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**PARTICIPANTS:**

**Moderator:**

AMADOU SY  
Senior Fellow, Global Economy and Development,  
Africa Growth Initiative  
The Brookings Institution

**Panelists:**

REVEREND NICOLAS GUÉRÉKOYAMÉ GBANGOU  
President  
Alliance of Evangelicals (CAR)

IMAM OMAR KABINE LAYAMA  
President  
Central African Republic Islamic Community (CICA)

ARCHBISHOP DIEUDONNÉ NZAPALAINGA  
Archbishop  
Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Bangui

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## P R O C E E D I N G S

MR. SY: Welcome, everyone. We are very honored today to have with us three religious leaders from the Central African Republic who are on a mission. We all know the terrible situation in which the CAR is and these three distinguished gentlemen are visiting Washington and then will visit Paris, Rome, Geneva, and Berlin, before going back to Bangui on April 5<sup>th</sup>.

My name is Amadou Sy from the African Growth Initiative here at Brookings and we will have this session webcast and so we welcome also our webcast viewers. Please join us also on Twitter, #CARcrisis and we will be happy to relay your questions here.

Now, I will switch to French and we will have this session also translated from French to English, okay?

(Speaking French.)

Welcome, gentlemen. It is truly a great honor for us to welcome you here at the Brookings Institute in Washington, DC. I am going to introduce you to our viewers, so by alphabetical order, we are pleased to welcome, in the middle, the Reverend Gbangou.

(Speaking English.)

Reverend Gbangou is the President of the Alliance of the Central African Republic and a member of the Association of Evangelicals in Africa, and he is also a member of the National Transitional Council, an interim parliament established after the coup about a year ago on March 24, 2013.

To my left we have Imam Omar Kabine Layama and Imam Layama is the President of the Central African Republic's Islamic Community.

And last but not least, on the far left, my far left, we have Archbishop Dieudonne Nzapalainga, and Archbishop Nzapalainga is the Roman Catholic Archbishop

of Bangui, which is the capital of the Central African Republic.

So, to start, I would like each of our hosts to spend five to seven minutes telling us the objective of their visit here in Washington and of course any other issues or points they would like to emphasize.

(Speaking French.)

So, I am going to start on the left with the Imam Layama.

(Speaking English.)

Start from the left, far left.

(Speaking French.)

In a few words, Archbishop, could you please detail the purpose of your visit here to Washington and could you also tell us more about your priorities here during your visit? Thank you. The floor is yours.

IMAM LAYAMA: Thank you very much, Amadou. Thank you, dear listeners. Thank you for the interest that you have expressed and thank you for coming here today. It certainly comforts us and through us, the people of the Central African Republic.

The purpose of our visit here in Washington, DC is to launch an appeal, a heartfelt appeal, on behalf of the people of the Central African Republic.

For the past year our people have been undergoing very dark hours and we cannot simply stand by with indifference when we look at our people plunge into the greatest depths of despair, and that is why, as religious leaders, we have risen and we have joined forces. We are forming a united front in order to denounce and to condemn these actions committed against civilians in the CAR.

The reason we are here in the United States today is because the solution provided by the (inaudible) the French mission and the MISCA, the solutions that they are offering are unsatisfactory. We believe that it is time for us, we believe it is time for the entire human nation -- for the United Nations, to organize an operation whereby all

people can be present in order to defend this humanitarian cause.

Indeed, this crisis, which is afflicting our country, is impacting civilians, civilians are dying. These are people who are innocent. They're dying gratuitously. These are farmers. These are people who simply want to labor the fields. They are being felled. They are leaving their homes and they are killed. It would seem that a few bandits have taken hostage the entire African people and that is why we are launching this appeal so that the men and the women of the world can also say no, no to the situation.

Let me be clear, how did we reach this point? You have probably heard a lot about the Sélékas, the Séléka militias. Séléka means alliance. These are military and political groups who have banded together and who marched upon Bangui.

During their march onto Bangui, these groups recruited mercenaries from Sudan as well as from Chad. These mercenaries do not speak Sangho, they do not speak French. Those are the two national languages of the Central African Republic, and during their march onto Bangui, these groups very quickly received support from the Muslim community and in doing so they committed unworthy acts.

In the past, Muslims and Christians lived harmoniously together and these same people say, why are my neighbors hosting my enemy who is pillaging the countryside, and that's why there's conflict, and that is why there is misunderstanding. Initially, people thought this was a war against Christians and they thought that the Muslims were trying to impose the law of Sharia.

We have heard tales indeed, when the Sélékas advanced and marched forward, they cut telephone lines and they impeded communications. Nobody knew what was going on. Some people escaped and were able to bear witness in Bangui and these testimonials were something that we've tried to verify.

The Imam, the Reverend, and myself, decided to go and visit the sectors occupied by the Sélékas and to our great surprise, we observed that in these areas, there

were Muslims who were suffering as well. Why, you might ask. That's because some Muslims said no. They refused to welcome the Sélékas. (Inaudible) the Imam prayed. He prayed so that the Sélékas would not be able to take over the city in order to destroy it and when the Sélékas took over the city, they dragged this Imam into the street and his son ran off to try to hide him.

When we met the others, we also understood that Muslims were suffering but because of the proximity in language, they were not able to express their suffering. And so what happened next? Well, our role was try to get Muslim and Protestant and Catholic leaders around the same table in order to be able to jointly express their suffering and to share experiences. We do not want to have a divided community. We should not think that the Christians are against the Muslims and the Muslims are against the Christians.

We asked them, given the absence of state leaders, we asked them to support the people of Central African Republic so that once the administration is redeployed, we can set off on new bases. Therefore, our role was to speak the truth. Human beings are sacred. You cannot kill, thou shalt not kill, and that's what we told the Sélékas who are on the ground. We told them, it is your duty to respect human life. You can't simply kill people like livestock.

And so we cried out at our own expense and at our own risk because we knew that this mission -- and we knew that what the Sélékas were doing, they were trying to grab the power, they were trying to grab possessions and we told them, this way of manipulating religion in order to make people believe that it is a religious war, we're not going to fall into that trap, and that has been our guiding line.

