specifically, it focuses on Muslim and Peuhl communities that fled from Bangui and the western regions of the country at the peak of the sectarian violence (late 2013 to early 2014). Given that identity-related issues, including long-standing discrimination against Muslims, are among the root causes of the conflict, it can be expected that some of the refugees interviewed for this study are among those most likely to experience barriers to rebuilding social ties within their community of origin if and when they return. Interviewees were asked about their experience of displacement and their intentions and concerns regarding return, reconciliation, and justice.

The research findings show that a lack of inclusion is a crucial underlying issue in most of the refugees' experiences and, therefore, their concerns for the future. In a country where access to state services and jobs has often been closed to those not considered to be truly "Central African"—due to their place of origin, ethnicity, or religion—a politics of inclusion would represent an important change. It would help to put CAR on the path of renewed, peaceful coexistence after violent conflict. Making minority groups feel like they are part of a common nation-building project would also mean finally recognizing them as Central African citizens. This would in turn have an important impact on their own identity, which has been so deeply challenged by years of discrimination that refugees used a narrative of "us-them" in speaking about those who remained in CAR, referring to them as "Central Africans," thereby suggesting that they themselves were not perceived to be Central African.

For many of the refugees who participated in this study, their interviews were their first opportunity to talk about their experience of displacement and their thoughts about reconciliation and justice. The interviews were both a painful process of reliving a period of extreme violence and fear and a source of great relief, as they were finally being listened to. Individuals mainly described their material losses, presumably because talking about lost property and assets is relatively easier than remembering the loss of loved ones. But it also represented a reflection on their previous socioeconomic status, as many had been fairly wealthy traders, mining professionals, or cattle herders in CAR before fleeing.

Displacement has divided families and exposed the most vulnerable people to acute hardship. As a consequence of a more general breakdown of social relations, in the new displaced settings, girls and young women often turn to prostitution for small amounts of money, and children were perceived by interviewees as less mindful and obedient to their parents.

Even though many refugees clearly stated their intention to return, they all knew that it is not yet the right time. Some were clear in their intention to resettle in their country of asylum or apply for relocation to a third country. As many people had already been exposed to loss and displacement before the crisis, they were not confident of a change in CAR's political situation that would create stability and enable them to return or of receiving compensation to help them to make a fresh start. In fact, socioeconomic factors (both in CAR and in their asylum countries) and security were pointed to as the key indicators for return. The correlation between these two factors was very tight, with refugees defining "peace" as the freedom to move around and conduct economic activities.

Many refugees who were interviewed were doubtful about the possibility of living together again with the people who had forced them to flee. According to them, reconciliation would not be easy if and when they returned, and it would need to be actively supported by those both within and outside of the communities they fled. They highlighted the need for strong top-down messages of inclusion coming from the highest state representatives that clearly state that Muslim Central Africans are citizens with the same rights as other citizens. Only such a narrative could change people's attitudes and beliefs and create the conditions needed to rebuild social ties at the local level. In parallel, refugees explained how the restoration of state authority—based on a new principle of inclusion—and symbolic gestures of reconciliation should accompany these messages. Because wounds are still open, for many refugees forgiveness is not yet an option.

When asked (probably for the first time) to reflect on justice, refugees clearly expressed their deep distrust of the national justice system, which was already extremely dysfunctional and corrupt before the crisis. The majority of interviewees would like some sort of international entity to investigate and prosecute the crimes committed in the last few years. Opinions varied widely on who should be investigated and how, but there was agreement that those most responsible for the crisis—mainly former presidents and warlords—should be put on trial. In a context of improved security, traditional chiefs could also play a role, especially in resolving property and land disputes. Compensation for material losses were commonly described as a personal entitlement for losses they had suffered during the conflict. In this sense, they could be seen as a form of reparation.

Based on refugees' concerns and expectations, this study identifies a number of crucial steps that could be taken in order to facilitate the return of refugees, reconciliation, and justice in CAR. Recommendations address three main issues: discussions and policy making, concrete actions to rebuild social ties in CAR, and measures to improve living conditions for Central African refugees in their countries of asylum.

Recommendations

- 1) **Change the narrative of the conflict among national authorities and the international community**, acknowledging the long-standing, latent tensions between Muslims and Christians, northerners and southerners, and cattle herders and farmers.
- 2) **Include refugees' voices in discussions and policies** on return, reconciliation, and justice, facilitating a constant flow of information, a serious debate on the most sensitive issues, and high-level visits to refugee camps.

- 3) **Promote inclusion through top-down messages and symbolic gestures from state officials**, which could change people's viewpoints regarding minority groups in CAR, foster recognition of Muslim and Peuhl citizens' right to live in CAR as equal citizens, and help to give Central Africans the chance to live together again peacefully.
- 4) **Launch a national discussion on transitional justice**, to promote common reflections on issues related to reconciliation and justice and lead to a Central African solution to the crimes committed during the recent crisis.
- 5) **Include reparations for refugees in current peace negotiations**. As victims of human rights violations, refugees strongly feel that they are entitled to receive compensation for their losses.
- 6) **Improve the legal framework on personal documentation and property and land rights in CAR**, through administrative procedures and transparent, simple, and decentralized legislation, which would be a crucial political move towards facilitating the return and reintegration of refugees from minority groups.
- 7) **Rethink community-based reconciliation programs**, moving towards a multilateral, comprehensive approach, with national and local authorities setting a framework of inclusion where community members could work together.
- 8) **Provide psychological support for refugees** to alleviate their suffering, related not only to their experience of displacement but also to years of uncertainty and humiliation.
- 9) **Promote durable solutions for refugees in their countries of asylum**, to promote their socioeconomic inclusion should they be unable to safely return to CAR anytime soon.
- 10) **Support future research** to further improve the understanding of displaced persons' experiences and concerns and help to integrate their voices into ongoing discussions and policies.

I. Introduction

The turmoil of the past few years in the Central African Republic (CAR) was triggered by the overthrow of President François Bozizé by Seleka rebels in 2013, following a decade of instability and a series of rebellions. The rebel coalition, which originated in the remote northern provinces of CAR, was largely (though not exclusively) composed of Muslims. The violence and abuse perpetrated by the Seleka forces led to the creation of a militia, the so-called Anti-Balaka, intended to defend and represent—ethnically and religiously—the majority of Central Africans.

The unprecedented intercommunal violence that broke out at the end of 2013 led to the displacement of nearly 1 million people within a country of a little more than four million inhabitants (25 percent of the population).¹ A large part of the Central African Muslim community was forced to flee to neighboring countries. In addition to the indiscriminate looting of state buildings, ministries, schools, hospitals, and private homes, many human rights violations were committed but went unpunished.² In the last four years, civilians have been exposed to high levels of violence and abuse, and today they still live in fear of attack from armed groups and many remain cut off from public services and economic activity.

When President Michel Djotodia, leader of the Seleka coalition, was forced to resign in January 2014, a new transitional government was established under President Catherine Samba Panza. That same year, the UN Security Council authorized the deployment of an integrated UN peacekeeping mission (MINUSCA) to CAR. In May 2015, the Bangui Forum launched a national dialogue to establish priorities for the transition, including those related to transitional justice. Despite very little progress being made, a constitutional referendum and presidential and legislative elections were held without major incidents between December 2015 and March 2016, and newly elected President Faustin Archange Touadera took office.³

This research report is based on interviews with Central African refugees in Chad and Cameroon and representatives of national and international organizations providing assistance to them. It focuses, in particular, on members of the Muslim and Peuhl communities who were displaced at the very beginning of the crisis, in late 2013 and early 2014.⁴ Muslims and Peuhl Central Africans have been largely perceived as foreigners by other Central Africans, even though they have lived in the country for generations. Consequently, it can be expected that these refugees will be more likely than other groups to experience serious difficulties in returning and rebuilding social ties in their communities of origin. Research was limited to these two communities in order

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to use their experiences to analyze some of the root causes of the conflict. Although often attributed to religious factors, the crisis in CAR is mainly related to long-standing disputes about identity and citizenship and who is considered truly Central African.⁵

One year after the 2015/2016 elections, episodes of extreme identity-based violence reappeared across CAR, with dynamics very similar to that of 2014.⁶ While some refugees returned during the period of relative stability that followed the elections, since early 2017 the country has faced a new and substantial wave of displacement,⁷ with the number of displaced people in and from CAR recently reaching an estimated, unprecedented 1.1 million people.⁸

The issues of return, reconciliation, and justice were the focus of the national forum held in Bangui in May 2015 (the Bangui Forum),⁹ which brought together representatives of civil society, religious organizations, and armed groups to launch a national dialogue and lead the country out of the crisis.¹⁰ It led to the decision to create local Peace and Reconciliation Committees and a Special Criminal Court to judge violations of human rights and international humanitarian law committed since 2003 as well as the recommendation to establish a truth and reconciliation commission.¹¹ So far, refugees' voices have not been heard by the decision makers drafting national policies. The reports of the local consultations that were held leading up to the forum show that refugees' experiences were rarely taken into account during this process, mainly due to the logistical and security challenges of reaching them abroad.¹² Further, the recommendations on reconciliation and transitional justice made in that context were not adjusted in response to the recent evolution of the conflict and displacement. Such adjustments become even more urgent given that supporting CAR authorities in implementing transitional justice as part of the peace and reconciliation process is now MINUSCA's top priority, according to its recently renewed mandate.¹³

This report gathers and analyzes the views of some Central African refugees in Chad and Cameroon so that they can inform understandings of the conflict and be integrated into the ongoing peace process and political dialogue.

This report gathers and analyzes the views of some Central African refugees in Chad and Cameroon so that they can inform understandings of the conflict and be integrated into the ongoing peace process and political dialogue. It should be noted that many of the refugees interviewed for this study were thankful to finally have the opportunity to tell their stories. It was the first time that many of them had been asked about why they had left CAR and what challenges they believe they will face in returning home. For many of the refugees, the interviews may have been their first opportunity to reflect on reconciliation and justice. As a result, on the one hand, their thoughts appeared to be quite sincere and straightforward; but on the other, their lack of previous discussion or reflection on these topics meant they were often trying to formulate possible solutions to complex issues in the relatively short timeframe of the interview itself.

Overall, refugees' experiences of displacement have been extremely traumatic. Most of the people interviewed had reached Chad or Cameroon in early 2014 during a large operation to evacuate the communities most exposed to violence, especially Muslims and Peuhls, when it was clear that international forces on the ground in CAR did not have the capacity to protect them.¹⁴ At that time, neighboring countries sent trucks and planes to extract their own citizens, which represented a unique opportunity for many at-risk Central Africans to escape as well. As a result, many families were divided. Some refugees have not had any news of their close relatives since they fled.¹⁵

The situation is complicated by the fact that most refugees have had to face multiple displacements and resettlements, both in CAR and in their host country. Convoys were repeatedly attacked on their way out of CAR, causing physical and psychological trauma.¹⁶ The majority of those interviewed emphasized the material

dimension of their losses, citing the property and businesses they had to leave behind in order to save their lives. While the death of a family member was often perceived as an unavoidable consequence of the war, because it has happened many times in the past, losing all the material goods that one accumulated over a lifetime, together with the very slim chances of ever being able to recover their former socioeconomic status, was one of the primary concerns of the displaced. As discussed below, this finding has important implications for appropriate justice processes in the future.

Refugees' views on their return and reconciliation varied widely according to their personal experiences and stories. However, there was general consensus on both refugees' willingness to return and that it was not yet the right time to go back. Many interviewees cited peace as a condition for return, defining "peace" as the freedom to move around and conduct economic activities. To ensure these conditions, the state should assume its responsibilities in providing security and services to all of its citizens and restore public services and national security forces. However, in the views of interviewees, not just any state authority should be restored, but one that



On December 5, 2013, Anti-Balaka militias attacked Bangui, killing and wounding hundreds of people; many fled their homes to gather in places where they could find protection, like the city airport. Bangui, 2014. (Juan Carlos Tomasi)

is new and inclusive, built on wide religious, ethnic, and geographical representation. Harboring a long-standing distrust towards state representatives, in part due to their reluctance to work for inclusivity, many of those interviewed view a politics of inclusivity as the only way to rebuild the social contract.

Refugees' conflictive perception of their own identity is evident in the way they define themselves as Central Africans but maintain an "us-them" narrative when talking about which people have the right to live in CAR and which do not. In this sense, inclusivity is seen as a mandatory element of reconciliation: through policies—for example, assuring representation of minority groups in state offices—but also, and perhaps

more importantly, through the words of the country's political leaders. For many, a strong public discourse originating at the highest state level recognizing that Muslims are also Central Africans and that all Central African citizens have the same rights was perceived as the only way to change people's minds and give communities a chance to live together peacefully. With such a top-down message of cohesion guiding the decisions of government officers and security forces, refugees reported that they would be relatively optimistic about the potential resolution of differences and disputes at the community level, despite the deep fractures created by the conflict.

While respondents see a more inclusive state as a solution for administrative institutions and security forces, they were less clear about their expectations of the national justice system. Many stated that "we can't allow a Central African to judge a Central African." When it comes to justice, years of nepotism and corruption have led to deep distrust among all Central Africans of public authorities. Refugees reported the perception that a trial is won either by the person who has more money or the person with some connection to the judge.

The weakness of national justice institutions has made Central Africans very resourceful in terms of dispute resolution. The vast majority of disputes have traditionally been resolved through mediation by the local chief.¹⁷ Refugees still perceived this system to be valid for all issues related to property and land rights, but they do not see it as a solution for alleged crimes involving physical violence, which it has never mediated in the past.

Interviewees, therefore, thought that justice for violations committed during the conflict should be handled by an international body. Because the state is perceived as unable to ensure impartiality, the participation and intervention of the international community was considered essential to guaranteeing any kind of justice for victims. For many interviewees, the international community should also be involved in policy and decision making on reparations, as national authorities are not considered to be resourceful or reliable enough. For most of those interviewed, compensation was considered as an individual's entitlement to recover—at least partially—the belongings that were unfairly lost during the conflict. The social and symbolic dimensions of reparations, however, were rarely mentioned.

Since 2014, national and international organizations in CAR have made significant efforts to improve community reconciliation and social cohesion. NGOs, UN agencies, and the MINUSCA Civil Affairs component have provided financial and technical support to a plethora of local mediation committees, in parallel with other initiatives intended to build trust within and across communities.¹⁸ Many of the refugees that were interviewed were unaware of these efforts, however, and, if aware of them, a lack of inclusivity was considered to be the main reason for their failure. Programs in CAR to address and restore property and land rights are still at a very early stage, given that very few returns have been registered so far. Similarly, authorities are struggling to re-establish civil registers and issue birth certificates for refugees and others.

In Chad and Cameroon, refugees have so far benefited from only very basic assistance for survival needs, such as food, shelter, and health. Awareness campaigns on peaceful cohabitation have sought to improve coexistence within local Chadian communities, but no programs or sessions have focused on post-return reconciliation or conflict-related justice in CAR. Finally, there are no reports of community-led initiatives to encourage return and reconciliation, which is a clear sign of the reduced space the conflict has created for such efforts.

II. Definition of Terms

The term *reconciliation* refers to processes of building or rebuilding relationships, often after conflict, repression, and massive violations of human rights. The word derives from the Latin term *conciliatus*, which means “coming together.” Ideally, reconciliation would prevent, once and for all, the past from becoming the seed of renewed conflict. It would consolidate peace, break the cycle of violence, and strengthen newly established or re-established democratic institutions. As a backward-looking notion, reconciliation involves the personal healing of survivors, reparation for past injustices, the building or rebuilding of nonviolent relationships between individuals and communities, and the acceptance of a common vision and understanding of the past by the former parties to a conflict. In its forward-looking dimension, reconciliation means enabling victims to get on with life and, at the level of society, the establishment of a civilized political dialogue and an adequate sharing of power.¹⁹

Since 2014, the words reconciliation and social cohesion have been largely employed in CAR by both state authorities and the international community during public speeches and awareness campaigns to describe the only possible way to achieve peace. As a result, these terms have entered the vocabulary of Central Africans at a deep level, but without a clear definition for them or an equivalent translation in the national language of Sango. They are mostly used in conversations with foreigners to show the willingness of the respondent to work for peace, but they do not necessarily refer to specific actions that people would undertake to rebuild social ties in their own community. In interviews, the researcher paraphrased the word reconciliation into, for example, “living together again” or “getting along with each other.” The word reconciliation was used by the researcher in an interview only if first introduced by the respondent. When the term was introduced by the respondent, the researcher asked the person to explain what it meant to him or her.

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The concept of *transitional justice* refers to justice-focused processes that societies undertake in the aftermath of large-scale human rights violations, typically in the relatively recent past. These processes consist of both judicial and nonjudicial processes and mechanisms, including prosecution initiatives, truth seeking, reparations programs, institutional reform, or an appropriate combination thereof. Transitional justice aims to confront impunity, provide redress to victims, recognize the dignity of victims as citizens and rights bearers, restore trust in state institutions, and prevent the recurrence of violations. It may also contribute to broader objectives, such as restoration of the rule of law, good governance, democratization, peacebuilding and conflict prevention, and reconciliation.

