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Central African Republic:

New displacement due to ongoing conflict and banditry

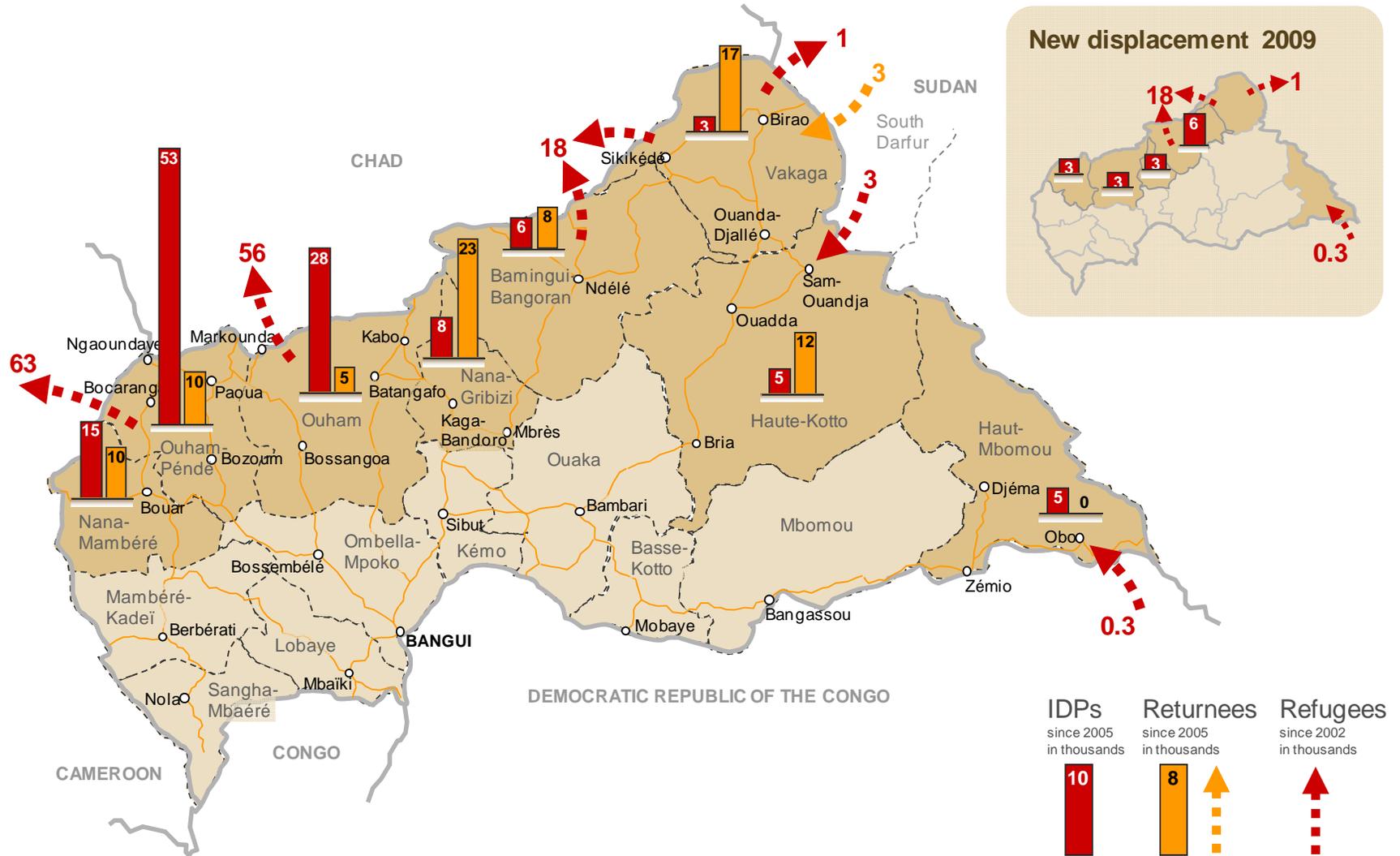
Internal armed conflict between government forces and various armed groups in northern areas of the Central African Republic (CAR) caused the internal displacement of over 200,000 people by 2007. Following peace agreements, their number fell to around 108,000 by February 2009, but since then clashes between the army and a splinter rebel group, and attacks against civilians by criminal gangs, have caused new displacement. As of October 2009, the number of internally displaced people (IDPs) was estimated at over 162,000, including over 73,000 people who were trying to return to their homes but had not yet found durable solutions for return.