I am sure you have also heard about the Anti-balakas, you hear about Christian militias. What do they mean by that? If you look at the history of our country, in 1990 we heard at the time of Anti-balakas. This is a traditional group, which received an initiation and then afterwards they receive amulets, which supposedly renders them

invulnerable in order to build self-defense.

These groups, these Anti-balakas will fight against people who are blocking roads and against cattle raisers who came from Chad and would have them graze in the fields of the Central African farmers.

Given today's situation with the exactions, certain villages have been wiped off the map in Central African Republic and people have been continuously persecuted, attacked, and there came a time when they said, enough is enough, and they said, we can no longer sit down and wait, and they decided to defend themselves.

In September 2013, that's when we started hearing about the Anti-balakas again. I went to these areas and I met several groups. Each group was very diverse. They did not have the same goals. They picked up their arms because they had lost everything. They said, they have taken our cattle, they've killed members of our family. There were many reasons. There wasn't a single political reason behind this struggle.

However, their determination of these young people who had lost everything, and I would tell the politicians, be careful. Somebody is going to gather up these people and he's going to say, follow me, I will be your leader, and sure enough, that's what happened as soon as the situation arrived, certain people positioned themselves and said, I will lead this, I will coordinate this, I am the head of the Anti-balaka.

But in the beginning, nobody referred to them. Today, they are the main leaders and of course they need to assume responsibility for the acts that they have committed.

As you can see, the Anti-balakas are far from being Christian. Christians do not kill. Thou shalt not kill, as the Bible says. A Christian person is not somebody who is spurred on by revenge or by hatred. On the contrary, Christians put out their hands and ask for forgiveness. Certainly some people talked about self-defense, and

that is perhaps accurate, but these were not Christian militia.

And in this march, whether there were Sélékas or Anti-balakas, these groups were made up of young people who were no longer going to school, who did not have any occupation, and who were simply looking for an adventure, and this same populations I being manipulated. These youth, who are ready to launch into a new adventure, they arrived with the Sélékas and now they've joined the Anti-balakas. And school in our country is a thing of the past because for the past four or five years, nobody is going to school, and this is a wild type of schooling that we're giving our children and it's incomplete. Our children are not being educated and now these children are vulnerable. They have become cannon fodder.

On the fifth and the sixth of December there was an attack by the Anti-balakas. I'm sure you saw it on TV. Fifty-seven people were dismembered, but behind that, there were 400 or 500 young people. It took three days to pick up all the body parts. I went with the MISCA and we saw the decomposing bodies and a lot of young people were standing around with machetes, with arrows in order to try to seize power, but they were not invulnerable and that was their gullibility. They are being exploited, they are being manipulated in order for certain people to achieve their ambitions.

And to this we said, no, this is not how politics should be conducted. We cannot march in a bloodbath in order to reach power. We refuse these proceedings. And that is why we decided to come together and to act as a united front in order to denounce these people and to offer an alternative to the Central African Republic, a country that, in the past, was united. We wish for it to become united once again, and in these difficult times, we, the religious leaders, we must launch strong appeals and that is the meaning of our encounters and that is the meaning of our messages. And now I am going to pass the floor to my brothers who will now introduce themselves.

SPEAKER: We do not claim to represent the countries of Central African Republic or of the ECCAS. We represent the people, yes, the people, of the Central

African Republic. This is a wounded people. This is a tired people. This is an abused people, and they are also disillusioned, and that is why we hope that the listeners here today will listen carefully and will also take us seriously.

We hope that the people here will truly believe that we are the spokespeople for people who have no voice, for people who are speechless, for a population that does not have weapons but only has words in order to express their anguish.

Today, as I speak to you, there are arguments, there are struggles. People are trying to seize power, but we need time to, of course, demonstrate that we are capable of governing ourselves. But as this goes on, people die in the Central African Republic. Yesterday, in fact, I was very troubled. I heard from my family -- my family called and said, things are going poorly in the fifth district. In fact, my church is located 200 meters from a Rwandan contingent that is incapable of providing security for this church and for my district.

My family has been splintered, it has been splintered and fragmented. Part of my family has been displaced to one neighborhood while another part of my family has gone to a different neighborhood and my grandchildren have remained in order to see what is going to happen, and this is taking place today, as I speak to you, before they themselves are displaced.

So, people may say yes, we can, we can. Maybe the MISCA's can say yes, there's still hope, and the African Union will say, we can still do something, and the Sangaris will say, yes, we can still do something. And that's why we told the General Secretary of the United Nations, "Help us. Help us remove the suffering from the people of Central African Republic." And we'd also like to convey the following message to the Americans, to American citizens, such as you, to tell you, please put an end to the suffering of the people in the Central African Republic. These people are experiencing the failings of their state and the deterioration of their state, and as a member of the



transitional parliament, I asked the Prime Minister, can you leave this session with your entire government standing unified and can you take Avenue du France at (inaudible)? These are districts that are completely occupied by the Anti-balakas and because of this, the Sangaris and the MISCA cannot act.

And here I'm quoting the Prime Minister. He said, "I, myself, am afraid. I, myself, I am concerned for my security. I fear for my safety, and I fear for the safety of my own family." And from that time forth until today, there is no authority in the Central African Republic that takes that particular avenue.

And this morning my son said to me, "Dad, this avenue is barricaded by the Anti-balaka. They're preventing the Sangaris and the MISCA from circulating and we don't know what's going to happen." But people are going to continue to say, no, give us more time. We need time. And this peacekeeping operation is going to be deployed in five months, in six months, but what's going to happen in five or six months? How many people are going to die in my country? That is what I ask you.

A woman has been elected to the head of our government and this is the first time in the history of our country, and she has a strong willingness in order to achieve success, but she has no financial support and one month after her election, unrest has started. Students are on strike. Civil servants have only received one month of wages out of the six months that were due to them, and they are complaining. They are unhappy. And this is simply going to reinforce the troublemakers and it's only going to give more power to the war specialists, people who think that they have the lease on life of the people of Central Africa.

And in the meantime, the international community is going to continue to palaver and say, give us time, we need more time, simply more time.