In CAR, the term *justice* mainly refers to state justice, which implies it is led by the judiciary, police, prosecutors, and judges. Using this term in interviews, therefore, would likely have limited interviewees' discussions and responses to forms of state justice, implicitly excluding other forms of traditional and customary justice, which are actually the most widely used in CAR. For this reason, the researcher did not introduce the word *justice* if not previously used by the respondent, using instead phrases such as "ways to resolve disputes" or "ways to decide on abuses committed during the events." With reference to this last paraphrasing, it is important to note that for Central Africans the word abuse has a larger meaning than the word *crime*, which refers only to a crime committed against a person but does not include in its common use crimes such as theft and looting. Moreover, the term events (*événements*, in French) is the common way to refer to the specific phase of the conflict that had a direct impact on most of the refugees interviewed for this study: for the large majority of them, it refers to December 5, 2013, the day of the Anti-Balaka attack on Bangui.

Displacement occurs when a person or group has been forced or compelled to flee or leave their home or place of habitual residence. The 1951 Refugee Convention defined a refugee as someone who flees across a border to avoid persecution, but a broader definition has emerged since then, as reflected in the 1969 Organization of African Unity Refugee Convention and the 1984 Cartagena Declaration on Refugees, which identifies a refugee as someone trying to avoid the effects of armed conflicts, situations of generalized violence, or human rights violations.²⁰ Durable solutions to displacement include voluntary return, local integration in the country of asylum, and resettlement in a third location or country.

Central Africans who fled to Chad in 2013–14 have been registered by UNHCR and the Chadian government either as refugees or as returnees. With the term returnee, Chadian authorities refer to two categories of people: those who were born in Chad but moved to CAR years before the conflict and those who were born in CAR but have an ancestor of Chadian nationality. It should be noted that according to Central African law a person born in the country to foreign parents does not automatically have the right to Central African nationality, but must apply for it. Given this, along with the fact that in CAR reconciliation and return are strictly related to the notion of citizenship, both refugees and those labeled "returnees" by Chadian authorities were included in this study. The difference in their legal status and living conditions is further detailed in section 4.

III. Methodology

This report is based on two sets of in-depth, qualitative interviews with 42 Central African displaced persons and representatives of 20 national and international organizations working abroad or in CAR. Interviews were carried out in person by one researcher during a five-week visit to CAR (Bangui), Cameroon (Garoua-Boulai), and Chad (N'djamena and Goré), from July 25 to August 29, 2017. The open-ended questions used in interviews, which were defined before the field research began, can be divided into three main areas: 1) the experience of displacement, 2) intentions to return and the meaning of reconciliation, 3) the meaning of justice and its role in rebuilding the community. Interviews were conducted individually (not in a group setting); most lasted approximately one hour.

Interviews with CAR Refugees in Chad and Cameroon

Of the 42 displaced persons interviewed, 34 were living in Chad and 8 in Cameroon. Of the 34 living in Chad, 19 were registered as refugees and 15 as returnees. In Chad, four interviews were carried out in the capital of N'djamena²¹ and 30 in the camps located in the southern region of Logone Oriental, near Goré and along the border with CAR.²² In Cameroon, interviews were carried out in Garoua Boulai: five in the camps²³ and three in the town. Despite the different settlements and conditions described in section 4, Central African refugees in Chad and Cameroon came from the same communities in CAR and shared similar experiences of displacement and similar fears and expectations about the future.²⁴

Before carrying out interviews in a camp setting, a preliminary presentation of the research and its objectives was made to local authorities (Préfet), camp managers (UNHCR or NGO), and camp leaders (refugees' representatives elected in each camp). After the presentation, the researcher gave some criteria to camp leaders for choosing respondents and guaranteeing the largest possible representation in terms of gender, age, ethnic group, place of origin, and social status. Respondents were then interviewed individually in a private space inside the camp—usually one of the offices used for community meetings—with only the researcher and one interpreter present. The pre-set list of open-ended questions was adjusted before starting the interviews to correspond to the respondents' primary language and level of education. Very few of the displaced had more than a primary or secondary level of education, with the exception of the imams, and only a few who had studied in Koranic schools. With the support of a local interpreter, interviews were carried out mostly in Sango, Arabic, and Fulbe. Only a few refugees who were interviewed felt comfortable enough speaking in French to express their thoughts in that language.

Of the 42 refugees interviewed, 22 were men and 20 women. Their ages ranged from 24 to 71: 3 were under 30 (1 woman); 15 were aged 30 to 39 (8 women); 11 were aged 40 to 50 (7 women); 13 were older than 50 (4 women). The majority were born in the southern and western provinces of CAR (36, including 9 from Bangui), while only 5 were born in the east and just one in Chad. However, half of those interviewed lived in Bangui before their displacement, while the other half resided in one of the western CAR provinces.²⁵

The vast majority of the displaced were married (33), with some divorced (4) and some widowed (4). The number of children each had varied from 1 to 14 (often with several wives, as polygamy is legal in CAR). Only one person was single without any children. Most interviewees had been wealthy traders, mining professionals, or cattle herders in CAR, making previous social status to be medium income (24) and medium-high (11) income. Finally, the ethnic composition of the sample revealed how issues related to return and reconciliation are much more linked to people's origins and ethnic identity than to their religious faith. In fact, 36 respondents belonged to minority groups,²⁶ and only 6 belonged to ethnic groups considered native to CAR.²⁷

Each interview started with a presentation of the study and a guarantee of complete confidentiality of the information and opinions shared—that is, statements would not be attributed to individual respondents by name. To put respondents at ease, the first question was always very open and related to their life before displacement. Then, respondents were asked to describe their experience of displacement, their human and material losses, and their conditions as refugees. In the second phase, respondents were asked about their intention to return and their thoughts on if and how it could still be possible to live together with others in their community in CAR once the conflict ends. Finally, respondents commented on their understanding of justice and the role they could see for conflict resolution mechanisms to rebuild relations in their community.

As mentioned previously, the list of questions was adapted to each respondent. Instead of basing conversations on theoretical notions such as reconciliation and justice, the researcher built on practical examples given by the respondents themselves in discussing these topics. This method led to longer interviews, but it was useful for encouraging people to reflect on topics that may have been broached with them for the very first time, given that surveys and research carried out in the Central African refugee community until then had mainly focused on humanitarian assistance and basic needs.

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Considering the number of displaced settings visited during the research, a different local interpreter was used at each location, with each receiving initial training on the study. This meant that he or she had a good understanding of the local population and their experiences; it also meant that they had varying levels of French proficiency and different approaches to translation.

Regarding the study sample, while gender, ethnic group, place of origin, and social status criteria ensured wide representation, the age range proved to be unbalanced towards the more senior members of the community. This can be explained in two ways: respondents were selected by camp leaders, who tended to prioritize elders, given their important role in the Muslim culture; and often the most senior members of the community asked explicitly to be interviewed because they were eager to share their stories and opinions. In response to the researcher's request to include more young people and students among the respondents, camp leaders chose people aged between 20 and 40 years old, as a "student" locally refers more to a life-long social status as a literate person than to someone currently pursuing a degree or education.

Interviews with senior members of the community surely enriched this research by bringing the experiences of individuals who have lived through many different regimes and conflicts. But their interviews tended to be marked by a deep sense of fatigue brought on by repeated loss and a lack of hope of seeing changes in attitudes among the country's leaders. Being very influential and respected in the camp, their experiences have also impacted the narrative of younger members of the Central African refugee community.

Younger refugees interviewed for this study were much more inclined than their older counterparts to find new opportunities in their asylum country or elsewhere, instead of thinking of returning and taking part in the reconstruction of their own country. Older and younger interviewees did not hide their concerns for their children (or grandchildren). Together with the lack of a proper education and the breakdown of social relations due to the conflict, they believed that children have less regard for both their parents' authority and basic social rules. The fate of girls and young women was a particular source of concern. Due to the disruption of traditional and moral references, interviewees reported that many had turned to prostitution to earn money.

Interviews with National and International Organizations

A total of 20 interviews were carried out with representatives of national (2) and international (18) organizations, including both NGOs and UN agencies. The prevalence of foreign organizations in CAR can be explained by the fact that both humanitarian and recovery programs are mostly run by international stakeholders, with a very minor role currently played by local NGOs or civil society groups. Twelve interviews were conducted in CAR (Bangui) and 10 in Chad (8 in N'djamena and 2 in Goré). Most interviews were carried out in French, and some in English.

Interview questions related to: the experience of displacement and assistance provided to refugees; the impact of the conflict on the communities and the possible ways to overcome tensions in the event of return; programs,

and especially the community-based programs, that could facilitate conflict resolution, reconciliation, and justice; and the integration of the voices of the displaced in national policies. Only a few respondents were in CAR or in the neighboring countries at the peak period of displacement (2013–14). As a result, only a few were able to provide deep and personal reflections on it.

In most cases, respondents discussed programs that were already in place or planned by their organizations; they provided only a few comments on issues such as national reconciliation and transitional justice. This could be explained because—very similar to refugee interviewees—members of international organizations appeared to be much more

oriented towards responding to the immediate basic needs of displaced persons, rather than to medium- and long-term plans for repairing social ties in CAR. The constant state of emergency in which humanitarian and development workers operate has not allowed for individual or collective reflections on how to address fundamental coexistence issues once the conflict is over.



In September 2013, a new wave of violence affected Bouca, a northern town, forcing more than 1,000 people to flee their homes and hide in the bush. Bouca (Ouham), 2013. (Juan Carlos Tomasi)

IV. Background on the Displacement Situation

While it has been described in many ways, the situation in CAR is certainly a huge displacement crisis. In a country of a little more than four million people, violence and attacks have forced almost a quarter of the population to flee, either internally or to a neighboring country. As of July 2017, UNHCR had registered 600,000 internally displaced persons in CAR, a 33 percent increase since the beginning of the year.²⁸ Cameroon, Chad, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), and the Republic of Congo now host a total of 480,000 Central African refugees. While some returns were registered in 2016 following a period of relative stability in the country after elections, in 2017 the number of refugees spiked, especially in DRC.

The UNHCR Regional Refugee Response Plan,²⁹ drafted in 2015 and constantly underfunded, is starting to be incongruous with a displacement pattern becoming progressively chronic. In fact, the largest, most recent wave of refugees dates back to 2013. There are also those who fled crises in 2003 and 2007 who have not returned. Hundreds of thousands of Central Africans are now stuck in camps, most for at least four years, with very few opportunities for integration into their asylum country and even fewer chances of return in the near future considering the rapid deterioration of the situation in CAR, which has pushed the United Nations to talk again about “early warning signs of genocide.”³⁰

The displaced population considered for this research includes those who fled at the peak of sectarian violence in late 2013 and early 2014. After the March 2013 coup, violence and violations committed by Seleka elements against unarmed civilians led thousands to mobilize in response and create self-defense groups.³¹ These groups, so-called Anti-Balaka, began attacking Seleka bases in the outer regions of CAR in September 2013, provoking a cycle of retaliations. Progressively, these have targeted not only Seleka elements but also Muslim civilians

accused of collusion with the rebels.³² This began the extreme polarization of the conflict along ethnic and identity lines, which pitted citizens who claim to be “Central Africans” (understood to be members of dominant groups) against those considered to be foreigners (members of minority groups, including Muslims) and thus not entitled to remain in the country. While often described as religion based, in reality the crisis in CAR is the result of decades of unsolved problems of weak state institutions and a lack of inclusivity.

While often described as religion based, in reality the crisis in CAR is the result of decades of unsolved problems of weak state institutions and a lack of inclusivity.

A crucial point in the crisis and a significant date for this study is December 5, 2013, when Anti-Balaka groups attacked the capital Bangui, then controlled by Seleka.³³ In the following weeks, it is estimated that a thousand civilians died in an unprecedented spiral of violence, while three-quarters of Bangui residents fled their homes.³⁴ At the same time, similar attacks and dynamics occurred in several towns in CAR’s southern and western regions. The Muslim and Peuhl minorities were particularly targeted, with African Union (MISCA) and French

“Operation Sangaris”) forces unable to protect them.³⁵ Most had no choice but to flee. With the exception of a few enclaves—Bangui’s well-known PK5 neighborhood, which is CAR’s biggest Muslim enclave, and some villages in the west—a large part of the Central African Muslim and Peuhl communities left the country.³⁶ Special planes and trucks were sent by foreign governments to evacuate their nationals, and many Central Africans took the chance to flee in them as well, in order to save their lives. These convoys brought the Central African refugees interviewed for this study to Chad and Cameroon.

CAR then went through a three-year transitional period that concluded in March 2016 with the establishment of an elected, legitimate president, Touadera. Since the beginning of the crisis, many cease-fires and peace agreements have been negotiated and signed.³⁷ Nevertheless, clashes and violence continue throughout the country, and



Muslim houses destroyed in the 3rd district (PK5) of Bangui. Bangui, 2017. (Enrica Picco)

at the time of this study armed groups were present in 14 out of 16 provinces. The absence of a nationally organized and inclusive political dialogue and the progressive fragmentation of the armed groups—geographically and strategically, driven by very local dynamics—have led to, among other things, a resurgence of violence along ethnic and identity lines, especially in south-eastern CAR.³⁸

While some refugee returns from Chad and Cameroon were registered before early 2017, the recent deterioration of the security situation has made them much more sporadic. Some returnees have gone back to their asylum countries.³⁹

For the Muslim and Peuhl communities considered in this study, the opportunity for safe return is shrinking. Given the presence of Anti-Balaka elements in large parts of the areas where refugees come from, together with the lack of sustainable economic opportunities, the only areas currently safe enough for their return are in Bangui, particularly the PK5 neighborhood,⁴⁰ and in a few towns in the west, such as Bouar and Berberati. Meanwhile, discussions for a national strategy of return have been on hold since 2016. Even if movements between CAR and neighboring countries are and will most likely remain very fluid, with individuals going back and forth regularly to evaluate the situation or conduct business—the refugees interviewed for this study know that they will not be returning anytime soon.

By far, Cameroon hosts the largest number of Central African refugees: 275,000 in July 2017, of whom approximately 90,000 were already present in the country before 2013. Refugees have settled along the Cameroonian-Central African border both in camps and urban settings.⁴¹ At the beginning of the crisis, Cameroonian authorities and international organizations struggled to deal with the influx of refugees, with delays in the refugee registration process and provision of life-saving humanitarian assistance.⁴² Often accused of being a source of instability, refugees have not been spared intimidations and abuse by local police in their country of asylum.⁴³ After more than three years, Central African refugees in Cameroon seem to be settling in more: even if many are still living in camps and receive humanitarian assistance, freedom of movement and access to Cameroonian social services, such as schooling and health care, have increased. “After God, the UNHCR,”⁴⁴ said one refugee interviewed in Cameroon. Functional services and security are probably the main reasons for refugees being able to envisage a long-term future in Cameroon and considering buying or building their own houses there. However, the

limited local economy is largely closed off to refugees, whose incomes still mainly come from CAR, through their businesses or remittances.⁴⁵

Since the beginning of the crisis, the movement of refugees has also been quite consistent along CAR's southern border: as of July 2017, 31,000 refugees are registered in the Republic of the Congo and 102,000 in the DRC.⁴⁶ In the former, the number of displaced persons has been very stable since October 2015, when Bangui was affected by violent riots that emptied entire neighborhoods. In DRC, however, the influx of refugees drastically increased in the first half of 2017, in parallel with the shift of the conflict towards south-eastern CAR. The Anti-Balaka attack in Bangassou in May 2017 and incessant fighting between ex-Seleka factions and Anti-Balaka along the border forced many to cross into DRC.⁴⁷ UNCHR registered more than 60,000 new arrivals in DRC's North Oubangui and Bas-Uelé provinces, with those figures expected to increase.⁴⁸

Central African Refugees and Returnees in Chad

Of countries in the region, Chad was the most engaged at the peak of the crisis in 2013–14,⁴⁹ sending dozens of planes and trucks to extract Chadian nationals and Muslims from CAR. However, during these operations, serious allegations of violence and killings of Central African civilians were made against the Chadian army, which had escorted the convoys.⁵⁰ In response, in May 2014, Chad withdrew its contingent from the African-led International Support Mission to the Central African Republic (MISCA) and closed its border with CAR.⁵¹ At the time, almost 150,000 people had already fled to Chad: 73,000 were registered as refugees, and approximately 74,000–75,000 were considered returnees (Chadian nationals who had been living in CAR returning to their country).⁵² This difference has deeply marked the assistance provided to the two groups. Despite the progressive reduction of the humanitarian presence and funds in southern Chad, Central African refugees are settled in well-organized camps along the Chadian-Central African border with access to basic services. While the border has remained closed and under strict control of the Chadian army, violations against Central Africans committed by Chadian soldiers have progressively decreased,⁵³ although economic retaliations (such as illegal roadblocks and taxes) are still ongoing.