IDPs in CAR have suffered from a range of human rights abuses, including killings, the looting and burning of villages, destruction of fields, loss of livelihoods, sexual violence, and the abduction and recruitment of children. Members of all armed groups have perpetrated these crimes. Each wave of IDPs has been forced to take shelter in fields and forests without access to basic services, before seeking support from impoverished host communities when it has been safe to do so. As of December 2009, their living conditions are very different from those of IDPs in neighbouring countries; there is only one IDP camp in CAR, and most rely almost entirely on host communities in remote rural towns.

While the government has been unable to provide assistance, it has given international humanitarian organisations unimpeded access to displaced communities and has allowed them to operate freely. However, reaching people in need is still a big challenge for both logistical and security reasons. Those still living in the bush have not received assistance, and given that IDPs are scattered over very large areas, strategies of “protection by presence” have had only a marginal impact.

International peacekeeping forces in CAR have had little impact in areas of internal displacement because they have been deployed in small numbers and have been unable to engage criminal gangs. The latest wave of fighting highlighted the fragility of the peace process and raised serious concerns about stability in the lead-up to the presidential elections to be held in 2010.

Refugees and displaced people in the Central African Republic



Source: Humanitarian and Development Partnership Team (HDPT) CAR, October 2009

More maps are available on <http://www.internal-displacement.org>

Background and causes of displacement

Since 2003, the Central African Republic (CAR) has experienced successive waves of violence and internal armed conflict, resulting in some of the worst humanitarian indicators in the world. Ranked 179th out of 182 countries on the 2009 Human Development Index (UNDP, 2009), one in ten live births in CAR result in the mother's death, one in five children die before their fifth birthday, and over 60 per cent of the population live on less than \$1.25 a day (OCHA, 30 November 2009). A landlocked country, CAR shares borders with three other countries that have ongoing internal armed conflicts: Chad, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) and Sudan.

In 2003, President François Bozizé seized power by means of a military coup with support from the government of Chad (Small Arms Survey, December 2008). After leading a two-year transitional government, Bozizé won the 2005 presidential election with 64 per cent of the vote (Xinhuanet, 25 May 2005). However, the new government's unwillingness to develop the north of the country and provide economic and social benefits fuelled resentment among people there, leading to internal armed conflict between government forces and three main rebels groups: the Popular Army for the Restoration of Democracy (*Armée populaire pour la restauration de la démocratie* or APRD) and the Central African Democratic Front (*Front démocratique du peuple centrafricain* or FDPC), both based in north-west CAR along the border with Chad, and the Union of Democratic Forces for Unity (*Union des forces démocratiques pour le rassemblement* or UFDR), in the north-

east along the border with Sudan (HRW, 14 September 2007). The fighting lasted until mid-2008 and caused the displacement of more than 300,000 people, who were forced either to flee to neighbouring Cameroon or Chad, or to take shelter in CAR in fields and forests without access to basic services, or with impoverished host communities.

In addition to the politically-motivated conflict, attacks against civilians by criminal gangs known as “*coupeurs de route*” or “Zaraguina” have also caused significant displacement. These gangs have acted with almost total impunity, taking advantage of the absence of government forces in the wake of the conflict. In 2008, the UN estimated that a third of all internally displaced people (IDPs) in CAR had been displaced by criminal gangs (OCHA, November 2008). The state's inability to control its territory has also made CAR a preferred hiding place for foreign armed groups. The Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) has made numerous attacks in south-east CAR since February 2008 (Reuters, 25 November 2009).

Peacekeeping operations and peace agreements

Peacekeeping operations

International peacekeeping forces in CAR have had little impact in areas of internal displacement because they have been deployed in small numbers and have been unable to engage criminal gangs. The Multinational Force in the Central African Republic (*Force multinationale en Centrafrique* or FOMUC), a regional peacekeeping force of the Central African Economic and Monetary Community

funded by the European Union and France, was in CAR from 2002 to 2008 under a mandate to provide security by patrolling main roads. However, it only had 200 troops, its area of operations was limited to three towns in the north, and it was not authorised to patrol more than ten kilometres from the centre of each town. In July 2008, FOMUC was replaced by the Mission for the Consolidation of Peace (*Mission de consolidation de la paix en Centrafrique* or MICOPAX). While troop numbers were increased to a planned 700 personnel, the area of operations was not expanded (ICG, 9 December 2008).