All of these displaced people who no longer have any shelter because their homes have been destroyed, everything has been stolen from them, everything has been pillaged. Soon the rainy season will begin in my country and they're going to be

told, go home, free up the airport. Sure, they will leave the airport because when they're in the airport its lack of security for themselves and for the airplanes, but where are they going to go once they leave the airport? They no longer have housing, they no longer have any shelter. And what about those who have sought refuge in order to protect their lives, in order to save their lives? They don't have any wages in order to get more equipment. What are they going to do?

There is a severe deterioration at all levels of society and that's why we say, if there's going to be a deployment of a peacekeeping operation, you need to take into account all aspects of the situation, the military aspects as well as the civilian aspects. We no longer have an army. Most of our soldiers have served a man who governed during ten years and who didn't do anything tangible, but who's trying to come back to power. And these are people from his ethnic group.

And if these are the people who are going to be reintegrated into the army, imagine what risk this will pose for the people of Central African Republic. We no longer have any police, we no longer have any (inaudible). We need the Americans because you are a world power and United States can help a population that is worn down, that is agonizing, and that is just waiting for its last breath of life.

And we do not believe that the United States, which is a country that believes in human rights, we do not believe that the United States will let this happen and will let an entire nation transpire. And that's why we are here as the religious leaders. We are the spokespeople for the speechless, for the people who have no voice. We are speaking from the heart. We are speaking, reaching out to NGOs as well as to military officials of the U.S. army as well as to civilian authorities. Our message is: help us. And we also want to speak to the Central African diaspora and say join us, help us. Let us come together so that we can rebuild our country and so that we can also emerge from this conflict. That is the message.

Dear listeners, that is what we wish to tell you. This is what we wish to

convey to you, and we are going to answer your questions, and we look forward to shedding more light on the situation in Central Africa, a situation that may be forgotten. Much is going on in Ukraine, much is going on in Syria, and of course a lot of people are more interested in those countries because they deem them more important than the CAR, but the CAR, the Central African Republic, is a member state of the United Nations and so why are we being forgotten? Why is close attention not being paid to the fate of the Central African Republic. Thank you for your attention.

SPEAKER: Thank you, ladies and gentlemen. I'd like to talk about justice. As you know, one of the causes of the crisis in the CAR currently is impunity, the lack of justice being served. We are a country that has known many coup d'état and those involved in those coup d'état were never worried about the justice system or being brought to justice because the justice system has always been beholden to those in power and not to the people, and that is why all criminals, all of the bandits out there, continue to act and continue to seek power through arms and weapons.

We, through this interfaith platform, want to bring a focus back on justice and the importance of justice being sought to help us reach reconciliation. Justice can be a tool, a tool for reconciliation and for the development of our country. And so we also, related to justice, wanted to talk about security.

There absolutely has to be security. It is the absolute prerequisite for us to be able to benefit from everything that the international community hopes to provide to the CAR in support and that's why Resolution 2127, which opened the door and provided the authority to the presence of international troops in our country who would work to disarm the armed groups. We, however, are seeing that these international forces who are present have not been able to secure the capital city, have not succeeded in deploying across the entire country.

Instead, our country has become a tinderbox and has taken hostage the communities in the east of our country, in the bush there are no schools, the government

is not functioning throughout the country and that is because government authorities are not even present in their various districts. The prefects, provincial prefects, are not present.

We also must mention town halls, mayors, the town halls are not populated, no one is in them. We're all talking about how we need to reach reconciliation, but how can we rebuild? How can we build if nothing is there to build with? Everything has collapsed and we need to rebuild the country.

We feel that only a peacekeeping operation, a peacekeeping operation alone, can fully take on that enormous responsibility, the United Nations in particular. We feel that the greatest country in the world, the United States, can help us in this work, help us to calm the suffering of the Central African Republic.

Let's talk about elections as well. We have projected elections in 2015 and we feel that this may be another occasion on which the people of the CAR will suffer again. Because we have porous borders, arms are coming in and coming out. The warlords are still present throughout the country and so we need to disarm those people, these warmongers, if we are going to be able to succeed in holding elections in 2015.

And civilian life is in a state of total disarray throughout the country. That is a major issue. That is why we think that the United Nations and a United Nations operation could help us to truly make progress in the face of these enormous challenges and so that we will no longer be beholden to these street criminals.

We want to avoid becoming a hotbed of unrest within Africa and within the sub region.

Speaking of reconciliation, we have a certain initiative, a certain approach that is focused on reconciliation. We spoke about bringing religious leaders together around the same table, government leaders. Government leaders have shared their strategies for reconciliation with us, but we too would like to share with government leaders our strategy. We would like to see a commission of truth, justice and peace, a

truth, justice and peace commission.

We also expressed that we want to see dialogue, peace talks and dialogue, set -- particularly the young leaders in our country, young religious leaders as well can help mobilize the population and prepare the people of the CAR for the elections in 2015.

Whenever in the past we've held elections after a coup d'état, we haven't always achieved valid results or lasting results. Therefore, in terms of policy, yes, policy is important, but it's at the grassroots that we really need to focus our efforts. The people need to have a real role to play in this process of reconciliation. We don't want to continue approaching elections as we always have, but rather this time truly focus on bringing together all of the communities of the Central African Republic. And we hope in so doing that we will receive support from all priests, reverends and imams throughout this process of reconciliation, this process of reconciliation, which we hope will bring us to a peaceful state. We will be working within the villages, in the cities, in the prefectures, at all levels, so that all will know that those who have killed will be revealed, will be found out, and so that we can try to work together from here on out to find solutions together.

We need to separate out what is what and arrive at a place where we can work together toward reconciliation, and so that is a brief summary of what we hope to achieve in working toward reconciliation. My friends here spoke about school as well. School is of such importance and will be of such importance in rebuilding the basis and the foundation of our country. We want to see schools that follow the religious reconciliation process and hold that as a priority. It is by preparing our children from the very early age of elementary education that we can, in the future, eradicate the potential for new crises such as the one we are experiencing right now. Thank you.