In Chad, assistance to Central African refugees and returnees has addressed their basic needs. The southern provinces of the country, where most of the displaced live, have witnessed a progressive reduction in available humanitarian and recovery funds, due to both the deterioration of the situation around Lake Chad and the deep economic crisis in the country. Chadian programs and initiatives for displaced persons are generally coordinated by the Commission Nationale d'Accueil et de Reinsertion des Réfugiés et des Rapatriés (CNARR), a governmental body in charge of maintaining a consistent response to the displacement crisis, despite multiple situations of displacement along the country's western, southern, and eastern borders.

A trilateral agreement among CAR, Chad, and UNHCR was under negotiation to create three humanitarian corridors (in Gore, Maro, and Harassa) to allow Central African refugees in Chad to return home.⁵⁴ In parallel, discussions on the reopening of the Chadian-Central African border were in progress. However, both initiatives were abandoned in late 2016, after CAR experienced a new wave of violence. In July 2017, the Chadian government, with the support of UNHCR, hosted a forum in N'djamena to analyze factors hindering the socioeconomic inclusion of refugees in Chad. Participants included several representatives of

There was a general consensus among interviewees belonging to national and international organizations that assistance for refugees covers only their basic needs, with almost no support for second-level needs, like access to justice.

ministries involved in refugees' inclusion, diplomatic corps, donors, UN agencies, local and international NGOs, local authorities of regions hosting refugees, and refugee representatives from each camp. Participants unanimously agreed that the adoption of Chad's draft Asylum Law would facilitate the priorities outlined during the forum, which center around five strategic areas: freedom of movement, right to apply for naturalization, access to land, access to employment, and access to financial opportunities.⁵⁵ Despite the success of the initiative and its clear recommendations, the outcomes remain solely on paper, mainly due to a lack of funding.⁵⁶

In terms of assistance to refugees, the main gaps in Chad are linked to health care, food security, and education. There was a general consensus among interviewees belonging to national and international organizations that assistance for refugees covers only their basic needs, with almost no support for second-level needs, like access to justice. They also agreed on a worrying trend: the progressive reduction of assistance has led to an increase in both the number of children who do not attend school and the “survival sex” practiced by girls and young women in urban and rural areas. While some important work has been done to facilitate peaceful cohabitation with Chadian local communities through awareness campaigns and events, issues related to return have not been addressed so far. Only the International Committee of the Red Cross is providing assistance with family reunification to both refugees and returnees, which is part of its mandate.



Anti-Balaka militias, which formed as self-defense groups to protect local populations from bandits in the outer region of the country, were openly in charge of security in the displaced camps of Bangui. Bangui, 2014. (Juan Carlos Tomasi)

Since the crisis began, UNHCR has prioritized durable solutions that could allow refugees to integrate into local communities. In August 2017, a workshop on peaceful coexistence in southern Chad produced positive results, as the local and refugee communities are ethnically and culturally very similar. In addition to the more traditional camp setting, in some areas like Moissala and Diba, UNHCR has assisted refugees in settling outside of camps, in host communities, from their initial arrival. As part of a longer-term strategy, UNHCR foresees the transformation of existing refugee camps into villages as part of a larger urbanization plan for the area, supported by the World Bank. Resettlement in a third country remains an option for refugees, although

the global quota for resettlements has dropped in the past year. Finally, repatriation remained a difficult and risky option at the time of writing. While in 2016, 15 percent of displaced people were ready to return,⁵⁷ the deterioration of the security situation in CAR has not only discouraged returnees but also led UNHCR to prepare a contingency plan in the event of a new influx of refugees.⁵⁸

In contrast, people registered as Chadian returnees do not have any internationally recognized legal status, nor do they benefit from any special assistance, as they are expected to rely on family connections and resources in what is seen as their country of origin.⁵⁹ However, many whose families have lived in CAR for generations arrived in Chad for the very first time as forcibly displaced persons. Although they received humanitarian assistance on arrival, no substantive reintegration plan has been developed by the Chadian government to assimilate them into local communities. Similarly, returnee registrations and distribution of Chadian identity cards are still far from

complete, limiting their freedom of movement and access to services. As a consequence, most returnees have settled in camps, where they live in very precarious conditions, with almost no assistance.

SOCADEV, a Chadian NGO, has been mandated by the Chadian government as camp manager for returnee sites. In 2014, it focused on four areas of intervention: social cohesion, food security, environmental protection, and water and sanitation. Since then, due to reductions in assistance, which was even more important for returnees than for refugees, SOCADEV has only run one water and sanitation program funded by UNICEF. Other national NGOs provide some assistance in other areas.⁶⁰ In 2016, the French NGO ACTED launched an innovative program of socioeconomic reintegration in N'djamena for returnees from the Gaoui camp.⁶¹ The pilot project, which may be replicated in southern provinces, provides displaced persons with support for housing and helps the generation of economic activities that could allow them to settle outside of the camp. It also has a strong advocacy component, urging Chadian authorities to provide identity cards to returnees leaving the camp.

V. Findings on the Experiences of Displaced Persons

For many Central African refugees, interviews conducted for this research were their very first opportunity to tell their story. “Thanks for coming to listen to us,”⁶² they often said, reporting that “nobody from the [CAR] government has ever come here”⁶³ and that “President Touadera went to N’djamena but didn’t come here to visit his people.” At the same time, recounting their experiences was both a great relief and an extremely painful process. On the one hand, being listened to helped them to feel like their dignity was restored, as they could present themselves as who they had been and describe what they had built before their displacement, making clear the differences between the more prosperous conditions of their former lives and the poor living conditions as an asylee. On the other hand, telling their heartbreaking stories and remembering their human and material losses was extremely distressful for most of them. Sometimes the interviewee broke into tears or was unable to continue, and the interview had to be suspended or interrupted;⁶⁴ in others, signs of post-traumatic stress were evident in the respondent’s words or gestures.⁶⁵

Some important patterns emerged during interviews with Central African Muslim refugees in Chad and Cameroon. Findings include their common experience of discrimination in CAR prior to being displaced, with most claiming to have suffered injustices for decades due to their identity and/or origin. However, there were stark differences in the experiences of those who fled Bangui under international military protection and those who fled the outer regions where the chances of being escorted abroad by international forces were much more limited. Further, the majority of respondents focused on describing their material losses, rather than the physical or psychological harm they had suffered as individuals and as family members. Their deep sense of humiliation brought on by their new condition as refugees was evident; it was a constant theme in their interviews. Finally, concerns were repeatedly raised about how displacement has affected their most vulnerable community members, such as women, children, and minority groups (like the Peuhl).

Almost all of the displaced persons interviewed for this study described the forms of violence they had suffered in 2013–14 as the culmination of a long history of discrimination against Muslims in CAR.

Long-standing, Identity-based Discrimination

“In CAR, if you are a Muslim, you are a foreigner.” — 38-year-old married man from Bangui, living in Dosseye (Chad)

Almost all of the displaced persons interviewed for this study described the forms of violence they had suffered in 2013–14 as the culmination of a long history of discrimination against Muslims in CAR. They reported that, even before the crisis, “if you had a Muslim name, you were stopped by the police,”⁶⁶ which is why many Muslims added a Christian name to their identity card to avoid harassment. For Muslims, the chances of obtaining a job in the public administration or entering politics were extremely limited.⁶⁷ Even if born in CAR to Central African parents,⁶⁸

a Muslim was usually perceived by other Central Africans as a foreigner. “The conditions to get Central African nationality should be taught in school,” insisted one man; “[Central Africans] are biased [against Muslims].”⁶⁹

Despite the prejudice, and although some felt abandoned by their country,⁷⁰ none of the interviewees hesitated to define themselves as Central African. However, it is clear that being constantly perceived as foreigners in their own country has impacted the construction of their own identity. In fact, some people started their interview specifying that they were “100 percent” Central African but had converted to Islam (usually after getting married).⁷¹ In fact, they claimed to be originally from an ethnic group called the Gbaya, which historically is considered among the first peoples to have arrived in the area. In their minds, this makes being forced to flee even more unfair than for other refugees from CAR. Finally, that the majority of interviewees spoke about those who remained in the country using an “us-them” narrative is a clear sign of the effect that a lifetime of discrimination and prejudice has had on their own identity.

Bangui and the Outer Regions: Different Patterns of Escape

Different patterns were identified in the experiences of those refugees who had lived in the capital of Bangui and those who had lived in the country’s outer regions. In Bangui, the Anti-Balaka attack on December 5, 2013, took inhabitants by surprise: “I thought that was happening in the small villages, it couldn’t happen in Bangui,” remarked a 33-year-old woman originally from Bangui.⁷² However, Muslims had found a provisional refuge in the capital’s PK5 neighborhood (in the 3rd district), where most already lived or had relatives. This made their escape from CAR extremely dangerous, as they could only reach the airport or



leave the country in convoys escorted by peacekeeping troops. Still, their access to international organizations (for example, the International Organization for Migration, which was in charge of most evacuations) or to foreign embassies was easier than elsewhere, giving them more evacuation options. While the majority of refugees fled Bangui immediately because of imminent threats to their lives, some “waited to see if the situation would improve” before leaving,⁷³ while others eventually decided to leave because there were no longer any economic opportunities.⁷⁴

Muslim women who fled from Bangui in February 2014, during the peak of the inter-communal violence, were forced to lie down with their families in a truck full of displaced people. Ndele (Bamingui-Bangoran), 2015. (Juan Carlos Tomasi)

In contrast, Muslims living in CAR’s western regions mostly did not have a choice of whether or not to flee. In some cases, they gathered in a local church or mosque before being evacuated.⁷⁵ In Berberati, for example, “the Anti-Balaka asked the bishop to let the Muslims out [of the church where they were hiding] so that they could kill them all.” After negotiations led by the bishop, Muslims were allowed to remain in the church for three more months before leaving.⁷⁶ In other cases, people were evacuated to the border by Seleka combatants who were also leaving the area.⁷⁷ But most often, their only chance of survival was to leave in a convoy escorted by peacekeeping troops. It should be noted that the majority of interviewees were very critical of the French forces

in CAR. Allegedly, after their arrival, French soldiers forcibly disarmed Muslims. A 35-year-old woman from Paoua reported, the Sangaris “disarmed all our [Muslim] husbands but not the Anti-Balaka. If you have no arms, the [Anti-Balaka] can kill you like a goat.”⁷⁸ Disarmed and abandoned by international forces, people in the outer regions had no option but to leave by any means possible to the nearest safe place in Cameroon or Chad.

A Focus on Material Losses

When asked about their losses, refugees talked primarily about their material losses: homes, shops, fields, cattle, and business opportunities. This is striking considering the physical and psychological violence they and/or their close family members had suffered. It can possibly be explained by two factors: first, talking about abuses was very distressing. Second, part of their identity had been defined by the assets they and their families had amassed over a lifetime, coming from generations of traders and businessmen. This made their current living conditions in the camps all the more unbearable. “Here I earn 100 CFA francs (USD \$0.10) a day, when in Boali I have my life,” said a 32-year-old man from Boali living in Doholo.⁷⁹

A woman from Paoua complained, “here we don’t have work to do.”⁸⁰ Similarly, another woman reported, “we can’t run a business here,” as they do not have enough money or contacts to start up new activities.⁸¹ “Here I have no choice but farming,” said another,⁸² referring to the community fields made available by UNHCR to allow refugees to earn some income.

Most of the refugees believed they had quite reliable information on the status of the assets they had left behind in CAR. Most were in contact with people back in their home village or town. Mobile phones were by far the most common way to receive news from home, calling a family member who remained in CAR, neighbors, or even local authorities if the respondents had a significant role in their community before displacement.⁸³ If no mobile network was available, another good source of information they reported were others travelling from

the area where they had come from. This sense of being well informed about the situation in CAR represents a crucial factor that will influence their return: if their houses have been looted but not completely destroyed people know they can count on having something to start with when and if they go back.

In many cases, refugees’ houses were completely demolished, without even the foundations being spared. They were aware that this was meant to send them a clear message: locals do not want them to return.

However, in many cases, refugees’ houses were completely demolished, without even the foundations being spared. Interviewees told stories about the destruction of their homes with mixed feelings. On the one hand, they were aware that this was meant to send them a clear message: locals do not want them to return. On the other hand, a 38-year-old male refugee

reported being sadly astonished that buildings that cost millions of CFA francs (thousands of US dollars) were destroyed to sell bricks worth only 1,000 CFA francs each (USD \$2), wondering why locals did not occupy them instead.⁸⁴ Sometimes, the plot of land where a house had been built was divided and resold by the neighbors, the local chief, or the mayor.⁸⁵ Similarly, fields were occupied and cattle stolen. Settling legal issues related to stolen assets and unlawfully resold or occupied properties is crucial to any national strategy of return, but so far they have been barely discussed by the government and other important parties in CAR.

The Cost of Harm and Human Losses

“They were telling us that people will come and kill us. Suddenly, it was true.” — 45-year-old woman from Bangui

Central African refugees fled horrific violence, including kidnapping, torture, and killings. They saw members of their community and relatives shot to death, murdered with knives or machetes, often dismembered and sometimes eaten.⁸⁶ “How is cannibalism still possible in the 21st century?,” asked a 35-year-old woman from Bangui.⁸⁷ Not everybody directly witnessed such terrible acts, but stories and rumors contributed to respondents’ fears, leading them to decide to leave everything behind to escape to safety. While responsibility for the conflict itself was generally attributed broadly to armed groups and politicians, respondents made a clear distinction in identifying the culprits of specific crimes: they appeared to be much more affected when atrocities were perpetrated by members of their own community than when committed by unknown combatants from other villages or regions.

After years of conflict, Central Africans’ resilience is extremely high. To meet their daily needs, many have learned to constantly look ahead to the future and often avoid thinking about painful memories, including those involving family members. At first, a 50-year-old widow spoke only about her material losses; it was not until the end of her interview, when asked about her social status, that she said she was widowed and, at the researcher’s request, described losing both her husband and son during the conflict. Both were brutally killed by the Anti-Balaka on their way back from the field.⁸⁸ Talking about their murders was extremely painful for her: not only did it make her relive the experience, but it also reminded her that she cannot count on them anymore for her daily subsistence.

At times, identity-based violence was perpetrated between members of the same family. This happened particularly when a family member had converted to Islam after marrying a Muslim, which implied changing their community, assuming a new identity, and perhaps weakening relations with their parents and blood relatives. In one case, a 32-year-old woman who converted to Islam reported being chased by her own aunt (a Christian) from the house where she and her children had found refuge: “Your time with Seleka is over now,” she was told.⁸⁹ Another woman who defined herself as “100% Central African and married to a Muslim,” saw her son (who is Muslim) beaten by her brother (who is Christian).⁹⁰ A 50-year-old widow reported that her nephew born to a Muslim father and Christian mother was killed by his maternal uncle.⁹¹

Many families have been separated as a result of displacement. A 50-year-old widow from Bangui reported that she had had no news of her two sons since the beginning of the conflict: “They were traders and they were travelling at that time.”⁹² A 38-year-old man also from Bangui said that for four years he had received no news of his parents, who were cattle herders in eastern CAR, based between Bria and Bambari.⁹³ Another



Civilians from Bouca fled retaliations from armed groups, seeking refuge in churches, mosques, hospitals, and, in this case, a local health center. Bouca (Ouham), 2013. (Juan Carlos Tomasi)

young man lost track of his mother and brothers when they fled to Nigeria,⁹⁴ while his only option to escape was to Chad. A 27-year-old woman from Berberati reported fleeing alone while pregnant, because her husband was away working in a mine.⁹⁵ She first went to Cameroon, but then heard her husband was in Chad and started travelling on her own to join him. She gave birth during the trip and used her last bit of money to buy clothes for the baby and a bus ticket to Dosseye, where her husband was living.

Some had to face the burden of displacement alone, particularly men who were working far from home and were surprised by the crisis; young people from the country's provinces who had gone to Bangui to complete their studies and had no means to reunite with their families before fleeing; and women who were already widowed or divorced and had to flee with their young children. The lives of two young male interviewees were both put in danger by some university classmates who identified them to Anti-Balaka militias, but they were later rescued by other classmates before they were captured.⁹⁶

Psychological Harm: Constant Humiliation

Constant in interviewees' stories was a deep sense of humiliation. Often, they expressed being humiliated by their escape from CAR and their current living conditions. The vast majority of refugees did not have time before they fled to take anything more than some clothes and some money; they felt that all they left behind would be looted or destroyed and that if they ever went back, they would have to start over from scratch. For some, the escape itself was particularly traumatic. One woman who made it to Danamadja said she left without wearing shoes.⁹⁷ Another woman said: "I left in my night clothes: it was only when I got to a village close by that the women there gave me a scarf to cover my head."⁹⁸ The fear and the distress caused by loss was so great that one woman living in a camp in N'djamena reported, "when I arrived here, I got sick. I dreamed about the events, my hair went white."⁹⁹

When they arrived in their country of asylum, the refugees had to face another kind of humiliation, drastic changes in their traditional social and familial roles. Even if they felt safe, a fundamental change had occurred for family breadwinners, as a 55-year-old man reported: "Before we were taking care of our family, now we are being cared

for."¹⁰⁰ Heads-of-household who had been financially secure suddenly became dependent on aid assistance. The only option they were given to earn money was to work in the community fields made available by UNHCR. "I'm not a farmer. They give me fields and seeds, but I don't know what to do with them," said a man from Boali.¹⁰¹ Finally, many felt humiliated by how locals in Chad and Cameroon treat them. "Chadian people said to us: 'It is our land, you have nothing to do here,'" and "Cameroonian people make fun of us," reported two women, on living in different asylum countries.¹⁰²

Women are often assaulted by locals on their way to the forest. Being isolated and defenseless, they are unable to call for help or feel empowered to report violations, which remain largely unpunished.