In 2007, in response to the growing levels of insecurity and human rights abuses in CAR and Chad, the UN Security Council authorised the creation of a joint UN mission to both countries known as MINURCAT, and the deployment of European Union (EU) troops, to protect IDPs and refugees affected by the spillover of violence from Darfur and to safeguard the delivery of humanitarian assistance. However, less than 200 EUFOR troops were deployed to north-east CAR, near the border with Sudan. As road bandits mostly operated in the north-west, where the bulk of IDPs were located, EUFOR troops were limited in their capacity to protect civilians and humanitarian workers from attacks.

EUFOR was replaced by UN peacekeeping troops in March 2009, and the mission's mandate was extended for one year (UN SC, 14 January 2009). Despite authorisation to deploy 5,200 troops, MINURCAT is currently working at half operational capacity with only 2,600 troops on the ground (UN SC, 14 October 2009). This is due to a lack of funding

and to problems in the acquisition and transportation of military equipment by troop-contributing countries. The impact has been greater on the larger contingent in Chad: 274 of the authorised 300 troops for CAR were deployed in mid-2009 (UN SC, 14 July 2009).

Peace agreements

In June 2008, the government of CAR signed the Libreville Comprehensive Peace Agreement with all the armed insurgent groups, after signing individual ceasefire agreements with the APRD and UFDR. The Libreville Agreement required the government to pass a general amnesty law and to undertake the demobilisation, disarmament and reintegration (DDR) of rebel groups. These efforts paved the way for peace talks in the capital Bangui in December 2008 under the auspices of Gabon's President Omar Bongo. Both the political and armed opposition participated in what is known as the "Inclusive Political Dialogue", and agreed to a consensus government in January 2009 that included leaders of APRD and UFDR (UNICEF, January 2009). Former President Ange-Felix Patasse, overthrown by Bozizé in 2003, returned from exile to participate in the peace talks. He has announced that he will run as an independent candidate in the upcoming presidential elections scheduled for 2010 (Reuters AlertNet, 31 October 2009).

While the various peace agreements and the new unity government led to a marked decrease in fighting in the second half of 2008, a splinter rebel group emerged to challenge of the peace process. In November 2009, the Convention of Patriots for Justice and Peace (*Conven-*

tion des patriotes pour la justice et la paix or CPJP) seized the northern town of Ndélé, where its clashes with the army caused new displacements (BBC, 27 November 2009). This latest wave of fighting highlighted the fragility of the peace process and raised serious concerns about stability in the period leading up to the presidential elections to be held in 2010 (UN DPI, 15 December 2009).

In August 2009, the government launched a DDR programme which was expected to last 36 months and involve between 6,000 and 10,000 ex-combatants (HDPT, 10-17 August 2009). The head of BONUCA, the UN's peacebuilding office in CAR, stressed the importance of reintegrating self-defense militias and other armed groups that were not included in the peace process (UN SC, 15 December 2009). The government also implemented a security sector reform initiative with the support of the UN Peacebuilding Commission to restructure and train all security forces in CAR, including the national army (*Forces armées centrafricaines* or FACA), gendarmerie, and police (PBC, 22 October 2008).

Latest displacement figures

While numbers of IDPs in CAR are not as high as in neighbouring Chad, Sudan, or DRC, they make up a significant proportion of the country's total population. Nearly eight per cent of CAR's 4.5 million people are either internally displaced or living as refugees outside the country (OCHA, 30 November 2009). As of October 2009, the number of IDPs was estimated at over 162,000, including over 73,000 people who were trying to return to their homes but had not yet found du-

erable solutions for return (UN SC, 8 December 2009).

Despite the peace agreements signed, this estimate of the number of IDPs in October represented a significant increase from the 108,000 reported in February 2009 (HDPT, 1 February 2009). In addition to increased internal displacement, a growing number of Central Africans have also sought refuge in neighbouring countries. The UN estimates that there are 137,000 Central African refugees living in Cameroon, Chad, DRC, and Sudan (OCHA, 30 November 2009), and in the first half of 2009, 18,000 people fled to Chad following clashes between government forces and rebels (IRIN, 14 August 2009). CAR also hosts more than 10,000 refugees from DRC and Sudan. These population movements reveal a worrying trend of increasing violence and renewed displacements.