MR. SY: I will open the floor to questions. Two things, first I would like to acknowledge the collaboration and cooperation we had from Search for Common Ground, Mercy Corps and Crisis Action. Thank you. Without them this even would not

have been possible to organize.

Second, I would just like to have two questions, on is the emphasis on the UNPKO.

(Speaking French.)

You've mentioned the need for a UN peacekeeping operation. After the coup d'état in March of last year, diplomats started talking about the possibility of a pre-genocidal situation and the preferred approach was to have MISCA troops with French troops. What do you think that UN peacekeepers could provide as a plus? What can they provide as a plus in relation to the troops that are already on the ground?

SPEAKER: If we have UN peacekeepers on the ground in the CAR, we'll have a diverse representation among the troops there, different colors will be represented, if you will, whereas right now we have factions, if you will, we have the DRC in one region, we have the Chadians in the north, and the French near the capital, and we're lost within all of this. We need to find a way whereby UN troops from other countries, countries that are not directly involved in the crisis, these troops will come into the CAR and will enforce security. We think that's very important.

At the same time, these UN peacekeepers, having them present -- it's not just to have a military presence, but it's also to have that civilian presence. We spoke about the fact that our government is completely collapsed and is not even able to send its authority figures, leaders, out into the field.

We need help. We need, if you will, a marshal plan, a budget that we can work with to help us crawl, climb out of this hole that we're in and so UN troops and their presence would help also our civilian authorities and civilian government. People have seen their livestock stolen, now what? We've lost five years in time and so the UN peacekeepers can help us to reestablish security and peace and alongside that we've mentioned serving justice. We've talked about schooling, reconciliation, the presence of the troopers would help us to rise above all of the current challenges to focus on all of

those aspects.

SPEAKER: I'd like to add that until -- up to today there has been no integrated collaboration. The head of the Séléka resigned over a month ago and how is it that people continue to steal, that people continue to flee to Sudan? We have the Sangaris, who are still on the ground, and they promise us, they tell us that they are establishing security up to Birao, up to the northeast borders. They tell us that they're there to help secure the north of the country.

Yet, the Cameroonians, as the Archbishop mentioned, are stationed at the border of the CAR. However, the Anti-balakas continue to create unrest on those borders, the Sangaris, the MISCA troops. The largest group of the MISCA troops are in the capital city of Bangui. We talk about the fifth district, the third district, they are completely occupied, fully occupied by the Anti-balakas. How is that possible?

We need a comprehensive plan so that the entire country -- that we can create an overarching plan for the full country that will focus on securing the entire country and that thereby will help us to prevent further partitioning of our country.

We do not believe that the Sangaris alone or that the MISCA troops alone can prevent the CAR from being partitioned. But without reaching security, without reestablishing security, we can accomplish nothing. And so the priority for us is establishing security once again and from there we can deploy humanitarian agents. We can't say today that there is not one Central Africa in the CAR who doesn't need help. Everyone needs help. Everyone is crying. Everyone is hungry. Everyone is worried. Everyone, when they wake up in the morning, thanks God for being alive. Everyone in the AR asks before falling asleep, my Lord, what is going to happen to me next? And so, having peacekeeping troops on the ground will create an atmosphere of calm and will help us to attack and address each of the aspects of reconciliation.

SPEAKER: The situation on the ground is highly complex. Even in Bangui, we know that the African forces are present, but there are lacks -- there's not

enough equipment, some do not even have phones. We can wonder why military troops are working without telephones in this 21<sup>st</sup> century. There aren't enough people and there are logistical difficulties that prevent them from achieving all of their goals and so that is why we want to have -- want to see those forces switch to a UN-led initiative.

SPEAKER: (Inaudible) Central African Republic, visited Washington and New York not long ago, and he highlighted a roadmap where the priorities -- three priorities were outlined. First one was security, you need to restore security situation. The second one was to deal with the humanitarian situation and the economic situation. And the third one was to move to this political transition.

So, my question is, having elections in 2015 as an objective, is that really credible? Does it really make sense?

(Speaking French.)

When you hear references to the elections of 2015, given the urgency of the crisis at this point, is it logical to have elections in 2015?

SPEAKER: I think we shouldn't confuse speed and speeding up. The situation in the CAR asks us for a keen understanding, a keen assessment of what needs to be in place before we hold elections.

We have people from the Central African Republic who are in Chad, who are in the DRC, who are in Cameroon, who are dispersed, displaced, and yet we want to hold elections. Who is going to be voting? If we're going to hold elections, all of those people who have fled who are displaced, must be able to come back and yet currently what is the priority of those living in the CAR and outside of the CAR? Security, safety.

Reestablishing security and creating a safe environment, that is the most important thing, so that people who are merchants, who are business people, can feel comfortable and safe going to the marketplace and do not have to worry about their safety, so that economic life can start again.

If we cannot reach reconciliation, if the people of the CAR are not



present and able to work together, we say we'll catch up, we'll catch up later, in the future, but no, we need to be able to all be present and sit around tables. We need to ensure that everyone is back home and in a state of security before we proceed with elections, because if we are too hasty in proceeding with elections, we'll be back to the starting point and have to start all over again. We don't want to create a second abyss for the people of the CAR.

Certain supposedly democratically elected officials, because they were democratically elected, that didn't mean that they weren't ready to mutilate bodies, dismember bodies, kill people. The CAR wants -- and the United States is known as a country that holds free and reliable elections. Everything that we have been suffering from until presently has been the result of bad elections, elections that were controlled by the central government.

We're at a state right now where the various provinces of the country have escaped control of the central government and when the United States says, for example, we do not recognize this regime, we therefore cannot support this country. When they say that, when the United States says that, that is of no worry to the leaders, to those in charge. Those who worry are the grassroots, the people, the very people of the country who are contenting themselves with mere crumbs and that is why we are saying that we need help in bringing peace back to our country.

We need help establishing full control of our country up to the very borders of the country. We need help bringing the displaced people back home, otherwise, whoever it is that we vote in, that we elect into office, that won't truly have been someone elected by the full citizenry and militants throughout the country will refuse to acknowledge the validity of the elections. We need to ensure that all of the parameters are covered so that we are not simply hastily trying to reach a goal in theory of holding elections by 2015. The president who is currently in power as a transitional president, an elected interim president, even though that wasn't a wholly democratic election that

brought her to power, various groups of society contributed to that election and that was for the very first time in our country that all social groups participated and that we elected a female, a woman, to the presidency, even if it's just as interim president.