Risks for the Most Vulnerable: Gender-based Violence and Children's Education

As a result of displacement, the most vulnerable members of the community are often most exposed to discrimination and abuse. Fragmentation and the loss of traditional values were cited by some respondents as having a significant impact within the community. Living in the limbo of a refugee camp, with painful memories of the recent past and few hopes for the future, has led to significant changes in customs and social relations, even within families. The progressive reduction of humanitarian assistance, together with delays in implementing an

effective socioeconomic reintegration, has made it urgent for refugees to find new sources of income. Women are often the first ones to be affected, forced to walk for hours in the forest looking for wood to sell or walking to the closest village to sell wood and agricultural products, in order to ensure the daily subsistence of their families.

But young women and children are also hurt by the lack of economic resources and loss of traditional social structures in the community. In Chad, several women interviewees openly talked about sexual harassment, rape, and prostitution. Women are often assaulted by locals on their way to the forest.¹⁰³ Being isolated and defenseless, they are unable to call for help or feel empowered to report violations, which remain largely unpunished. Some women also reported that “young women prostitute themselves to make a little money,”¹⁰⁴ a phenomenon that has increased recently—in parallel with the reduction of assistance to refugees—but is quickly becoming widespread in both urban and rural areas. Some mothers who were interviewed admitted to being completely powerless to stop their daughters from engaging in such practices, as they cannot afford to provide their daughters with their needs and they complained of not having any influence over their behavior. Besides disrupting traditional values and affecting individuals’ and families’ sense of dignity, this type of “survival sex” has also brought serious health problems to the community, such as teen pregnancies and sexually transmitted diseases.

The breakdown of social relations does not spare children. “Children do not respect their parents here in Chad,” complained a 32-year-old woman living in Dosseye.¹⁰⁵ While in Cameroon access to the national education system was broadly cited as a reason for remaining, in Chad access to education is extremely limited, with primary-level education only offered in refugee camps. As mentioned, school attendance rates have further decreased



Nomadic groups such as the Peuhls pass through the north of CAR, camping in the bush, where they can install their tents close to their cattle. Ndele (Bamingui-Bangorran), 2015. (Juan Carlos Tomasi)

in parallel with the reduction of assistance to refugees and child labor is becoming a serious protection issue. However, children’s behavior and lack of respect for shared social values seem to be making respondents even more worried about the future than their children’s lack of access to education. Coming from a society in which the public education system has been dysfunctional for decades, Central African refugees consider the positive role played by children in the community and within the family as a more crucial indicator of their growth than their level of education. Nevertheless, education was reported as a concern by the very few people who had access to it before the crisis, particularly some former students living in Chad who had to interrupt their graduate or post-graduate studies because of the conflict, although none mentioned having tried to access universities in their asylum country.

Peuhl Communities

In CAR, like in many other countries of the region, Peuhl communities are particularly vulnerable. Peuhls are partly nomadic herders who move along the transhumance corridors with their cattle or temporarily settle in camps

along the road. Because of their traditional practices, they are often marginalized and cut off from social services, such as health care and education. Much more than other ethnic groups, Peuhls are perceived as foreigners and are rarely represented in state institutions. Moreover, during the ongoing crisis, traditional conflicts related to the transhumance were exacerbated by the collapse of local mechanisms to settle disputes between farmers and herders.¹⁰⁶ In 2013–14, Peuhl communities were particularly targeted by Anti-Balaka militias, who killed many and stole their cattle. Since then, transhumance corridors have partially changed and the supply of cattle to the biggest market in the country, in Bangui, is only assured via convoys escorted by peacekeepers.

The Peuhl refugees who escaped to Cameroon and Chad had to face violent attacks before reaching safety. Recounted a Peuhl refugee in Goré: “For three months I had to fight every day against the Anti-Balaka. I had 300 cattle, now there are only 20–30 left.” “If I don’t have cattle, what am I going to do?,” he wondered. “I ask the President to secure the transhumance corridors and make them available only for Peuhls.”¹⁰⁷ It is evident that the conflict has added another layer to the long-standing disputes between Peuhls and locals in CAR. For traditionally pastoral Peuhls, the sense of humiliation of having to farm is even greater. “I have to go to the fields even if I’m a herder,” said a 55-year-old Peuhl, showing his hands that were worn from agricultural work.¹⁰⁸

VI. Findings on Displaced Persons' Views on Conditions of Return

The following three sections describe the views of the displaced persons interviewed regarding conditions of return, reconciliation, and justice. This section focuses on the intentions of the Central African Muslim refugees to return back home. Opinions among refugees interviewed for this study varied deeply regarding the necessary conditions for return. While the majority want to return to CAR, some respondents clearly stated their intention to apply for asylum or for relocation to a third country. Their primary concerns regarding return related to socioeconomic factors—both in CAR and their country of asylum—and their personal security and safety. The respondents' definition of “peace” actually requires both of these conditions: security and economic opportunity. The current dynamics of return processes in CAR, as well as the ongoing interventions to make these repatriations sustainable, will also be explained.

Returning, Remaining, or Finding a Third Way

When asked about return, an evident tension emerged in the answers of the majority of interviewees. First, they stated their strong desire to return home and again be part of the country they were forced to abandon. They talked very nostalgically about their lives before displacement, describing many good memories: “We think about when we can go back to our country and we don't sleep at night,” said one woman.¹⁰⁹ But they also fear that social relations and assets may have been irreversibly damaged or lost. In general, refugees said they needed clear information from home and positive signals before going back. “If all the Muslims go back, it is a good sign,” said a 30-year-old woman from Bangui.¹¹⁰ One man said he would not feel comfortable bringing his family back straight away: “If there is peace, I will go back alone. My family will remain in Chad at the beginning.”¹¹¹

Others stated unambiguously that they have no intention of returning. “I don't want to go back to Bangui as I have bad memories,” said a woman who had lost her brother during the crisis and has not had any news from her two sons since fleeing.¹¹² “I'm not ready to go back, but one day my children might be,” reported a father who was taken hostage and tortured by the Anti-Balaka before being able to reach his family and leave the country.¹¹³ Some respondents also raised concerns about being accepted back into their Muslim community: “Once we go back, we'll have to listen to jokes from other Muslims too, the ones who stayed behind.”¹¹⁴

If they cannot go back, many refugees in Chad—often those with a higher level of education—do not wish to stay there. Some talked about leaving the region and starting a new life in Europe, the United States, or Canada. One 35-year-old woman from Paoua explained that she had twice been a victim of conflict, the first time in 2003, when her husband and two sons were killed and she had to flee to Chad and could not return for five years;¹¹⁵ and the second time in 2013-14: “Now I'm a refugee, my [second] husband is a returnee, but we asked UNHCR to be sent somewhere else. We want to leave.”

Finally, one young man mentioned the division of the country, specifically the secession of the northern and eastern provinces—where most Central African Muslims live—as the only possible solution. “If we can’t live together, we should at least be able to have a place to go back to,” he said.¹¹⁶

Socioeconomics, Security, and Peace

Refugees made it clear that socioeconomic factors would affect their decision to return and their ability to make a fresh start. “I don’t have the courage to go back: I don’t have money or a house,” said a 43-year-old divorced woman from Bangui.¹¹⁷ Receiving some economic compensation for part, if not all, of their lost assets is considered a precondition for return. “If they accept to rebuild what they destroyed, I can go back,” said a young woman from Berberati.¹¹⁸ “You have to think that you have nothing left in CAR,” she was told by phone when she called home: to return, she believes she needs something to start with. Housing was the main issue, immediately followed by ownership of merchandise and cattle. “Where are we going to sleep?,” asked a 40-year-old man from Bangui.¹¹⁹

For many refugees, this will not be the first time they have to start all over again. Many lost everything during the 2003 Bozizé coup,¹²⁰ and were extremely proud of how they had managed to restart but were deeply saddened by their new loss. Other respondents were less optimistic about finding economic opportunities on returning: “If I ever have the chance, I’d like to go abroad. In CAR, even if peace comes, there won’t be jobs,” said a 34-year-old man from Bangui.¹²¹ The socioeconomic conditions of displacement, including access to social services, may also play a role in refugees’ decision to return. “In Cameroon, kids can go to school,” pointed out one mother.¹²²

But the fear of experiencing the same horrific violence again in CAR is a strong deterrent. “I have no problems with people there, but I’m afraid of them,” said a woman from Carnot.¹²³ A 63-year-old man from Gadzi said,

“I want to go back to my family, but I won’t feel as safe as before.”¹²⁴ People are scared of being forced once again to leave everything behind and flee. “We don’t have the strength to run away. If we go back, we could be forced to flee again,” worried a young man from Bangui.¹²⁵ “I’m scared for my security. I’m 50 years old. I can’t run away like the kids,” said an older man from Baoro.¹²⁶



In late 2013, fighting in Bangui between Anti-Balaka militias and Seleka combatants resulted in hundreds of civilians killed and injured. From March 2014 on, French forces (Sangaris) were deployed all around the country. Bangui, 2014. (Juan Carlos Tomasi)

Similarly, for members of Peuhl communities, the fear of being attacked again may be more powerful than the desire to return. “If I ever have some cattle again, I’ll take care of them here in Chad. I’m afraid to go back to CAR,” a young widow said.¹²⁷ Memories of recent suffering are still very vivid for these refugees and have an undeniable influence on their thoughts

about return. Some reported they had received clearly hateful messages from their neighbors to stay away from CAR: “We’ve got all your things, this is not your home anymore,” a young widow from Nana Bakassa was told.¹²⁸ “They are going to think that we are returning to take revenge,” another refugee said.¹²⁹

Peace was generally discussed by respondents as a fundamental precondition for return, defined as the possibility of moving around freely and carrying out economic activity. For them, the main impact of restored security will be on restoring their freedom of movement and, consequently, the opportunity to restart their businesses and rebuild their lives. When there is peace, “you sleep well, kids eat well and go to school, you don’t hear shootings,” said a 41-year-old mother of six.¹³⁰ Peace is “Peuhl and Gbaya together,” specified one young Peuhl woman.¹³¹ Without these conditions, the only way for refugees to go back is to return to an enclave and live “like a prisoner” in your own country.¹³² “If you go back to Bangui, you have no choice but to settle in PK5,” said a woman from Bangui.¹³³

Current Dynamics of Return and External Interventions

Spontaneous returns have been ongoing since the general election (early 2016), when renewed stability in many areas of the country encouraged some refugees to go back. By July 2017, UNHCR had registered 30,000 returns, from a total displaced population of approximately one million.¹³⁴ Although there are no official figures, representatives of national and international organizations interviewed for this study generally believe that Muslims and Peuhls represent a minority of returnees. According to them, most of those who went back did not return to their original village, but to somewhere considered safe enough to resettle in and where they could count on family connections for initial support. Respondents also commented that returns are made even more difficult by the persistent hostility toward Muslims and Peuhls in their communities of origin. As a result, most Muslim refugees who decided to return to their country chose a pre-existing enclave to go to, either in the western regions (principally in Gamboula, Berberati, and Bouar) or the PK5 neighborhood.

Displacement intensifies vulnerability regarding an issue that already concerns most Central Africans: civil registries. Such records, if they existed, were likely destroyed during the 2013 coup.

Some of the biggest challenges that returnees will likely face relate to civil documentation (identity papers; birth, marriage, and death certificates; etc.) and housing occupations. Displacement

intensifies vulnerability regarding an issue that already concerns most Central Africans: civil registries. Such records, if they existed, were likely destroyed during the 2013 coup. Even where administration is in place, costs, short deadlines, and corruption remain persistent obstacles to obtaining civil documentation.¹³⁵ A presidential decree issued during the transition calling for the provision of free birth certificates to all children born between December 2012 and December 2014 was never implemented (allegedly due to a lack of funding). Organizations like *Avocats Sans Frontières* provide counseling and legal support on this matter, but registries will need to be rebuilt almost entirely from scratch.

Occupation of housing and land represents an enormous problem for returnees. Some respondents reported that the original owner is often obliged to pay some amount of compensation to the unlawful occupant in order to reclaim their house. The Norwegian Refugees Council (NRC) is working to address this issue through advice and awareness campaigns as part of a broader program called Information Counseling and Legal Assistance. As a result of advocacy, the government approved by decree the launch of a national database on destroyed and occupied houses. NRC is also advocating for the national land law to be amended and for a larger decentralization of its services across the country.¹³⁶ Finally, with its “Logements, Terres, Biens” program, NRC works directly with the community to prepare an action plan on houses, lands, and goods, promoting mediation and providing the training and tools needed to implement the plan.

When this study was carried out, a national strategy on durable return solutions was under discussion in Bangui.¹³⁷ As part of a process co-led by the UN Development Programme and the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, in the summer of 2017 a survey of both returnees and internally displaced persons was undertaken in six areas—Bambari, Bangui, Berberati, Bouar, Kaga Bandoro, and Obo—intended to determine as much as possible about the different reintegration needs in the country. Based on the results, a draft national strategy was circulated proposing the following five areas as priorities for durable solutions: 1) security and restoration of state authority, 2) protection, 3) basic social services, 4) livelihood and economic recovery, and 5) peace-building, reconciliation, and social cohesion.

While these outcomes parallel the findings of this study, the draft national strategy in its current form falls short in that it does not identify Muslim communities as a unique category of returnees and it does not give special consideration to the repatriation of other minority groups, like the Peuhl. Overall, like some other international interventions, the document presents repatriation as a mere act of return, focusing on providing basic assistance to returnees and mitigating possible problems; however, repatriation also includes an important political dimension, which implies the state's responsibility to eliminate barriers to reintegration and create the conditions for sustainable return through measures like reparation.¹³⁸

VII. Findings on Displaced Persons' Views on Reconciliation

“We used to eat together but one day they woke up and they told me: ‘You are a foreigner, you have to leave.’ Do you understand what I mean?” — 33-year-old man from Bangui¹³⁹

When asked about the possibility of living together again with members of their community in CAR, refugees interviewed seemed at first very skeptical. Even though the country has been affected by conflict for decades, nobody expected the horrific level of violence that engulfed CAR in 2013. People did not imagine they would be assaulted not only by members of armed groups, but also by their own neighbors. The intercommunal dimension of the conflict has left lasting wounds that will take a long time to heal. “How many times has there been dialogue and reconciliation?” a 51-year-old widow wondered.¹⁴⁰ Most respondents believed that if reconciliation did not work before, the chances it would be successful after the latest crisis were even slimmer.

Having analyzed their intentions and concerns about returning in the previous section, displaced persons' views on reconciliation will be described here. It should be stressed that all respondents insisted on the need for strong, top-down messages of inclusivity. Getting the highest state representatives to recognize that all Muslims are Central Africans, and that all people living in CAR have the same rights—regardless of their ethnicity or religious faith—was considered by most respondents to be a preliminary step towards reconciliation. Respondents felt that these messages should be accompanied by both concrete actions to restore state authority that would respect the principle of inclusion and symbolic gestures that would demonstrate a genuine will for peace from the national leadership. The refugees who were interviewed for this study spoke about forgiveness and their struggle to balance ethnic and religious norms and their personal feelings. Finally, the limitations of the ongoing community-based initiatives for reconciliation, as well as the other obstacles for external interventions, will be described.

A Top-down Message of Inclusivity

Among the Central African refugees interviewed for this study, there was broad consensus that no reconciliation would be possible without strong messages from the state's highest representatives. “We need a decision from the government to live together. The president should say that we all have to rebuild the country together and that our brothers who are abroad should come back,” said a 64-year-old man from Bouzoum.¹⁴¹ “Reconciliation will be like an order for us,” said a woman from Bangui.¹⁴²

This emphasis on the need for a top-down approach to reconciliation is striking given the bottom-up, community-based strategies that have been promoted so far by many international organizations to encourage communities to live together. It raises questions about the efficacy of current programs promoting community efforts to promote reconciliation, which are considered relevant but insufficient to rebuild social ties without a clear and strong message from the Central African political leadership.