Protection and assistance needs of IDPs

Since 2005, IDPs in CAR have suffered from a range of human rights abuses, including killings, the looting and burning of villages, destruction of fields, loss of livelihoods, sexual violence, and the abduction and recruitment of children.

Members of all armed groups have perpetrated these crimes. Government forces committed atrocities against civilians until late 2007 in retaliation for their support of opposition groups which, as the de facto authorities in some areas, punished civilians when their authority was not respected. Criminal gangs have in turn committed atrocities for financial gain; and self-defence militias, created with the support of the government in

response to attacks by bandits, recruited children.

The living conditions of IDPs in CAR are very different from those in neighbouring countries. There is only one IDP camp in CAR, in the town of Kabo, and most IDPs are dispersed in remote rural towns after prolonged periods of living in small groups in the bush without any type of social services. Today, IDPs rely almost entirely on host communities for support. Those that are still living in the bush do not receive humanitarian assistance because of problems with access. Given that IDPs are scattered over very large areas, the “protection by presence” strategies of humanitarian agencies only have a marginal impact on displaced communities.

Issues of return

As of December 2009, over 73,000 people had returned to their villages of origin, but had been unable to find durable solutions for return (UN SC, 8 December 2009). Most of their areas of origin saw an increase of violence in 2009, which caused several waves of renewed displacement.

Some of those IDPs who have returned have not done so voluntarily. There is evidence that rebel groups and government forces have forced villagers to return to destroyed and looted homes in order to extract “taxes” from them (IRIN, 28 May 2009). This trend poses serious protection concerns as it further increases the vulnerability of the displaced population.

For most IDPs in CAR, return is not yet a viable option. Besides security concerns, an important factor contributing to the

reluctance of IDPs to return to their villages of origin is the lack of basic services and infrastructure available in areas of return. Houses have been burned, health posts, schools, and water pumps are unlikely to be functioning, and infrastructure has been damaged for nearly ten years, leaving very little incentive for people to return (Kälin, 18 April 2008). Conversely, increased availability of basic services in villages of origin and improved security conditions would probably increase IDPs’ willingness to return and thus begin the slow process of rebuilding their lives.

National and international responses

National response

Until recently, the Ministry of Social Affairs was the government office charged with coordinating assistance to IDPs. However, it lacked the funds and the capacity to respond to their needs. In 2009, CAR’s High Commissioner for Human Rights and Good Governance created the National Standing Committee for IDPs (*Comité National Permanent de Concertation et de Coordination pour la Gestion de la Protection des Droits des Personnes Déplacées*) to coordinate the national response to internal displacement (Office of the President of the Central African Republic, 24 June 2009).

While the government has been unable to provide assistance to IDPs, it has given international humanitarian organisations unimpeded access to displaced communities and has allowed them to operate freely in the country for this purpose. It has allowed UN agencies and NGOs to implement rule of law activities, such as

protection training workshops for local authorities, the army and the police, and even for armed opposition groups such as the APRD.

In June 2008, the Pact on Security, Stability and Development in Africa's Great Lakes region entered into force. This positive development for the protection of IDPs represents a commitment by 11 states to work to end the conflicts plaguing the region, and to cooperate on security, governance, development, humanitarian and social issues (UN SG, 24 June 2008). Given its porous borders and fragile state status, the Pact's success is of particular importance in CAR. The Pact's Protocol on the Protection and Assistance to Internally Displaced Persons (ICGLR, 14-15 December 2006) commits member states to incorporate the UN's Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement into domestic law. Although CAR has yet to enact national legislation to protect IDPs, UNHCR and the National Standing Committee for IDPs held a workshop in October 2009 to discuss the integration of the IDP Protocol and the Property Protocol of the Pact into national law. UNHCR plans to review existing legislation to determine what current provisions, if any, protect IDPs.