We hope that the international community will support this transitional government and will help us to organize elections, elections that are held properly, because we cannot allow ourselves to have imperfect elections.

SPEAKER: At this moment, if you read today's *Washington Post*, for example, you will see accounts of violence against the Muslim minority by the Anti-balaka, and so I just wanted to have your appreciation on the risks of partition and also this terrible question of having the choice between either protecting them to these minorities that are (inaudible) to stay, or helping them flee the capital.

(Speaking French.)

As you perhaps saw in *The Washington Post* this morning, there's a certain group of persecuted individuals and the terrible choice -- the difficult choice to be made as whether to help protect them and help them stay or to help them flee. So, in your eyes, is reconciliation possible? Should we help evacuate these minority groups or should we help them to stay?

SPEAKER: We believe that evacuating the rest of the Muslim population that remains is not the solution. The solution is to create security, to establish security. Some say that to establish security we need to evacuate them so that we ensure that their lives are saved. However, we have been saying and continue to say that this is a complex situation on the ground and that we need substantial presence on the ground and that we need substantial help in protecting these minority groups, these minority groups that are fleeing because they're afraid for their lives.

The problem -- the issue we're facing is this, if you say you're a Christian or a Muslim, your own neighbors -- your neighbors in the past have never -- it's not the neighbors that are rising up against their neighbors, attacking their Christian neighbors or

Muslim neighbors. These are armed groups, militias, criminals that are doing this and that are invoking the name of religion.

We want the Muslims back home to know that they are also being protected by the neighbors, their Christian neighbors.

In Bossembele, a village that is -- a small village, there are 700 Fulani or Peul Muslims who have been living peacefully with their Christian neighbors for decades. It wasn't until the militants, the militias came in that the unrest started. If they come back, their Christian neighbors themselves don't know how they can defend against their attackers and so those who have hoped to create chaos in our country by invoking religion, invoking religious strife in a country where Christians and Muslims previously lived in harmony, well, we want to be able to say that reconciliation is possible and that if we establish security within the country, we can get back to that harmonious living arrangement that we were in before the onset of this crisis.

And we want to warn those who would create more unrest of the consequences of their actions, that they will be taken to account, that they will be tried. The former president's home city, in that city we see the Anti-balakas and the Muslims and if we say to each other, if you continue to approach us, we won't allow it. Well, how are they going to reach reconciliation? We need to get them around the same table so they can learn how to live harmoniously again.

We even have Muslims and Christians who previously were living harmoniously together in the north and in the east and in (inaudible), we have Muslims.

So, hopefully you can help us also to focus on the positives of the situation in our country, that there are communities that are living in harmony.

SPEAKER: Could we ask *The Washington Post*, for example, to send some of its reporters to the Central African Republic and have them visit the central region and the eastern region so that they can see with their very eyes the reality of the situation. That's what the BBC is doing because we can only share -- if you want to

share the good, the positive, there is a difference between the different regions in the east, there is not an issue between the Muslims and the Christians.

The information that you are getting is filtered. Chad, for example, which is requiring -- which is sending vehicles to Bambari to require Muslims, Muslims who are not even worried for their safety, requiring them to flee to Chad. Why would Chad do that? Chad has sent trucks, sent vehicles, people, up to Bangui to kill people, to create strife, to create unrest. The press isn't talking about that. The press has not spoken about that.

There are Christian families in Bangui who have housed and who continue to house Muslim families. Why is no one talking about that? Why is that not mentioned?

This issue of living in harmony, Muslims and Christians, this needs to be used as a uniting force, something that will bring us together. This is our experience.

In December 2012, as the Archbishop said, we decided to band together to block the road, block the path of all those who would wish to continue to create chaos and strife in the CAR, who would wish to partition our country. We ask, are we all together here? Are we all family? Within one family, we can't say we all speak the same language, but we can say we are a family, a diverse family, but we all believe one thing, I, as the president of the Evangelicals in the CAR, I have the -- I represent the reverends and the faithful and I can help reassure our community.

So, we need to find balance in the CAR and that will help encourage those who have righteous goals to move forward.

SPEAKER: In my opinion, the Central African Republic is a country that has been taken hostage by fringe groups and you hear about the Sélékas and the Anti-balakas, they have taken the country hostage. These are unofficial groups, informal groups. Their goals are not goals that fit into the framework of the state and these groups, as we have seen, have been attacking sections of the population and their goal,

their aim, is to terrorize people, is to make them flee so that they can win, what? What are the gains they are seeking?

Some people say, okay, we are going to become shop people. You can't do that overnight. That is a profession. And our brothers who are being driven out of town, they're being driven out because they're Muslims, but we refuse that way of doing. A Muslim is not a foreigner. There are people from the Central African Republic who are Muslim and they have a right to live there. We are a secular country. And what is important is our constitution.

We have chosen our own respective religions, but we obey the constitution, but now that laws no longer exist, what happens? It is the law that is strongest, it's the law of the jungle. We have the small chiefs, who are manipulating people, and they want people to talk about them, but what we need to do is we need to secure the populations. If we have problems amongst ourselves, we need to settle those differences as people do in families. This is something that we need to do amongst ourselves, as the Imam said. If there is a justice operation, people who have committed crimes will be accountable for them, but we should not simply send people away, as far away as possible.

The more people leave, the greater the distances that are created and people start to wonder, shall I return, shall I come back, and that is not a solution. Some people have left and that is -- that was supposed to be a fleeting departure, but they've been away for years and they may not come back.

We do not want everybody to leave, we do not want to have these fringe groups believe that their way is the right way.

MR. SY: (Speaking French.) Well, I am now going to open up the floor to questions.

(Speaking English.)

-- and identify yourself. So, we'll start with here and then with the

gentleman in the middle.