Refugees suggested that a reconciliation process can only start if the country's leaders communicate crucial, powerful notions that encourage the population to change its mentality toward Muslims. These messages, some respondents suggested, should first target the long-standing prejudices about Central African Muslims: "If we don't remove from people's minds that they are not Central African Muslims, I don't see peace coming anytime soon."¹⁴³ Others insisted on a more general recognition of their status: "They have to accept our rights as Central African Muslims," said a 50-year-old man from Bangui.¹⁴⁴

Respondents felt that if the country's leaders recognize that Muslims are Central Africans with the same rights as other citizens, people's minds could begin to change. "If the authorities change their language, the population will follow. The leaders are the ones who should talk and be echoed by the media," said a young man from Bangui.¹⁴⁵ But respondents also admitted that current CAR authorities have not made moves in this direction and that words of hatred are still being directed against them in CAR without any consequence. As a 50-year-old widow reported, "People in Carnot say, 'We have cleaned up our land once, we don't need rubbish again.'"¹⁴⁶

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Referring to the long-standing state absence in CAR's outer regions, some respondents stated that the government should not limit such positive messaging and actions to the capital, but should "carry out awareness campaigns in the provinces, together with the local authorities."¹⁴⁷ One woman proposed churches as critical places where the issue of reconciliation could be addressed: "The pastor should talk about forgiveness, and let Christians express their thoughts. Then, Muslims could tell their stories too."¹⁴⁸ Another woman, emphasizing the role both state representatives and local leaders could play in promoting reconciliation, recommended that "leaders and local chiefs should stand together and say, 'We were born together with our brothers and sisters who went to Chad. What can we do for them?' If they give us some land and some cassava, it will be enough for us."¹⁴⁹ For some, if the state's message about living together is clear, no big gestures are needed. "The state is like a parent: if it does what it says it will, people respect it," said a woman from Bouai.¹⁵⁰

Some respondents, acknowledging the economic and political significance of those who were forced to leave, contended that supporting inclusion and, by extension, reconciliation would benefit the country. As a 68-year-old man noted: "Look at the country, what was before and what is now,"¹⁵¹ "Did the Central African government realize what was lost?" asked a 55-year-old man from Boda.¹⁵² Since the beginning of the conflict, the country has dropped to the world's lowest position in the UNDP Human Development Index.¹⁵³ As a result of displacement, it lost traders who were able to connect the landlocked country to its neighbors in the region and it lost the expertise and resources of many mining professionals and cattle herders. According to the refugees, political leaders recognizing their value in the country's economy could partially restore their dignity. In parallel, they complained that they were not involved in the preparation of the Bangui Forum¹⁵⁴ and that, more than one year after elections, "nobody from the government has ever come here."¹⁵⁵ They asked for their voices to be heard.

State Authority Combined with Symbolic Actions

Respondents felt that strong and sincere messages about inclusivity should be accompanied by both concrete actions to help restore the authority of the Central African state throughout the country and symbolic gestures. Many refugees cited the presence of national security forces and public administration throughout the country

as a condition for peaceful coexistence. Where capacities for core state functions such as security and justice have been very weak for decades and then taken over by armed groups, people are desperate for the presence of a recognized, legitimate state authority. However, not just any state can be restored and obtain citizens' trust. In this sense, some respondents looked favorably on the option of creating quotas for minorities within security forces and state administration, although opinions varied as to how to assign such quotas. One respondent suggested mixing Christians and Muslims,¹⁵⁶ while another proposed that "all the ethnic groups should be represented."¹⁵⁷

Where capacities for core state functions such as security and justice have been very weak for decades and then taken over by armed groups, people are desperate for the presence of a recognized, legitimate state authority.

Many respondents mentioned a disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration program (DDR) as a fundamental step towards reconciliation. They also believed that not only should combatants from both sides (Seleka and Anti-Balaka) be disarmed, but weapons should also be taken away from civilians "house by house."¹⁵⁸ The huge number of people carrying weapons in the country is perceived as an obstacle to security and, by extension, to any form of social cohesion. In parallel, refugees thought that the Central African government should ensure implementation of the peace agreements that have been signed. If it does not, "the international community should make it a condition for providing funds," warned a 38-year-old from Bangui.¹⁵⁹

Finally, some respondents proposed creating platforms for local authorities, civil society representatives, and religious leaders to facilitate social cohesion and reconcile communities. Yet, many respondents said they had never heard of initiatives like the Peace and Reconciliation Committees, established after the Bangui Forum, which have been operating for two years. Those who had heard of them were unable to explain why they have not been successful in overcoming tensions affecting their own communities.

With reference to symbolic gestures, refugees proposed several steps that national and local authorities could take to signal their determination to work towards reconciliation. One interviewee suggested "a day of mourning for the Muslims killed,"¹⁶⁰ another that "local chiefs come to the border to ask them to go back."¹⁶¹ As one woman from Bangui finely put it: "People who stayed could create a committee to rebuild the neighborhood or the mosque, and afterwards come here to ask us to return. The government should help them to do so, and should show the importance of the people who left for the future development of the country."¹⁶² According to these respondents, such actions could help to strengthen the messages coming from leaders and give them concrete meaning.

The Notion of Forgiveness

While respondents generally agreed on potential paths towards reconciliation, discussions involving notions of forgiveness were less coherent and consistent. Transitional justice processes should not be understood or designed to require or expect forgiveness on the part of victims, but the term was often introduced by respondents when asked about their feelings toward those responsible for the crisis and the perpetrators of crimes. At first, refugees often explained that Islam gives them no choice but to forgive those who have committed a wrong, as "teeth and tongue sometime hurt each other," as one respondent put it.¹⁶³ Then, as the conversation progressed, they began to reflect on the concept itself: "If your heart is wounded, would the forgiveness be sincere?"¹⁶⁴ "If somebody comes to ask me for forgiveness, I can forgive. But I can't go to ask for forgiveness myself," said one woman.¹⁶⁵ In many cases, resentment against those who turned on them is hard to control, as demonstrated by several people's comments: "If you go back and they show you who destroyed your house, you will feel anger," said a young

woman from Berberati.¹⁶⁶ “People say that they will forget everything if there is an amnesty, but it isn’t true,” said a 35-year-old woman from Paoua.¹⁶⁷ “Me, I’m young, but how can people who lost everything forgive?,” said a 24-year-old man from Bangui.¹⁶⁸

Those who raised the issue of forgiveness had different opinions on who should ask for forgiveness. Many believed that the perpetrators would not recognize they had broken the law and therefore would not ask victims to forgive them. “I can’t figure out that people would admit to having killed somebody,” said one man.¹⁶⁹ “If somebody committed a crime, he won’t admit it in front of the community,” insisted another.¹⁷⁰ In one interview, a 35-year-old widow linked forgiveness with reparations: “I can forgive if those who destroyed my assets will reimburse me, if those who destroyed my house will rebuild it.”¹⁷¹ Finally, for a 50-year-old widow stated, “it should be the state that asks for forgiveness.”¹⁷²

Most respondents were clear that they would not be able to forgive the perpetrators of crimes against persons and those responsible for the crisis, including former presidents and leaders of armed groups, who are considered to be guilty of manipulating civilians for their own purposes. For other crimes, responses varied according to the personal experience of each respondent. For example, a 45-year-old woman from Bangui said:

There are people I can’t forgive. For example, my neighbor was a FACA [CAR’s national army] who used to beat his mother. As I used to help this poor woman, in the past he even took me to court because of my involvement. When the Anti-Balaka took Bangui, he told me that he would come to look for me and kill me. I fled before, but he destroyed my house. How can I forgive him? I could have pointed him out to the Seleka, but I didn’t.¹⁷³

External Interventions on Reconciliation

Since the end of 2013, CAR has experienced an unprecedented influx of NGOs, which accompanied the build-up of the UN agencies that were already present. Since September 2014, the country has relied on the deployment of an integrated peacekeeping mission, MINUSCA. These entities have made significant efforts to support Central African communities in promoting reconciliation and peaceful cohesion; however, local episodes

of brutal violence have often frustrated the results. In general, there has been a notable absence of true ownership of these initiatives by local communities.

In recent years, there have been numerous community-based programs on reconciliation and social cohesion in the country. NGOs, UN agencies, and MINUSCA’s civil affairs section have worked to develop projects to help bring together communities divided by the conflict and develop local mediation committees to intervene in the event of renewed conflict. While detailing all such interventions would be impossible in this report, it should be noted that some have led to remarkable results in getting Central



Mbororo refugee women prepare communal land for the next planting season in Gbiti. October 2009. (UNHCR / F. Noy)

Africans to live together again. Respondents from international organizations raised two main challenges to such programs: the absence of a clear national strategy to protect minorities and promote inclusivity; and the deep distortions of traditional social relations within the community. “We need to work with community mechanisms but local powers are nonexistent,” said one interviewee.¹⁷⁴ Moreover, these interviewees felt that there is a need to listen more to displaced communities in order to improve the interventions: “Nobody is asking them why they fled,” commented one respondent from a UN agency.¹⁷⁵

Similarly, some respondents pointed out that success stories share three common elements: security, strong local leadership, and significant investments to improve people’s living conditions. “Distributing peace dividends” is the priority for many reconciliation-related programs now underway in CAR. Going for quick wins that give immediate results to the population appeared to be the main strategic line of the pilot projects that NGOs and UN agencies implement in the country. However, one person commented on the challenge of designing and implementing programs that solidly link the humanitarian and recovery phases, the absence of which contributes to a vicious circle of medium and acute needs, as stabilized areas become unstable again if sufficient investments are not made.

Finally, some interviewees pointed to increasing attacks against humanitarian personnel. According to them, NGOs may be targeted because their programs assist minorities, such as Muslims and Peuhls. Humanitarian organizations reported episodes in which armed groups prevented members of minority groups from accessing aid. In some cases, the same NGO personnel—both national and international—were directly targeted, as the aggressors believed they were supporting minorities (namely, Muslims) and, by extension, one side of the conflict (namely, the Seleka). In the context of the more general reduction of the humanitarian space that relief organizations are experiencing in CAR, this represents an extremely worrying trend.

VIII. Findings on Displaced Persons' Views on Justice

“What happened in our country is like an epidemic: if you have a problem with somebody, you can go to court and settle it, but me, I don’t know who I have a problem with.”— 63-Year-Old Man from Gadzi¹⁷⁶

It is hard to meet a Central African who is not in some way a victim of the conflict, but it is even harder to identify the perpetrators. Crimes have been committed by leaders and members of armed groups, by national and local authorities, by people’s own neighbors. In addition, the conflict has often been used as a pretext to break the law: together with serious violations of human rights and humanitarian law, many common crimes have been committed by individuals who took advantage of the disorder that followed the 2013 coup. “If we put together all the people who broke the law, the entire population of CAR should be included,” said one man.¹⁷⁷

For Central African refugees, the interviews conducted for this study were probably their first opportunity to reflect at length on what justice might look like for the violations they suffered, which helps to explain their difficulty in defining what they meant by the term “justice” and deciding who should be judged and punished for which crimes. Despite the complexity of the task, respondents were glad to have the chance to express their feelings, chiefly the deep sense of unfairness they felt for all their human and material loss. Many people agreed that the only way to obtain peace is through justice, even though there was a wide variety of opinions on what is meant by justice.

Justice represents a long-standing issue in CAR. Even before the current crisis, widespread corruption among the few justice officials in the country had prompted Central Africans to find alternative conflict-resolution mechanisms. This deep distrust in the national system has elicited calls for an international response to the crimes perpetrated during the conflict. Even though opinions on who should be judged and how varied greatly, there was common agreement on the need for a foreign entity to investigate those responsible for the crisis. A residual but important position was also put forward by many people interviewed regarding traditional authorities: when security is established, local chiefs will be allowed to play a crucial role for all issues related to property and land rights. Compensation for material losses was also often considered a precondition for return. Finally, limited external justice interventions have been launched so far, mainly focused on supporting the Special Criminal Court.

Distrust in the Dysfunctional National Justice System

Central Africans have possibly never known a functional national justice system. Even before the crisis, in the absence of a functioning state and due to the public’s general distrust, communities had to be resourceful in solving disputes through alternative mechanisms. Most disputes were settled through out-of-court agreements (*à l’amiable*, in French) made in the presence of the local traditional chief. Although they were not enforceable,

these settlements had the advantage of being endorsed by the parties.¹⁷⁸ For Central Africans: “If you go to court to solve an issue, even if it is settled by the judge, it will remain in the minds of the disputants,”¹⁷⁹ meaning that it will not be forgotten or feel resolved.

In a country where there is little possibility of winning justice unless the victim can identify the alleged perpetrator and where the national justice system is largely incapable of undertaking serious and impartial investigations, some respondents felt absolutely powerless to pursue justice for violations they had suffered. In the words of one interviewee: “We can’t have justice after the war. We will never know who stole our cattle or destroyed the house.”¹⁸⁰ Some respondents even went further, arguing that victims’ attempts to bring perpetrators to justice could backfire: “Justice won’t change anything. People will think it is your fault if they are called to court and they will dislike you.”¹⁸¹ According to a 47-year-old woman from Paoua, “If you bring people to justice, they will take revenge afterwards.”¹⁸² Even though “impunity caused a lot of damage,” as one respondent put it,¹⁸³ the absence of protection for victims, or more generally for any civilian who decides to claim their rights, made some refugees suspicious of any form of justice at all.

A common refrain was that in matters of justice “you can’t start with the tribunal.”¹⁸⁴ Traditionally, disputants first consult the local chief, who only refers them on to the police if they do not agree with his decision or if the dispute is beyond his jurisdiction (notably, in the case of crimes against persons). Only if the question is not settled at the police/gendarmerie level does a magistrate have to intervene. However, considering the extremely small presence of judges and prosecutors in the outer regions of the country, the chance that a dispute ends up in court is extremely low. Tribunals and prisons, when functional, mainly work as a deterrent, to make people scared to commit crimes and to serve as an example, one woman explained.¹⁸⁵

Even when in office, however, national judges are not trusted by the population. A trial is perceived to be won by the disputant who pays the magistrate more or by the one who has a better relationship with him. There was, as a result, a general consensus among those interviewed for this study that “we can’t allow a Central African to judge a Central African,” as one man put it.¹⁸⁶ This deep distrust towards the state justice system became even more significant regarding crimes committed during the conflict. “We need judges who don’t know our mothers and fathers,” one man said.¹⁸⁷ “We can’t trust those who caused this war and then moved their family and children abroad,” insisted a woman from Bangui.¹⁸⁸

Calls for International Solutions

Given their general distrust of the domestic justice system, most respondents suggested some kind of international entity was needed to ensure justice after the conflict. Opinions on this varied widely, however; some talked about establishing an international court, some about NGOs or UN agencies ensuring justice, and one person talked more generally about Europeans (referring mainly to the French).¹⁸⁹ Only a few people were aware of the creation of the Special Criminal Court in the Central African Republic (SCC), which is a hybrid court with both Central African and international judges and prosecutors. One man commented, “I’m pessimistic about the SCC. The president is a foreigner, but the other judges were named by our country’s leaders.”¹⁹⁰ According to many respondents, only a court exclusively composed of foreigners could assure impartiality and guarantee a free

In a country where there is little possibility of winning justice unless the victim can identify the alleged perpetrator and where the national justice system is largely incapable of undertaking serious and impartial investigations, some respondents felt absolutely powerless to pursue justice for violations they had suffered.

and fair trial. In the words of a 68-year-old refugee: “A national court will hide half of the files. The international court should do in CAR what they did in Sierra Leone.”¹⁹¹ Further describing this idea, a woman proposed: “They need to send foreign judges all around the country. The government sees only Bangui, but the provinces are the core of CAR.”¹⁹²

There was general consensus that those responsible for the crisis should be punished. “The ones who fund the conflict, give the arms, and live abroad” should be investigated, arrested, and judged, said a man from Carnot.¹⁹³ A number of interviewees found it outrageous that they could still see those individuals active on social media.¹⁹⁴ While some respondents believed former presidents and warlords should be judged in the country,¹⁹⁵ others felt judging them abroad would have more of a deterrent effect.¹⁹⁶ In contrast, opinions on prosecuting petty criminals—generally local people who took advantage of the chaos generated by the conflict to steal goods and loot properties—were very diverse. While one man thought that “civilians have been manipulated and can’t be judged,”¹⁹⁷ others argued that “we always forget the petty criminals, but they are the ones making trouble in the villages. If we get them, the others will be scared.”¹⁹⁸

After almost five years of conflict that led to the deaths of thousands of people, the displacement of more than one million people, and the ravaging of the country, the resentment felt by refugees against those responsible for the crisis is so deep that there was little interest in offering any form of amnesty to them, if one were to come about as the result of a political settlement. One of the few respondents who mentioned the possibility, a man of middle-high income from Baoro, argued:

We need to have a general amnesty for the big leaders. They are the ones who started everything and they are the only ones who can stop it. If we talk about arresting them, they will never return to the country. How you can make peace if your enemy is far away? The SCC should collect complaints and then wait for the decision of the government, which will ask them, “The people gave you the amnesty, what are you going to give to the people?”¹⁹⁹

The Residual Role of Traditional Justice

In line with the role that traditional justice had, and still has, in CAR as a dispute resolution mechanism, many respondents suggested that local chiefs could represent an important resource. A young interviewee from Bangui said: “Chieftoms should be re-established. Justice should begin with them, at the community level.”²⁰⁰ Overall, respondents seemed confident that if the armed groups were neutralized, security established, and some state authority restored, local chiefs could play a key justice role, especially in dealing with land and property rights. “If peace comes, issues related to goods and houses can be dealt with amongst ourselves,” said a 45-year-old man living in Danamadja.²⁰¹

Respondents also thought that the authority and decisions of the traditional chief would be respected in cases of theft or unlawful occupation related to the conflict because “a local chief knows who lands and properties belong to. If they are occupied, he should press for them to be given back, or for the owner to be reimbursed.”²⁰² One older refugee from Bouar was completely confident that he would get all of his belongings back: “I have a paper written and signed by the local chief with a list of all my assets. I will take it back with me.”²⁰³

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One woman gave a very clear example of the kind of disputes that will need to be settled at the end of the conflict and their relevance for those who return to CAR:

I bought a sewing machine for 120,000 CFA francs. When we left, I gave it to my neighbor to keep it. When I was told that she left the village to go to Bangui and she took the machine with her, I called her to propose either to give me the machine back or to pay me its value. But she disappeared and changed her mobile number. If I ever meet her again, I'll make an effort to approach her and ask about my machine. If she doesn't collaborate, I will bring her to justice as we can't get along anymore. First, I'd go and see the local chief, but if the dispute goes beyond him, he will send us to the police or the gendarmerie.²⁰⁴

Some respondents went further on the possible post-conflict jurisdiction of local chiefs. Going beyond their traditional authority, which normally covers issues related to assets and property, it was proposed that they could assume a role as guarantors for petty criminals, like those responsible for theft and other nonviolent abuses. In the words of one young woman: "If state justice is established and the leaders of the crisis punished, petty criminals will be under pressure. We can thus leave their cases in the hands of the local chief, as he will know what to do. If they break the law again, they will have to be punished, even if they are the chief's sons."²⁰⁵ In fact, what was proposed is a sort of conditional amnesty: people who committed minor crimes would be pardoned unless they broke the law again, in which case the jurisdiction over them would transfer beyond the traditional chief directly to the state judge, who would try and possibly sentence them for alleged crimes.²⁰⁶

The Relevance of Reparations

Although the refugees interviewed for this study did not use the word reparation, they talked largely about possible forms of financial compensation for their material losses. In this sense, compensation represented a precondition for return, as none said they would feel comfortable going back without some economic incentive. While respondents made no connection between this compensation and the verification of the truth or any kind of investigation or judgment by the justice system, they believed they have the right to receive support to make a fresh start.