In October 2009, the African Union adopted the Convention for the Protection and Assistance of Internally Displaced Persons in Africa, the first legally binding regional instrument to protect the rights of IDPs. The Convention cannot enter into force until it is ratified by 15 African States. While the number of IDPs in CAR is not as high as in other African countries, ratification of the Convention by CAR would show its commitment to protecting the rights of IDPs and achiev-

ing their durable return, resettlement or reintegration. By ratifying the Convention, CAR could act as a positive example for the region, given its strategic geopolitical position between Chad, DRC, and Sudan.

International response

UN agencies and international NGOs have provided protection and assistance to conflict-affected communities in CAR, and some have also worked on early recovery and development programmes. Since the cluster approach was implemented in CAR in August 2007, ten clusters have been activated, grouped under the Humanitarian and Development Partnership Team (HDPT), a platform that has been instrumental in increasing visibility and funding. These clusters are: protection, health, food security, water, hygiene and sanitation, nutrition, shelter and non-food items, multi-sector assistance to refugees, education, early recovery, and coordination and support services (OCHA, 30 November 2009).

As of 25 November 2009, 68 per cent of the \$116 million requested in the 2009 Consolidated Appeals Process (CAP) was funded; however clusters received widely varying percentages of their initial requests. The consolidated appeal for 2010 is for \$113 million, to fund emergency assistance programmes for IDPs and to increase the self-sufficiency of displaced communities (OCHA, 30 November 2009).

The Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF) recognised that CAR was an underfunded emergency and allocated \$2.8 million for life-saving assistance benefiting 355,000 people (CERF, 2009). The

UN Peacebuilding Commission also contributed \$10 million to kick-start the peacebuilding process, but more sustained bilateral and multilateral support will be needed to rebuild CAR for durable solutions and lasting peace.

In September 2009, the Paris Club grouping of creditors cancelled \$48 million of CAR's debt to them (Paris Club, 15 September 2009), or the equivalent of six per cent of the country's total external debt. This will make it possible for the government to implement a comprehensive poverty reduction strategy (HDPT, 28 September 2009).

Humanitarian access

Although the government has not impeded the operations of humanitarian agencies, access is a big challenge in CAR for both logistical and security reasons. The long distances between Bangui and beneficiaries, and the collapsed road infrastructure mean that transport is cumbersome and costly. During the rainy season which runs roughly from May to October, most roads to the north from the capital are impassable, and humanitarians can only access the far north-east of the country by air. The area in the east recently attacked by the LRA is five days from Bangui by car, preventing a fast response to the needs of people affected. The impact of these difficult conditions

on the delivery of humanitarian assistance is exacerbated by the fact that the IDPs most in need of help do not live in concentrated groups. This makes distributions of goods and services time-consuming and highly labour-intensive, increasing the cost of humanitarian operations (Reuters AlertNet, 15 May 2007).

The continuing insecurity also restricts humanitarian access. Criminal gangs have started kidnapping aid workers. Two French staff members of the NGO Triangle were abducted in November and remain in captivity as of end December 2009, while a third hostage from the NGO Comité d'Aide Médicale was released shortly after being taken (IRIN, 4 December 2009). These abductions have led three humanitarian agencies in CAR to relocate field staff to Bangui (Reuters AlertNet, 1 December 2009).

Encouragingly, the humanitarian presence has improved drastically in the past years, with the number of international NGOs increasing from five in 2005 to 27 in 2008 (OCHA, 30 November 2009). Despite this improved capacity, reaching the most vulnerable IDPs living in the bush remains a significant challenge for humanitarian organisations.

Note: This is a summary of IDMC's internal displacement profile on CAR. The full profile is available online [here](#).

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About the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre

The Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, established in 1998 by the Norwegian Refugee Council, is the leading international body monitoring conflict-induced internal displacement worldwide.

Through its work, the Centre contributes to improving national and international capacities to protect and assist the millions of people around the globe who have been displaced within their own country as a result of conflicts or human rights violations.

At the request of the United Nations, the Geneva-based Centre runs an online database providing comprehensive information and analysis on internal displacement in some 50 countries.

Based on its monitoring and data collection activities, the Centre advocates for durable solutions to the plight of the internally displaced in line with international standards.

The Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre also carries out training activities to enhance the capacity of local actors to respond to the needs of internally displaced people. In its work, the Centre cooperates with and provides support to local and national civil society initiatives.

For more information, visit the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre website and the database at www.internal-displacement.org.

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