SPEAKER: (Speaking French.) I'm a member of the Community Council. This is a group that was created a short time ago due to the crisis in the Central Africa Republic and I have a question I would like to ask the three religious leaders.

Do you not believe that legal proceedings brought against the leaders of the Séléka should be done as well as against the leaders of the Anti-balaka? If they're brought to justice, would this not send out a strong signal for building peace in the CAR?

SPEAKER: Good morning, everybody. I'm (inaudible) from the French Air Force and I'm going to switch to French.

(Speaking French.)

I'm from the French Air Force. I work here at the Pentagon in Washington, DC. I would like to thank you for bearing witness. Indeed, there are a lot of interfaith tensions in the world and you are living proof that there can be dialogue between different religions. Thank you for your courage. Thank you for your leadership.

My question is the following: first of all, I'd like to know, can you assess the number of displaced people currently in the CAR and can you also assess the number of refugees that are at the international airport in Bangui?

My second question relates to the role of the African Union in the CAR, notably, if you are considering a UN operation, do you not believe that you should also have discussions with the African Union because the African Union deems that peace in the Central African Republic is also under its responsibility?

MR. SY: And we'll answer and come back.

SPEAKER: Okay, I have a comment -- more commentary --

(Speaking French.)

My comment is the following: this is the first time that during a conference I have heard about the need to train people in matters of religion. Indeed, I believe that all of humanity's problems stem from the fact that man's animal side

dominates over his human side, and until we resolve this issue, we'll always be confronted by the same problems.

It seems to me that the best way to settle humanity's problems is to foster spirituality and that is what we can do in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Religions all share a common love and this can be used to find solutions, peaceful solutions. Therefore, I greatly appreciate the fact that you have spoken about the need to train individuals, to train people, and I believe that you should emphasize this type of training and you should really emphasize the spiritual aspects because if our spirit is dominated by materialism and if God is dominated by our animal sides, we will have problems.

SPEAKER: Here is my question now. I would like to ask the Reverend to go into greater detail regarding the veiled and programmed intentions of certain individuals. Can you tell us more what you mean by that, the veiled and programmed intentions?

MR. SY: (Speaking French.) The first question, let me rephrase, is would it be necessary to initiate legal proceedings against the Séléka and Anti-balaka leaders? The second question, the number of displaced people and refugees around the airport. And third, and also the role of the African Union in terms of settling this crisis. Fourth question, can you go into greater detail regarding the veiled and programmed intentions that you mentioned earlier?

SPEAKER: (Speaking French.) We emphasized the legal aspects and we've also had discussions with local authorities. We've also had discussions with generals from the MISCA and from the Sangaris and we also underscore the fact that in order to mitigate the level of violence, it means that we need to disarm, to neutralize leaders of these two movements, the Sélékas and the Anti-balakas. The leaders of these two movements should no longer be able to roam freely in order to continue to drive these tensions as has been the case, unfortunately, while we've been away.

A day prior to our trip, people were freed. We don't know how, perhaps it

was due to pressure from the Anti-balakas. They invaded the homes of judges who were not protected and we would also like to advocate that the legal representatives of our country need to be provided with security and the police and the (inaudible), they need to have the means necessary in order to be able to protect legal institutions so that judges and such can perform their duties.

And if there's a lack of this, there is a vacuum, then certain people are freed who should not be freed. Certain people were freed despite the presence of the MISCA, but certain people were freed from the prisons. We don't know why and that is why we expressed our willingness that such people should be kept in jail until they are tried.

SPEAKER: Before I shed light on my thoughts, I would like to talk about the role of the African Union. We have what is -- on one hand we have willingness and on the other hand we have reality, what is possible. You can be driven by a strong willingness to achieve something, but if you do not have the means necessary in order to achieve these goals, you need to have the humbleness to say this is beyond my means.

The African Union is present in Bangui through its various representative bodies. The African Union, in fact, has been heading the MISCA. By this I mean that day in, day out, the African Union has been realizing its incapacity to bring peace back to the CAR.

Earlier I said, every single day, at least one person from the CAR dies, and this means we have to negotiate the lives of people from the CAR who are dying so that the parent organization, which is there day in and day out, can manage things? Certainly we would like to go to Addis in order to conduct such negotiations, but in the meantime, there are realities on the ground and the African Union is experiencing these, day in and day out.

I talked about a veiled and programmed intention. When President Djotodia was in power, he granted us a meeting, the three of us, and we were discussing



-- having a discussion with him and all the sudden said, if you don't want us, we'll leave, we'll go back to where we came from, that's what we said. And we will organize ourselves and position ourselves over there.

To this he responded, he said that he had been brought to power and he had been told that if you don't want us, we'll go home. I, myself, had been arrested. On the night when I was supposed to be freed along with the Reverend, who had joined me in prison, one of the lieutenants of Djotodia again repeated, if you don't want us, we'll go home. He said this several times.

These Séléka leaders cried loud and clear that their basement -- they're talking about the north of the CAR they said that it contains mineral resources including oil. And we all know this. We have Internet. We can follow events on the Internet.

So, when someone asks this question in a diplomatic settings to say, are you not afraid of the partitioning of the CAR is inevitable, well, when we are asked that question, how can we respond? For me, this question from a diplomat, what does it mean? What does it hide? It means that it's hidden in program. Why did I mention a friendly country, friendly countries that come in and that don't simply take care of Chadian citizens, but who collect all Muslims in order to take them, where? To the north of the country, and currently those two areas are (inaudible) and they are both in the northeast of the country, (inaudible) is in the northeast.

And so people are being brought to those areas, Muslims are being brought there, and why? Well, they claim -- it's been claimed that it's to protect them. They say it's a protection. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century we still heard about protectionism and so I measure my words, I measure my words and I say this; a veiled and programmed intention. Attempts are being made to partition the CAR. Attempts are being made to say that the northeast of the country will be a separate region simply because they are trying to bypass people whose memory is easily erased and who can try to reap the benefits of the oil.

So, I'm saying out loud what a lot of people think without saying it out loud.

SPEAKER: So, the number of refugees around the airport, at the height of the crisis there were 100,000. Currently, because of the torrential rains, unfortunately I must say there are mothers who are sleeping with their children like animals in a barn. I have seen it with my own eyes. Their clothes are drenched and many have left.