The large majority believed that such compensation or financial support should come from the international community, as they are the only ones who can assure the necessary resources and guarantee impartiality in distributing them.²⁰⁷ Some thought that such compensation and provisions should be the primary responsibility of the government, supported by NGOs,²⁰⁸ while one woman proposed that an international court should be the one "to give us something to start with."²⁰⁹ In general, people

were not concerned about how such compensation amounts would be calculated, nor how much they would individually receive. None stated that the value of their previous assets or human losses suffered during the conflict should be taken into account. The only issue that all respondents generally endorsed was the need for support to help rebuild their lives.²¹⁰ In this sense, that support was generally perceived as a mix between compensation for losses (material reparation) and the provision of humanitarian assistance.

The same skepticism shown by respondents about the potential for reconciliation was also expressed regarding reparations. They all agreed that people who remained in the country would not take measures to help them to

In general, people were not concerned about how such compensation amounts would be calculated, nor how much they would individually receive. The only issue that all respondents generally endorsed was the need for support to help rebuild their lives.

rebuild their lives, as “it is not in their mentality,”²¹¹ with limited resources making solidarity very limited. In the same way, “even if the perpetrators receive [from NGOs] the means [to assist in rebuilding], they will not participate in reconstruction because of the fear of being recognized.”²¹² NGOs were thus seen as the only local actors that could bring in resources and help displaced people to resettle,²¹³ although it should be noted that respondents put much more emphasis on receiving reparation than on what entity will be in charge of providing it.

Finally, older men were very reluctant to rely on the support of the government or international organizations. They seemed to have learned from previous experience that promises of reparations were not always respected, as they had been promised compensation in the past but were left to rebuild on their own. A 68-year-old man from Bangui reported: “During the mutinies, at the time of President Patassé, I lost 36 million CFA (USD \$64,000). A committee was created to provide reparations, but it never worked. I did everything by myself.”²¹⁴ Another 53-year-old man from Baoro insisted: “It happened already in 2003, when the Banyamulenge ravaged the town. Neither the government nor NGOs gave us anything back, we didn’t even see justice. Now, after four years, what could we ask for?”²¹⁵

External Interventions on Justice

While some respondents representing international organizations stressed that in a country with few judges and prisons, the most sustainable path to justice should be through communities, external interventions in pursuing justice for conflict-related violations so far have mainly focused on the SCC. Besides the institutional

support provided by MINUSCA’s Justice and Correction section, the American Bar Association (ABA) runs a program of documentation of human rights violations through local legal clinics to help prepare files for court. The ABA also works on the standardization of these files, given the large number of local NGOs gathering complaints from victims. In parallel, the ABA also launched a program to support the national justice system through mentorship and training in deontology and accountability, particularly for members of the National School of Administration and Magistracy (ENAM, in French). The Bangui Forum also recommended a Truth, Justice and Peace Commission be created within the Ministry of Social Affairs and Reconciliation, but so far it is not



Refugees from Central African Republic gather at a site in Yamba Adamoua, eastern Cameroon. January 2014. (UNHCR / K. Daimon)

operational. Finally, respondents generally pointed out that refugees are much more interested in compensation than other forms of social or symbolic justice (“Do what you want but rebuild our houses,” as one NGO representative phrased victims’ main concern),²¹⁶ an attitude that is directly linked with the constant survival mode in which the entire CAR population lives.

IX. Conclusion

This study presents some of the intentions and concerns regarding return, reconciliation, and justice of Central African refugees living in Cameroon and Chad, who represent a specific portion of the approximately one million Central Africans currently displaced inside and outside of the country. Given the significant divisions caused by CAR's recent conflict, the objective of this study was to analyze the displacement experiences of certain communities and the potential obstacles they face to one day returning and reintegrating back in CAR. All of the refugees interviewed for the study belong to the Muslim and Peuhl communities that fled CAR due to acute persecution and violence at the height of the conflict in late 2013 and early 2014. Focusing on these two minority groups, whose members have long been perceived as foreigners in CAR despite being Central African citizens, made it possible to more clearly comprehend how the displaced view the link between their past exclusion and current displacement and to consider what measures would make them feel like equal members of society and part of the country's reconstruction when and if they should decide to return.

Central African refugees' views on reconciliation and justice are deeply relevant to their conditions for possible return and to understanding the long-standing, still-unaddressed tensions that led to the horrific outbreak of violence in 2013–14, which continues to contribute to the killing of hundreds of Central Africans today. To them, return is conditioned on “peace,” defined as freedom of movement and engagement in economic activities. It is thus linked to the restoration of security in the country and the creation of new economic opportunity for those who lost everything. However, return anytime soon looks unlikely, considering the current intensity of the conflict.

For Central African refugees, it was clear that only strong messages of inclusivity coming from the highest state representatives could help to prevent those who remained in the country from continuing a rhetoric of hatred. Those messages should be accompanied by progressive restoration of state authority based on broad inclusion of minorities and other vulnerable groups. Only in a Central African state renewed from its very foundation, based on a new social contract between the state and its citizens, could justice for past violations have an impact and truly improve lives. Opening up public administrations, security forces, and the political arena to members of minority groups could progressively change citizens' perceptions of national and local authorities, who many refugees believe represent only the interests of the majority ethnic and confessional groups. Such a process would only be possible if the state supported such reconciliation efforts with both words and deeds.

Given the limited reach of state institutions in CAR's outer regions, however, it is likely to be the word, or messages, of the government promoting inclusion that could have any type of immediate impact. Respondents consider such messages to be essential to creating conditions in which communities can first peacefully coexist and then, hopefully, work together to rebuild social ties. The rebuilding process would obviously be impossible without the necessary political will and support of newly elected authorities, particularly the president and the most prominent members of government. Refugees expressed frustration at the little progress that has been made

since general elections were held two years ago. They cited a generalized lack of sincere political will among the national leadership to promote peace, with massacres continuing in southeastern CAR, where sectarian violence very similar to that of 2013 is still ravaging the country.

Political will to promote reconciliation and peace is a precondition not only for inclusion, but also for clarifying and settling the related long-standing question of who is truly Central African and who is not, given that many Central Africans do not feel that Muslims and Peuhls are citizens. Solving challenges related to citizenship, personal documentation, and property rights would have a twofold effect: it would encourage the return of refugees and help them to rebuild social ties within their communities of origin on a solid—and politically supported—legal basis; and it would represent a drastic improvement in the daily life of the entire Central African citizenry, who are often very limited by uncertainty and lack of accountability of the public administration. If minority groups could rely on strong political statements and a clear legal framework to support them as Central Africans, space for rumors and suspicions would likely be reduced. For example, if the laws governing Central African citizenship were to be explained at schools—as suggested by one respondent—the next generation would be much less exposed to manipulation regarding who is truly Central African and who is not.

Being recognized as Central African and taking part in a new social contract based on inclusion are ultimately the two most prominent demands expressed by Muslim and Peuhl refugees interviewed for this study.

Being recognized as Central African and taking part in a new social contract based on inclusion are ultimately the two most prominent demands expressed by Muslim and Peuhl refugees interviewed for this study. For respondents, addressing these demands in the medium and long term was even more important than responding to the alleged crimes committed during the conflict (and previous conflicts). Besides their generalized distrust of the national system, justice for those crimes on its own looked like a short-sighted objective for respondents: even if some of those responsible for the crisis would eventually go to jail and some reparations were provided to victims, the only possible way to build durable social ties within communities would be to address the discrimination and identity-related issues that caused the crisis to erupt in the first place.

Refugees perceived such a political change as both a precondition and a consequence of a genuine process of reconciliation and justice. For them, principles of inclusion should drive the design of new entities and institutions, including the selection of members of the local Peace Committees and SCC judges. If this happens, the implementation of these reconciliation and justice initiatives could then contribute to strengthening inclusion within communities, in their view.

To date, the Central African government has said very little to combat the hate-filled narratives regarding Muslim and Peuhl communities published in local newspapers and broadcast on the radio. These narratives, and the prejudice and hatred they engender, are preventing the refugees interviewed for this study from considering returning home. The government was also worryingly silent after the United Nations recently warned of impending genocide against the Muslim community in Bangassou, the south-eastern town ruled by self-defense militias since May 2017. In general, with violence spreading, the government has failed to make clear public statements condemning massacres or expressing empathy with victims. So far, no Central African leaders have taken the initiative to visit the refugee camps that have housed half a million of their compatriots for four years or to issue public apologies for the state's responsibility and role in the violence that caused human rights violations and forced displacement.

In parallel, some of Touadera's recent political decisions are cause for concern. Inclusion does not seem to be the principle inspiring new appointments to relevant positions in the capital, as illustrated by the last government reshuffle and by the nomination of judges and judicial police officers to the SCC. Similarly, at the local level, the recent nomination of new governors did not take a bottom-up and inclusive approach. Instead, former members of the national army belonging to majority groups were elevated in order to help restore state authority in the northern and eastern provinces, where claims for participation of minority groups are rightly greater. There also do not seem to have been attempts to be inclusive along the lines of gender and comply with a 2016 law setting a 35 percent quota for women in official appointments.²¹⁷ While outraged by some of these decisions, the international community has so far preferred not to exert any substantial political and financial pressure on the government in the interest of political stability.

Recommendations

Based on the interviews conducted with Central African refugees belonging to Muslim and Peuhl communities who fled to Chad and Cameroon in 2013–14 and representatives of national and international organizations, this study has identified a number of crucial steps that could be taken in order to help to facilitate return, reconciliation, and justice in CAR. Recommendations cover three main issues: policymaking processes; efforts to rebuild communities' social ties in CAR; and measures to improve living conditions in the country of asylum. A general recommendation for additional research on this matter completes the list. Although these suggestions are based on a relatively small sample of respondents belonging to minority groups, many of them refer to longstanding issues that continue to undermine the foundations of the Central African state and therefore may be extrapolated from this particular context and time and taken as reference for future peace and reconciliation initiatives in the country.

1. **Change the narrative of the conflict among national authorities and the international community.** Acknowledging a conflict is the first step to solving it. In this sense, the narrative often supported by government officials that Muslims and Christians, northerners and southerners, and cattle herders and farmers were peacefully living together before the current crisis should be challenged. Although CAR had never before experienced such large-scale, targeted violence, conflict between these different communities was always latent and only partially contained by the existing conflict-resolution mechanisms led by local or traditional authorities. A context-sensitive and realistic analysis should recognize that these tensions are long standing and integrate that recognition into appropriate peacebuilding and trust-building measures.
2. **Include refugees' voices in discussions and policies on return, justice, and reconciliation.** The local consultations preparatory to the Bangui Forum missed the opportunity to properly integrate refugees' voices into the national dialogue for peace in 2015. After the recent renewal of violence, the need to resume a comprehensive and inclusive process that could finally lead the country towards a sustainable peace is more urgent than ever. The experiences and views of those entering their fourth year of displacement could be an important source for informing national policies and decisions on return, reconciliation, and justice. Making displaced persons feel part of the national dialogue is essential, not only because they represent 25 percent of the population but also because they have been the most affected by the conflict and it is on them that the reconstruction of durable social ties in the communities will depend. Their integration into the national dialogue should be ensured by a constant flow of information, high-level visits to refugee camps, and a forum for discussion on the most sensitive issues.
3. **Promote inclusion through top-down messages and symbolic gestures.** The highest state representatives should commit to including clear messages of inclusion in their public statements. Recognizing that Muslims are also Central Africans and that all Central Africans have the same rights, regardless of their ethnicity or religious faith, could help to change people's minds and represent a crucial step towards

reconciliation. Considering that, so far, the current authorities have made no moves in this direction, and words full of hatred are still being directed against Muslims in CAR, the international community should play an important role in making the national leadership change its current narrative. These strong messages should be accompanied by symbolic gestures that make it clear that the newly elected authorities intend to represent the entire Central African population and work for peace.

4. **Launch a national discussion on transitional justice.** The Bangui Forum has so far been the only opportunity to discuss transitional justice, and the only clear decision taken at that time was the creation of the SCC and the Truth, Justice and Peace Commission. Therefore, launching a national discussion on transitional justice is an absolute priority. The interviews conducted for this study showed how personal and common reflections on issues related to justice are still at a very early stage, at best. CAR's population has always been very resourceful in terms of dispute resolution, solving the large majority of controversies through mediation. People's voices should be integrated into the process of finding alternative justice mechanisms that could complement the mandate of the SCC and respond as much as possible to the particularity of the CAR context. Furthermore, when security is restored, the trust that people still have in local chiefs should be used to address all issues related to property and land rights, which represent a very sensitive issue for rebuilding social ties in the community.
5. **Include reparations to refugees in the current peace negotiations.** Losing all the material assets accumulated over a lifetime is one of the biggest concerns of the displaced persons interviewed for this study. At the same time, many said that having economic support to make a fresh start would deeply influence their decision to return. This is why some sort of compensation for losses suffered during the conflict should be considered, not only as a form of assistance to return but as a form of reparation. While refugees did not link such support to any kind of accountability for perpetrators, they strongly felt they are entitled to receive compensation for their losses. This would help them to regain their dignity partially by restoring their previous socioeconomic status and helping them to find a place in their community again. Fomented by electoral promises and by the creation of the SSC, expectations on reparations are higher than ever.
6. **Improve the legal framework on personal documentation and property rights.** Personal documentation and property and land rights are a typical example of a chronic weakness of the Central African state's administration that has been exacerbated by the conflict. However, improved legislation on these issues—while it would surely benefit the large majority of CAR's population—would also represent a crucial political move towards return and reintegration of the minority groups that were forced to flee. Facilitating their access to ID cards and other personal documents would entail a partial answer to the long-standing question of citizenship and, if accompanied by strong messages of inclusion, this simple administrative procedure could be an important step in fighting the perception that segments of the population are foreigners. Similarly, if followed by mediation initiatives and counseling at the local level, more transparent, simplified and decentralized legislation on property and land rights could help to solve some of the complex questions related to the occupation and disposal of refugees' property. National authorities should take firm, symbolic decisions in this sense, even if their actual implementation would be delayed by the disruption of the state's administration.
7. **Rethink the community-based reconciliation programs.** Since the beginning of the crisis, many community-based programs to support local reconciliation have been launched throughout the country. In parallel, Peace and Reconciliation Committees recommended by the Bangui Forum have been set up in all the biggest cities. Despite these ongoing efforts, the refugees interviewed for this study reported that they were unaware of such initiatives, nor could they see any positive outcome of them. The limited

results obtained by the reconciliation programs and committees, together with the highlighted need for strong top-down messages on inclusion, make it urgent to rethink the community-based approach to reconciliation. Current experience shows that strategies based on local emergency mediation might lead to very positive results in the short term, but are likely to fail in the mid and long term when intercommunity tensions may re-emerge. A multilevel, comprehensive approach—that combines national leaders' sending strong messages of inclusion, local authorities setting the framework of coexistence, and members of the community working together to rebuild social ties—should therefore be envisaged as quickly as possible, to prevent the resurgence of violence. In addition, refugees should benefit from programs on post-return reconciliation or transitional justice, similar to those carried out to improve coexistence with the local community in the country of asylum.

