

## **The Conflict in the Central African Republic: A brief background<sup>1</sup>**

In order to understand the current situation in the Central African Republic, it is necessary to take a brief look at the political evolution of this nation since it gained independence from France in 1960. The Central African Republic, a former colony of France, gained independence in 1960. During more than half a century of independence, the country has been ruled by military dictators for all but nine years. In the wake of these violent changes, corruption, the non-respect of human rights, repression of free political expression and nepotism, became institutionalized and endemic. The only goal of successive corrupt governments was personal enrichment of the political leaders and members of their families through embezzlement of public funds, looting of public corporations, and illegal exploitation of precious minerals and other natural resources while a very large majority of the people lived in abject poverty.

François Bozizé's ascent to power by means of a military coup in 2003, was strongly contested by civil society and the various political groups. This led to pressure from Economic Community of Central African States to organize transparent, free and fair democratic elections, although those that Bozizé held never met those conditions. In an attempt to work out a compromise and bring peace to CAR, ECCAS held many peace conferences mainly in Libreville between 2008 and 2011. Although these conferences produced agreements, none were ever implemented because of the intransigence of Bozizé. He was abandoned by his remaining supporters and Djotodia was allowed to take power and form a government of transition.

When Michel Djotodia Am-Nondroko ousted President Bozizé and took power on 24 March 2013, many people rejoiced because they believed this would bring an end to their suffering. But their joy was short-lived because the foreign fighters which Djotodia and the Séléka<sup>2</sup> coalition brought from Chad and Sudan and their local collaborators engaged in widespread violations and provoked sustained inter-ethnic, inter-tribal and inter-religious violence.

The wanton violence of the Séléka forces, especially after they had taken power, discredited the newly installed Djotodia regime. The anti-balaka<sup>3</sup> militia, reinforced by elements of the disorganized and scattered FACA<sup>4</sup>, organized themselves and carried out mass killings, looting and destruction of property under the pretext of retaliating for the violations against the non-Muslim and Christian communities by the Séléka forces. The latter responded with equal ferocity. The atrocities resulting from this explosion of violence, especially in Bangui, led ECCAS to compel Djotodia's resignation at a meeting in Ndjamena, on 10 January 2014.

After Djotodia's departure, the National Transitional Council was reconstituted and on 27 January 2014, a new National Transitional Government, headed by President Samba-Panza, was put in place.

*The transition to a new Government is taking place following presidential and legislative elections that were held in late 2015 and early 2016, which were organized by the United Nations.*

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<sup>1</sup> Extract from the "Final Report of the International Commission of Inquiry on the Central African Republic", UN document S/2014/928, paras. 25-29.

<sup>2</sup> Seleka means "alliance" in Sangho, the local language.

<sup>3</sup> Balaka means "machete", a main weapon of violence in the villages.

<sup>4</sup> Armed Forces of the Central African Republic.