At the risk and peril of their own life, there is no security, but they can no longer stay where they were because of the torrential rains, and this is very painful for me to tell you this. And perhaps there are 30- or 40,000 people around the airport, but they have left against their own will. Some have been sheltered by friends and family because they don't have any other choice, any other alternative, and this is stripping them of their humanity.

When you look around, you hear about perhaps one million Africans who have been displaced to the DRC, to Cameroon, to Chad. Many people have left. They have left because of the high level of insecurity. They have become refugees against their own will, but they maintain the hope of being able to come home, and we would also like to express this hope. We also hope that these people will be able to go home to their country, the Central African Republic, in order to contribute to the rebuilding of this country, which is our country.

MR. SY: Okay, I have a question for the ambassador too. So, okay, we'll do another round. So, I'll take three now and three later. Sorry, ambassador, but the person behind just asked a question last time and I ignored her, and then the ambassador, and then just to move in the back, I'll take the gentleman over there and on the second round I will take you.

MS. SEGERO: Good morning. My name is Rosemary Segero. I am the president of Hope for Tomorrow. We focus on violence prevention and conflict resolution.

My organization is based here but I'm initially from Kenya. Thank you so much for your wonderful discussion looking at the collaboration between the faith-based, the Christian and the Muslims. But looking at your presentation you talk about election, humanitarian and security. What would you say about the humanitarian -- what is the most (inaudible) humanitarian you would look at and how would we do a small -- as organization -- to support, especially the women and the children who are misplaced and looking at housing? How would we come into and even if we did want to support? About the security, as to what is the African Union doing? They need to do something. Bring security. Looking at those children and the women, even the people, how do we come in even if we wanted to donate a dress or something or food, how does it get to those in need looking at humanitarian?

At election, we have now the president woman, give her time, even if it's transition. Women are now leading the world. She may maybe do better than the person you want to bring in as a president. Maybe things may be worse. Just give her maybe two, five years as you go on, let's see what happens. We will support her as a woman president and the country will be run well even more than men. As you are here, you need to come with another woman too and talk, so I support her and -- let's support her now. Let her lead the country, and thank you very much.

MR. SY: Thanks. So, I'll take the ambassador and I'll take the gentlemen there, and for the two gentlemen, I'll take you on the second round. Just bear with us.

SPEAKER: (Speaking French.) I'd like to introduce myself, Ambassador Musai Nkembe, ambassador to Washington. I'd like to ask a few specific questions to the Imam, the Imam who is also president of the Islamic Council of the CAR, if I'm not mistaken.

You maintain that this link exists between Muslims who are displaced, whether against or by their will, those who were forced out to neighboring countries and

those who have left on their own accord --

(Interruption))

SPEAKER: (Speaking French.) Good afternoon, I'm Naka Balaki, I'm from Cote d'Ivoire. I am an African and so I am therefore very much concerned with what is happening in the CAR. I would like to echo what the French officer said. I was very happy to see that an African voice of reason is being heard amongst this crisis.

Have you spoken with the French authorities about the possibility of not holding elections a year from now? If so, what was their reaction? And if not in 2015 a year from now, when do we think elections could be held?

MR. SY: (Speaking French.) Would you like me to repeat the questions?

(Speaking English.)

(Inaudible) so, I will not translate this time.

SPEAKER: As for the humanitarian aspects, this is one of the most serious humanitarian crises that our country has experienced, that any African country has experienced. In Bangui, despite the coup d'état, et cetera, people continued after the coup d'état to go outside to leave their homes. We haven't seen in the past people sleeping under trees, and yet we've seen that in our country since. Peoples homes burned to the ground, people reduced to a life of livestock, people who are fleeing through the bush, fleeing with great fear. And that fear, that chaos, has reached even the capital city of Bangui. The roads themselves are not secure.

If you walk down, ride down a road, you're always at risk of being robbed, pillaged, attacked. Not too long ago humanitarian groups came in to airlift some supplies. The plane left and 15 minutes later the Sélékas had arrived to take over the vehicles, take all the money, take all of the supplies.

Currently many children, many children who had to leave their homes with nothing but the clothes on their back, we see them. Their clothes are dirty. We see so

many kids with dirty clothes. Why? Because their houses were burned to the ground.

This may seem really simplistic, but it's the reality. Dignity, that is dignity that is at stake. What is dignity? Do you have clean clothes or not? People who no longer have their medication, who can no longer take care of their medical needs, who have been uprooted from their homes, who have been pushed years back in time, who don't have access to health clinics, who don't have access to physicians. We need help. If you could make donations of medication, that could be helpful.

We have also spoken about the need to reestablish security. An airlift, we have an airlift in place but that costs twice as much as if we brought supplies in by land. It's unimaginable the situation. We aren't able to bring milk to the children. We don't even have imaging equipment in the hospitals, and we see those who are working in the hospitals and we think, my god, they're heroes, they're working with almost nothing. It's unbelievable.

When you come to the CAR from here, from Europe, you would be shocked. Some of the equipment, medical equipment that you throw away here, that could save lives in the CAR. We don't have that equipment on hand. There are very good physicians who studied in the U.S., who studied in Europe, who are back to work in the CAR but who don't have any equipment to work with. How can they be effective in what they do without medical equipment?

So, humanitarian needs, there are several levels, for those who have lost everything, for the women who are widowed, who are begging in the streets, we can give them seeds so that they can plant in preparation of the next harvest year so that these women no longer have to be begging in the streets.

Let's help people to help themselves so that they can take care of themselves. Let's not wait until they are left with nothing to give them a few handouts. No, we need to help them now. Give them seeds, give them tools so that they can be forward facing and work toward the future. There are so many ways we can help and

that you all can help, you, associations, NGOs, there's so much that you can do and we thank you because it will help save lives.