8. **Provide psychological support for the refugees.** Assistance to Central African refugees has so far mainly focused on the provision of very basic needs, such as shelter, food, water, and basic health care. In none of the refugees' settings visited during the field research did displaced persons have access to any form of psychological or psychosocial support. It would therefore be desirable to include in assistance some mental health programs that could contribute to alleviating refugees' suffering. Displaced persons have not only been deeply traumatized by their experiences of displacement—that often included horrific violence as well as material and human losses—but they have also spent the last four years living in a constant state of uncertainty and humiliation. As mentioned, some interviews had to be suspended or interrupted when respondents were unable to continue. Financial constraints, together with the challenge of treating people who have been exposed to conflict for decades and are not used to expressing their feelings, are certainly a limitation, but they should not prevent national and international organizations from offering some kind of psychological assistance to refugees.
9. **Promote durable solutions for refugees in the country of asylum.** In the not unlikely scenario that refugees will not be able to return to CAR anytime soon, measures to improve their living conditions in the country of asylum should be prioritized. UNHCR is already moving in this direction in Chad, after the suspension sine die of the negotiations for a tripartite agreement. Alternative solutions for the socioeconomic integration of refugees within local communities, together with strong lobbying of the national authorities to issue a new asylum law, could represent some important preliminary steps towards sustainability. The situation of the Central African returnees in Chad is even more precarious: providing them with personal documentation and some economic support could help them to move out of the camps where they are still living, even though they are considered Chadian citizens (returnees). In both cases, assistance should take into consideration the previous experience and skills of refugees/returnees, facilitating their access to trade or other opportunities compatible with their skills and experience.
10. **Support future research.** This study focuses mainly on Central African refugees and returnees in Chad, as the sample of refugees interviewed in Cameroon was very limited because of logistical constraints. The research also targeted a very specific population—Muslim and Peuhl communities that fled at the beginning of the current conflict—while the influx of both refugees and internally displaced persons in recent years has been much larger and ethnically and geographically varied. Even though humanitarian agencies have been carrying out surveys and research since the arrival of the refugees, they have mainly focused on providing assistance and meeting refugees' basic needs. Very rarely have displaced persons been given the chance to tell their stories and reflect on topics such as return, reconciliation, and justice. Donors should, therefore, fund additional research on Central Africans who fled within CAR or to neighboring countries and who belong to different ethnic and religious groups. Such research would contribute significantly to the understanding of displaced people's experiences and concerns and help to integrate their voices in ongoing discussions and policies.

Appendix:

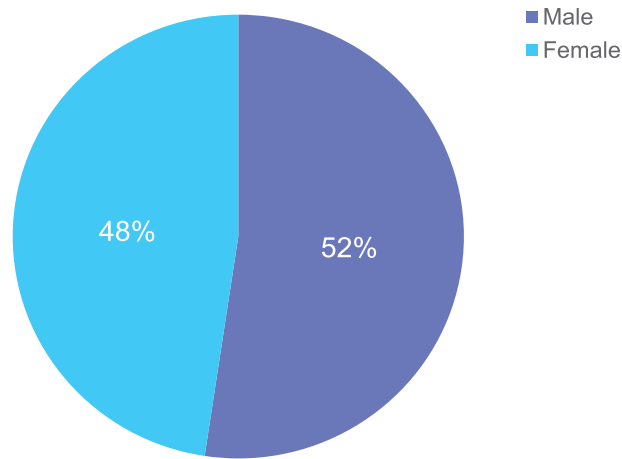
Table 1: Profile of Refugee Respondents

Gender	Age	Place of Birth	Place of Residence	Family Status	Displacement Status	Social Status	Ethnic Group	Settlement	Location
Male	65	Bouar	Bouar	Married, 4 children	Refugee	Low Income	Fulbe	Camp	Garoua-Boulai
Female	45	Bouca	Bangui	Married, 5 children	Refugee	Medium Income	Haoussa	Camp	Garoua-Boulai
Male	68	Sangu-erelim	Bohom	Married, 16 children	Refugee	Low Income	Fulbe	Camp	Garoua-Boulai
Female	45	Bangui	Bangui	Divorced, 4 children	Refugee	Medium Income	Fulbe	Camp	Garoua-Boulai
Male	42	Koui	Boda	Married, 4 children	Refugee	Medium-High Income	Foulata	Camp	Garoua-Boulai
Female	33	Bangui	Bangui	Divorced, 3 children	Refugee	Medium Income	Fulbe	Camp	Garoua-Boulai
Female	35	Carnot	Carnot	Married, 5 children	Refugee	Medium-High Income	Haoussa	Rented House	Garoua-Boulai
Female	41	Carnot	Bangui	Married, 6 children	Refugee	Medium-High Income	Gbaya	Rented House	Garoua-Boulai
Male	28	Mbaiki	Bangui	Single	Refugee	Medium Income	Rounga	Rented House	Ndjamena
Female	27	Berberati	Berberati	Married, 3 children	Refugee	Medium Income	Foulata	Camp	Doholo
Female	35	Nana Bakassa	Nana Bakassa	Widow, 4 children	Refugee	Medium Income	Foulata	Camp	Doholo
Male	55	Boda	Boda	Married, 8 children	Refugee	Low Income	Fulbe	Camp	Doholo
Male	32	Boali	Boali	Married, 3 children	Refugee	Medium Income	Okangue	Camp	Doholo
Male	34	Bo-zoum	Bangui	Married	Refugee	Medium Income	Fulbe	Camp	Doholo

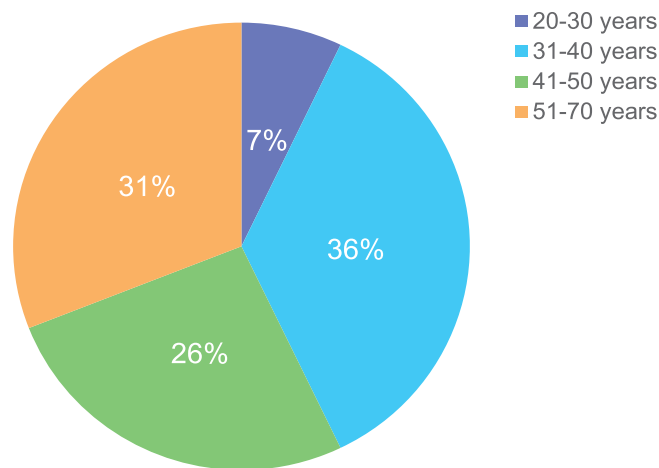
Female	50	Carnot	Carnot	Widow, 10 children	Returnee	Medium Income	Rachid	Camp	Danamadja
Female	35	Boguila	Paoua	Married, 5 children	Refugee	Medium-High Income	Rounga	Camp	Danamadja
Male	45	Nana Bakassa	Nana Bakassa	Married, 3 children	Returnee	Medium Income	Salamat	Camp	Danamadja
Female	35	Bossangoa	Bossangoa	Widow, 4 children	Returnee	Low Income	Mbororo	Camp	Danamadja
Male	63	Gadzi	Gadzi	Married, 9 children	Returnee	Medium-High Income	Salamat	Camp	Danamadja
Male	30	Paoua	Bangui	Married	Returnee	Medium Income	Rounga	Camp	Danamadja
Male	41	Bouar	Bangui	Married, 4 children	Refugee	Medium-High Income	Farankoen	Camp	Dosseye
Female	43	Zemio	Bangui	Divorced, 3 children	Refugee	Medium Income	Azande	Camp	Dosseye
Male	33	Bangui	Bangui	Married, 4 children	Refugee	Medium-High Income	Nzakara	Camp	Dosseye
Male	71	Birao	Bangui	Married, 14 children	Refugee	Medium-High Income	Gula	Camp	Dosseye
Female	45	Kembe	Bangui	Married, 4 children	Refugee	Medium Income	Bandiri	Camp	Dosseye
Female	32	Bouai	Bouai	Married, 3 children	Refugee	Medium Income	Gbaya	Camp	Dosseye
Male	39	Bozoum	Bozoum	Married, 4 children	Returnee	Medium Income	Haoussa	Camp	Kobiteye
Female	40	Bozoum	Bozoum	Married, 6 children	Returnee	Low Income	Gbaya	Camp	Kobiteye
Male	64	Bozoum	Bozoum	Married, 14 children	Returnee	Medium Income	Rounga	Camp	Kobiteye
Male	53	Bozoum	Baoro	Married, 7 children	Returnee	Medium-High Income	Haoussa	Camp	Kobiteye
Female	47	Paoua	Paoua	Married, 5 children	Returnee	Low Income	Kaba	Camp	Kobiteye

Female	30	Bangui	Bangui	Married, 7 children	Returnee	Low Income	Salamat	Camp	Kobiteye
Male	49	Carnot	Carnot	Married, 12 children	Returnee	Medium Income	Foulata	Camp	Kobiteye
Female	50	Bangui	Bangui	Divorced, 3 children	Refugee	Medium Income	Fulbe	Camp	Dosseye
Female	35	Bangui	Bangui	Married, 3 children	Refugee	Medium Income	Foulata	Camp	Dosseye
Male	38	Bangui	Bangui	Married, 1 child	Refugee	Medium Income	Mbororo	Camp	Dosseye
Male	24	Bria	Bangui	Married	Refugee	Medium Income	Fulbe	Camp	Dosseye
Female	50	Bangui	Bangui	Widow, 3 children	Refugee	Medium Income	Haoussa	Camp	Dosseye
Male	31	Kaga Bandoro	Bangui	Married, 1 child	Refugee	Medium Income	Mbororo	Camp	Dosseye
Female	56	Bilti (Chad)	Yaloke	Married, 10 children	Returnee	Medium-High Income	Mimi	Camp	Gaoui
Male	50	Bangui	Bangui	Married, 4 children	Returnee	Medium Income	Rachid	Camp	Gaoui
Male	68	Ndele	Bangui	Married, 13 children	Returnee	Medium-High Income	Rounga	Camp	Gaoui

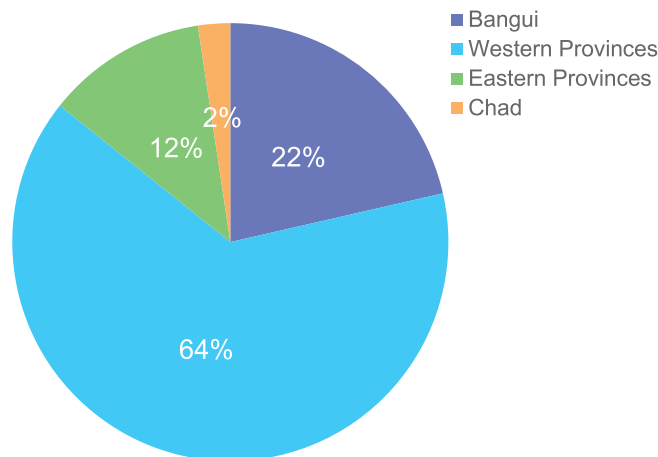
1. Gender Distribution of Central African Respondents



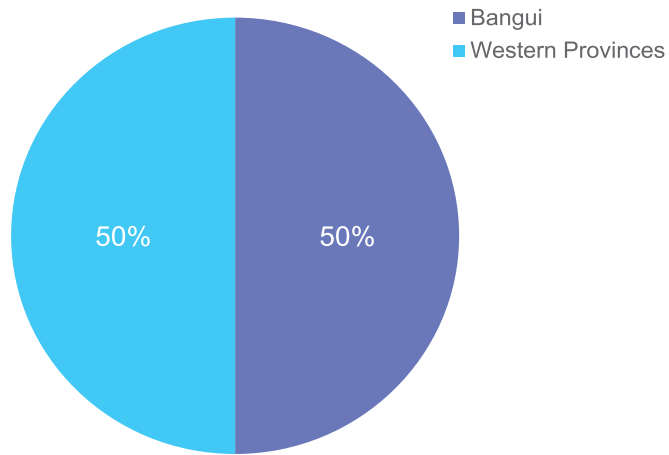
2. Age Distribution of Central African Respondents



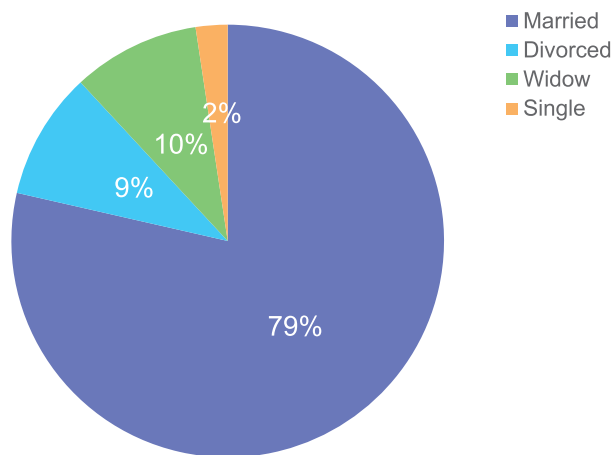
3. Place of Birth of Central African Respondents



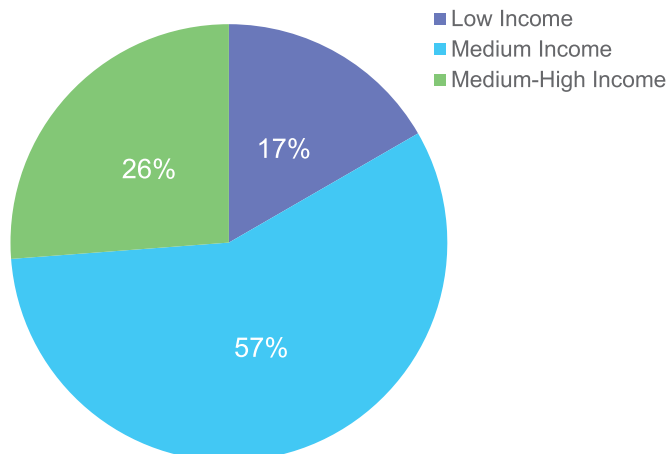
4. Place of Residence of Central African Respondents



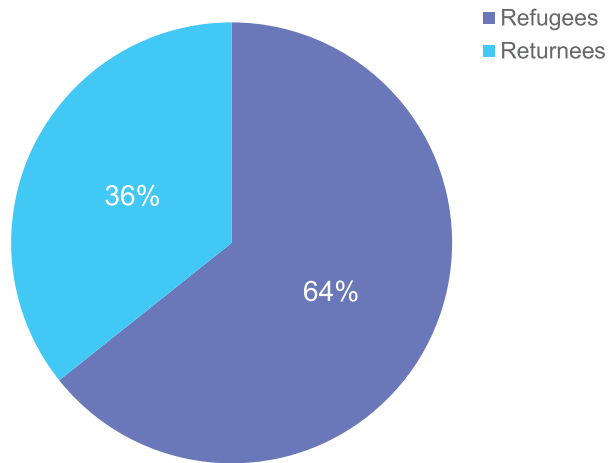
5. Family Status of Central African Respondents



6. Social Status of Central African Respondents



7. Legal Status of Central African Respondents



8. Ethnic Group of Central African Respondents

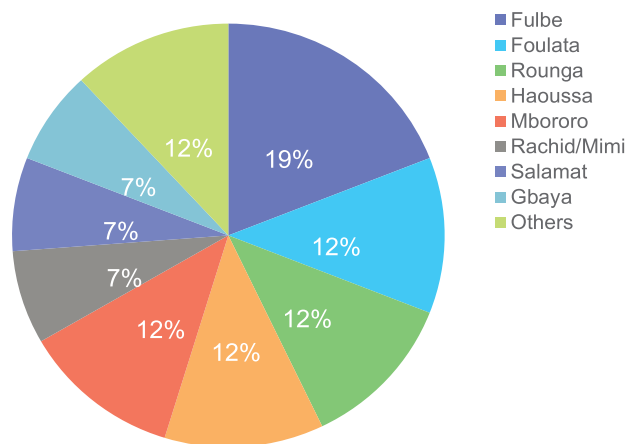


Table 2: List of Interviews with National and International Organizations

Organization	Meeting Date and Place
United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)	July 27, 2017, Bangui (CAR)
United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)	July 27, 2017, Bangui (CAR)
World Food Programme (WFP)	July 27, 2017, Bangui (CAR)
Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA)	July 27, 2017, Bangui (CAR)
Intersos	July 27, 2017, Bangui (CAR)
World Food Programme (WFP)	July 28, 2017, Bangui (CAR)
Cluster Solutions Durables	July 28, 2017, Bangui (CAR)
United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)	July 28, 2017, Bangui (CAR)
Comité de Coordination des Organisations Internationales en Centrafrique (CCO)	July 29, 2017, Bangui (CAR)
Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation	August 6, 2017, N'djamena (Chad)
International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC)	August 7, 2017, N'djamena (Chad)
CARE	August 8, 2017, N'djamena (Chad)
Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA)	August 8, 2017, N'djamena (Chad)
Commission Nationale d' Accueil de Réinsertion des Réfugiés et des Rapatriés (CNARR)	August 8, 2017, N'djamena (Chad)
SECADEV	August 11, 2017, Goré (Chad)
United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)	August 15, 2017, Goré (Chad)
ACTED	August 17, 2017, N'djamena (Chad)
Norwegian Refugee Council	August 23, 2017, Bangui (CAR)
Avocats Sans Frontières	August 24, 2017, Bangui (CAR)
American Bar Association	August 25, 2017, Bangui (CAR)

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23. Named “Turkey” and “Saudi Arabia” camps, reflecting the donor countries.
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63. 31-year-old married male from Bangui, medium income, Mbororo, living in Dosseye (Chad).
64. 45-year-old married female from Bangui, medium income, Haoussa, living in Garoua-Boulai (Cameroon) and 35-year-old widowed female from Bossango, low income, Mbororo, living in Danamadja (Chad).
65. 30-year-old married female from Bangui, low income, Salamat, living in Kobiteye (Chad); and 24-year-old married male from Bangui, medium income, Fulbe, living in Dosseye (Chad).
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71. 32-year-old married female from Bouai, medium income, Gbaya, living in Dosseye (Chad). 40-year-old married female from Bouzoum, low income, Gbaya, living in Kobiteye (Chad).
72. 33-year-old divorced female from Bangui, medium income, Fulbe, living in Garoua-Boulai (Cameroon).
73. 68-year-old married male from Bangui, medium-high income, Rounga, living in Gaoui (Chad).

74. 30-year-old married male from Bangui, medium income, Rounga, living in Danamadja (Chad).
75. 65-year-old married male from Bouar, low income, Fulbe, living in Garoua-Boulai (Cameroon). 35-year-old married female from Carnot, medium-high income, Haoussa, living in a rented house in Garoua-Boulai (Cameroon). 27-year-old married woman from Berberati, medium income, Foulata, living in Doholo (Chad). 53-year-old married male from Baoro, medium-high income, Haoussa, living in Kobiteye (Chad).
76. 27-year-old married female from Berberati, medium income, Foulata, living in Doholo (Chad).
77. 32-year-old married female from Bouai, medium income, Gbaya, living in Dosseye (Chad).
78. 35-year-old married female from Paoua, medium-high income, Rounga, living in Danamadja (Chad).
79. 32-year-old married male from Boali, medium income, Okangue (Mbororo), living in Doholo (Chad).
80. 35-year-old married female from Paoua, medium-high income, Rounga, living in Danamadja (Chad).
81. 45-year-old married female from Bangui, medium income, Bandiri, living in Dosseye (Chad).
82. 55-year-old married male from Boda, low income, Fulbe, living in Doholo (Chad).
83. 64-year-old married male from Bouzoum, medium income, Rounga, living in Kobiteye (Chad). 56-year-old married female from Yaloke, medium-high income, Mimi, living in Gaoui (Chad).
84. 38-year-old married male from Bangui, medium income, Mbororo, living in Dosseye.
85. 45-year-old married female from Bangui, medium income, Haoussa, living in Garoua-Boulai (Cameroon). 45-year-old divorced female from Bangui, medium income, Fulbe, living in Garoua-Boulai (Cameroon). 47-year-old married female from Paoua, low income, Kaba, living in Kobiteye (Chad).
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88. 50-year-old widowed female from Carnot, medium income, Rachid, living in Danamadja (Chad).
89. 32-year-old married female from Bouai, medium income, Gbaya, living in Dosseye (Chad).
90. 40-year-old married female from Bouzoum, low income, Gbaya, living in Kobiteye (Chad).
91. 50-year-old widowed female from Bangui, medium income, Haoussa, living in Dosseye (Chad).
92. 50-year-old widowed female from Bangui, medium income, Haoussa, living in Dosseye (Chad).
93. 38-year-old married male from Bangui, medium income, Mbororo, living in Dosseye (Chad).
94. 24-year-old married male from Bangui, medium income, Fulbe, living in Dosseye (Chad).
95. 27-year-old married female from Berberati, medium income, Foulata, living in Doholo (Chad).
96. 28-year-old single male from Bangui, medium income, Rounga, living in a rented house in Ndjamena (Chad). 31-year-old married male from Bangui, medium income, Mbororo, living in Dosseye (Chad).
97. 50-year-old widowed female from Carnot, medium income, Rachid, living in Danamadja (Chad).
98. 32-year-old married female from Baoui, medium income, Gbaya, living in Dosseye (Chad).
99. 56-year-old married female from Yaloke, medium-high income, Mimi, living in Gaoui (Chad).
100. 55-year-old married male from Boda, low income, Fulbe, living in Doholo (Chad).
101. 32-year-old married male from Boali, medium income, Okangue (Mbororo), living in Doholo (Chad).
102. 27-year-old married female from Berberati, medium income, Foulata, living in Doholo (Chad); and 35-year-old married female from Carnot, medium-high income, Haoussa, living in a rented house in Garoua-Boulai (Cameroon).
103. 27-year-old married female from Berberati, medium income, Foulata, living in Doholo (Chad).

104. 43-year-old divorced female from Bangui, medium income, Azande, living in Dosseye (Chad).
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108. 55-year-old married male from Boda, low income, Fulbe, living in Doholo (Chad).
109. 35-year-old widowed female from Nana Bakassa, medium income, Foulata, living in Doholo (Chad).
110. 30-year-old married female from Bangui, low income, Salamat, living in Kobiteye (Chad).
111. 49-year-old married male from Carnot, medium income, Foulata, living in Kobiteye (Chad).
112. 50-year-old widowed female from Bangui, medium income, Haoussa, living in Dosseye (Chad).
113. 33-year-old married male from Bangui, medium-high income, Nzakara, living in Dosseye (Chad).
114. 45-year-old married female from Bangui, medium income, Bandiri, living in Dosseye (Chad).
115. 35-year-old married female from Paoua, medium-high income, Rounga, living in Danamadja (Chad).
116. 38-year-old married male from Bangui, medium income, Mbororo, living in Dosseye (Chad).
117. 43-year-old divorced female from Bangui, medium income, Azande, living in Dosseye (Chad).
118. 27-year-old married female from Berberati, medium income, Foulata, living in Doholo (Chad)
119. 41-year-old married male from Bangui, medium-high income, Farankoen (Mbororo) living in Dosseye (Chad).
120. 53-year-old married male from Baoro, medium-high income, Haoussa, living in Kobiteye (Chad).
121. 34-year-old married male from Bangui, medium income, Fulbe, living in Doholo.
122. 41-year-old married female from Bangui, medium-high income, Gbaya, living in a rented house in Garoua-Boulai (Cameroon).
123. 35-year-old married female from Carnot, medium-high income, Haoussa, living in a rented house in Garoua-Boulai (Cameroon).
124. 63-year-old married male from Gadzi, medium-high income, Salamat, living in Danamadja (Chad).
125. 24-year-old married male from Bangui, medium income, Fulbe, living in Dosseye (Chad).
126. 53-year-old married male from Baoro, medium-high income, Haoussa, living in Kobiteye (Chad).
127. 35-year-old widowed female from Bossangoa, low income, Mbororo, living in Danamadja (Chad).
128. 35-year-old widowed female from Nana Bakassa, medium income, Foulata, living in Doholo (Chad).
129. 41-year-old married male from Bangui, medium-high income, Farankoen (Mbororo), living in Dosseye (Chad).
130. 41-year-old married female from Bangui, medium-high income, Gbaya, living in a rented house in Garoua-Boulai (Cameroon).
131. 35-year-old widowed female from Bossangoa, low income, Mbororo, living in Danamadja (Chad).
132. 50-year-old divorce female from Bangui, medium income, Fulbe, living in Dosseye (Chad).
133. 45-year-old divorced female from Bangui, medium income, Fulbe, living in Garoua-Boulai (Cameroon).
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139. 33-year-old married male from Bangui, medium-high income, Nzakara, living in Dosseye (Chad).
140. 50-year-old widowed female from Bangui, medium income, Haoussa, living in Dosseye (Chad).
141. 64-year-old married male from Bouzoum, medium income, Rounga, living in Kobiteye (Chad).
142. 33-year-old divorced female from Bangui, medium income, Fulbe, Garoua-Boulai (Cameroon).
143. 33-year-old divorced female from Bangui, medium income, Fulbe, Garoua-Boulai (Cameroon).
144. 50-year-old married male from Bangui, medium income, Rachid, living in Gaoui (Chad).
145. 31-year-old married male from Bangui, medium income, Mbororo, living in Dosseye (Chad).
146. 50-year-old widowed female from Carnot, medium income, Rachid, living in Danamadja (Chad).
147. 39-year-old married male from Bouzoum, medium income, Haoussa, living in Kobiteye (Chad).
148. 43-year-old divorced female from Bangui, medium income, Azande, living in Dosseye (Chad).
149. 40-year-old married female from Bouzoum, low income, Gbaya, living in Kobiteye (Chad).
150. 32-year-old married female from Bouai, medium income, Gbaya, living in Dosseye (Chad).
151. 68-year-old married male from Bohom, low income, Fulbe, living in Garaou-Boulai (Cameroon).
152. 55-year-old married male from Boda, low income, Fulbe, living in Doholo (Chad).
153. UNDP, *Human Development Report 2016* (New York: UNDP, 2016), http://hdr.undp.org/sites/default/files/HDR2016_EN_Overview_Web.pdf
154. 41-year-old married male from Bangui, medium-high income, Farankoen (Mbororo), living in Dosseye (Chad).
155. 31-year-old married male from Bangui, medium income, Mbororo, living in Dosseye (Chad).
156. 32-year-old married female from Bouai, medium income, Gbaya, living in Dosseye (Chad).
157. 32-year-old married male from Boali, medium income, Okangue (Mbororo), living in Doholo (Chad).
158. 33-year-old married male from Bangui, medium-high income, Nzakara, living in Dosseye (Chad).
159. 38-year-old married male from Bangui, medium income, Mbororo, living in Dosseye (Chad).
160. 71-year-old married male from Bangui, medium-high income, Gula, living in Dosseye (Chad).
161. 68-year-old married male from Bohom, low income, Fulbe, living in Garoua-Boulai (Cameroon).
162. 30-year-old married female from Bangui, low income, Salamat, living in Kobiteye (Chad).
163. 30-year-old married male from Bangui, medium income, Rounga, living in Danamadja (Chad).
164. 35-year-old married female from Carnot, medium-high income, Haoussa, living in a rented house in Garoua-Boulai (Cameroon).
165. 33-year-old divorced female from Bangui, medium income, Fulbe, living in Garoua-Boulai (Cameroon).
166. 27-year-old married female from Berberati, medium income, Foulata, living in Doholo (Chad).
167. 35-year-old married female from Paoua, medium-high income, Rounga, living in Danamadja (Chad).
168. 24-year-old married male from Bangui, medium income, Fulbe, living in Dosseye (Chad).
169. 50-year-old married male from Bangui, medium income, Rachid, living in Gaoui (Chad).
170. 68-year-old married male from Bangui, medium-high income, Rounga, living in Gaoui (Chad).

171. 35-year-old widowed female from Nana Bakassa, medium income, Foulata, living in Doholo (Chad).
172. 50-year-old widowed female from Carnot, medium income, Rachid, living in Danamadja (Chad).
173. 45-year-old married female from Bangui, medium income, Bandiri, living in Dosseye (Chad).
174. Senior officer, international NGO, Bangui.
175. Senior officer, United Nations, Bangui.
176. 63-year-old married male from Gadzi, medium-high income, Salamat, living in Danamadja (Chad).
177. 39-year-old married male from Bouzoum, medium income, Haoussa, living in Kobiteye (Chad).
178. World Bank, "Understanding Access to Justice and Conflict Resolution at the Local Level in the Central African Republic," February 24, 2012, <http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/970091468192841525/pdf/782640WP0CAR0A0Box0377336B00PUBLIC0.pdf>
179. 41-year-old married male from Bangui, medium-high income, Farankoen (Mbororo), living in Dosseye (Chad).
180. 64-year-old married male from Bouzoum, medium income, Rounga, living in Kobiteye (Chad).
181. 43-year-old divorced female from Bangui, medium income, Azande, living in Dosseye (Chad).
182. 47-year-old married female from Paoua, low income, Kaba, living in Kobiteye (Chad).
183. 41-year-old married male from Bangui, medium-high income, Farankoen (Mbororo), living in Dosseye (Chad).
184. 65-year-old married male from Bouar, low income, Fulbe, living in Garoua-Boulai (Cameroon).
185. 45-year-old married female from Bangui, medium income, Bandiri, living in Dosseye (Chad).
186. 55-year-old married male from Boda, low income, Fulbe, living in Doholo (Chad).
187. 33-year-old married male from Bangui, medium-high income, Nzakara, living in Dosseye (Chad).
188. 43-year-old divorced female from Bangui, medium income, Azande, living in Dosseye (Chad).
189. 64-year-old married male from Bouzoum, medium income, Rounga, living in Kobiteye (Chad).
190. 38-year-old married male from Bangui, medium income, Mbororo, living in Dosseye (Chad).
191. 68-year-old married male from Bohom, low income, Fulbe, living in Garoua-Boulai (Cameroon).
192. 50-year-old divorced female from Bangui, medium income, Fulbe, living in Dosseye (Chad).
193. 49-year-old married male from Carnot, medium income, Foulata, living in Kobiteye (Chad).
194. 33-year-old married male from Bangui, medium-high income, Nzakara, living in Dosseye (Chad).
195. 35-year-old married female from Paoua, medium-high income, Rounga, living in Danamadja (Chad).
196. 71-year-old married male from Bangui, medium-high income, Gula, living in Dosseye (Chad).
197. 24-year-old married male from Bangui, medium income, Fulbe, living in Dosseye (Chad).
198. 35-year-old married female from Bangui, medium income, Foulata, living in Dosseye (Chad). 39-year-old married male from Bouzoum, medium income, Haoussa, living in Kobiteye (Chad).
199. 53-year-old married male from Baoro, medium-high income, Haoussa, living in Kobiteye (Chad).
200. 31-year-old married male from Bangui, medium income, Mbororo, living in Dosseye (Chad).
201. 45-year-old married male from Nana Bakassa, medium income, Salamat, living in Danamadja (Chad).
202. 40-year-old married female from Bouzoum, low income, Gbaya, living in Kobiteye (Chad).
203. 65-year-old married male from Bouar, low income, Fulbe, living in Garoua-Boulai (Cameroon).
204. 35-year-old widowed female from Nana Bakassa, medium income, Foulata, living in Doholo (Chad).

205. 32-year-old married female from Bouai, medium income, Gbaya, living in Dosseye (Chad).
206. 68-year-old married male from Bangui, medium-high income, Rounga, living in Gaoui (Chad).
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209. 33-year-old divorced female from Bangui, medium income, Fulbe, living in Garoua-Boulai (Cameroon).
210. 55-year-old married male from Boda, low income, Fulbe, living in Doholo (Chad).
211. 40-year-old married female from Bouzoum, low income, Gbaya, living in Kobiteye (Chad).
212. 50-year-old married male from Bangui, medium income, Rachid, living in Gaoui (Chad).
213. 47-year-old married female from Paoua, low income, Kaba, living in Kobiteye (Chad).
214. 68-year-old married male from Bangui, medium-high income, Rounga, living in Gaoui (Chad).
215. 53-year-old married male from Baoro, medium-high income, Haoussa, living in Kobiteye (Chad).
216. Officer, international NGO, Bangui.
217. UNDP, “La Centrafrique adopte la loi sur la parité homme et femme,” November 10, 2016, <http://www.cf.undp.org/content/car/fr/home/presscenter/pressreleases/2016/11/10/la-centrafrique-adopte-la-loi-sur-la-parit-homme-femme.html>

Cover Images. Top row, from left: Civilians from Bouca fled retaliations from armed groups, seeking refuge in churches, mosques, hospitals, and, in this case, a local health center. Bouca (Ouham), 2013. (Juan Carlos Tomasi). Nomadic groups such as the Peuhls pass through the north of CAR, camping in the bush, where they can install their tents close to their cattle. Ndele (Bamingui-Bangoran), 2015. (Juan Carlos Tomasi). Anti-Balaka militias, which formed as self-defense groups to protect local populations from bandits in the outer region of the country, were openly in charge of security in the displaced camps of Bangui. Bangui, 2014. (Juan Carlos Tomasi). Muslim women who fled from Bangui in February 2014, during the peak of the inter-communal violence, were forced to lie down with their families in a truck full of displaced people. Ndele (Bamingui-Bangoran), 2015. (Juan Carlos Tomasi). Mbororo refugee women prepare communal land for the next planting season in Gbiti. October 2009. (UNHCR / F. Noy). In late 2013, fighting in Bangui between Anti-Balaka militias and Seleka combatants resulted in hundreds of civilians killed and injured. From March 2014 on, French forces (Sangaris) were deployed all around the country. Bangui, 2014. (Juan Carlos Tomasi). In September 2013, a new wave of violence affected Bouca, a northern town, forcing more than 1,000 people to flee their homes and hide in the bush. Bouca (Ouham), 2013. (Juan Carlos Tomasi)

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