SPEAKER: (Speaking French.) If you are here representing the Catholics or the Protestants in the United States, we would hope to hear from you. I wanted to respond to my brother from the Cote d'Ivoire. You asked if we had been in contact with the French government. Yes. But is only France to be interested in this issue surrounding elections in the CAR? I think that the Barack Obama's Special Counsel, if you will, is quite interested in elections in the CAR and as such we encourage him to quickly send an ambassador to the CAR. As such, with that, the United States will be able to participate in the process leading up to elections because it's not just about France.

We have people in the CAR, we have very sick people who need help. CAR itself is sick. And we believe that all of the great powers, all of the great countries in this world can help us, help us solve the crisis in the CAR and help heal our wounds.

As for the timeline, President Samba-Panza has given us a certain timeline for the elections, but we don't know yet if that timeline is valid. We'll see how things go once the initiatives are truly under way. We've said it already, and we will say it again, how can we hold elections in areas where we don't even have any government representation, where there is no government representation in the far out provinces.

Policymakers, decision makers, if they truly want to hold elections, if they truly want a timeline to be complied with, they will establish a firm timeline and according to that timeline and progress checked against that timeline, we will know if we are ready or not to hold those elections in 2015.

Perhaps somewhere down the line we will realize that it's too tight, it's too hurried, and we will postpone it for two years. But then after two years we notice that we've only progressed 50 percent in terms of the expected outcomes. Then we'll all have to sit around a table. In fact, we all do need to sit around a table to map out specifically

how these free and transparent elections will be held at which all can vote. It's not just France that should be leading this work, we are calling on the entire international community to join these efforts.

SPEAKER: (Speaking French.) As for the last question, that was addressed to me, one cannot ever be a leader without being in contact with his or her faithful, so, yes, I have maintained contact with the Muslims of my country who are displaced, who call me to keep me informed, also to reassure me that I continue to receive their support in the work I am doing to promote reconciliation and peace. That is very important and I do remain in contact with them.

As for those who went back to their countries of origin, who were taken in by their relatives, without being considered as refugees, I've been in contact with them as well as those who are displaced and who are refugees.

MR. SY: I'm sorry, I'm just going to take the gentleman there and one lady here.

SPEAKER: (Speaking French.) My name is Jean (inaudible). I'm American but I am originally from the Central African Republic. I quite simply would like to say to you that I feel very encouraged. I feel very encouraged now that I know that you've taken this initiative to address an issue that affects us all.

I see the signs of your various denominations, your clothing, the crosses, the cross from the Reverend, the cross from the Archbishop, the clothing of the Imam, and perhaps as a joke, I want to say that, is there not someone missing here in your delegation? The Kenyan spoke about women. I'm wondering, where is the great sorceress? Where is the great sorceress, the animist representative, because that is a significant religion, if you will, in Africa. So, perhaps you could add that person or a representative from that religion to your delegation.

We've been discussing various issues in the Central African Republic and even though I and my family immigrated to the United States, I -- we continue to

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maintain contact with our friends back home and we are -- feel very moved and emotionally affected by everything that is happening in the CAR even though we are over here in the United States, and so we feel very emotional, very moved.

There must be reasons, you all referred to them, reasons, causes of this crisis. There are issues with education, a lack of education, and also perhaps shortcomings in teaching, in terms of teaching. And the moral education --

MR. SY: I'm so sorry, but -- apologies, sorry.

SPEAKER: I would like to encourage you to try to change things by including moral education in terms of like the civic education, and this is lacking civil values -- civic values.

MR. SY: The webcast is going to stop, so the gentleman there, and very quickly please. And the lady here.

SPEAKER: As quickly as I can. As-salamu alaykum. Thank you very much. Some years ago before the petition of Sudan and South Sudan, I was the co-leader of an interfaith delegation to both Khartoum and to other areas of the country, including Darfur. We found that the interfaith community of the United States really did not understand the conflict. Two points I would like to make, first, in thanking our brothers and in reinforcing the need for female leadership. One, have you established concrete ties with the evangelical Catholic, Jewish, and Muslim leadership councils of the United States and how can we help you do that?

Secondly, very quickly, I would like to say that Muslims in Rwanda in 1994 during the period of genocide played an incredibly constructive role in sheltering Tutsi refugees and turning back much of the tide of the unfortunate slaughter and killing, and I would like to say that to the Imam so that he might reach out to the Rwandan Muslim community and see if there might be things we could learn from that.

MR. SY: Thank you. Very last question, very quickly, please. I've just been --



MS. HOLLOWAN: My name is Molly Holloman and I am an intern with the House of Representatives Committee on Foreign Affairs, and to make my question very brief, in terms of your priorities, what three to five specific things would you want from the U.S. government right now that would make the most productive impact on the ground? And thank you very much.

MR. SY: So, I know they have a meeting with the U.S. State Department just very -- so, we will very quickly, apologies here.

SPEAKER: (Speaking French.) In our charter we have planned to include other religions and when the time has come, if other religions turn to us, there will be room for them, and of course, the struggle that we are leading is not just for the three religions that we represent, it's for everybody. We want to live together, to coexist, to peacefully coexist and if we respect the ethics -- any religion that respects the ethics of the platform, they will find their place. And so we welcome wholeheartedly everybody.

In terms of civic instruction, we will duly note that in order to incorporate it.

SPEAKER: Yesterday we had dinner with several religious leaders, evangelicals, Catholics, Muslims, and we believe that the Quaker organization, which hosted this dinner, will be able to take note of the interest that you have expressed, that you can get into contact with these religious leaders for any assistance.

In terms of the Rwandese, yes, in New York we did have an opportunity to meet with the ambassador of Rwanda who conveyed an invitation on the part of Rwanda for all three of us so that we could have an exchange and we could share best practices regarding the situation that occurred in Rwanda.

As far as our priorities are concerned, we will be presenting these to the U.S. government. We have evoked the need for support, support for the implementation of the parliament -- we would like to have the support of the United States for the implementation of the MEP and we'd also like the U.S. government to help us support the

current government so that the current government in the CAR can assume its responsibilities.

We are also seeking support for the United States and from the American NGOs for humanitarian initiatives in the CAR. These are our three priorities.

MR. SY: (Inaudible) encourage here our three leaders --

(Applause)

MR. SY: And you will agree with me that the time is for action now.

Thank you very much. Thank you.

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