

THE BROOKINGS INSTITUTION
PEACE AND DEVELOPMENT IN THE
CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC:
A CONVERSATION WITH
INTERIM PRESIDENT CATHERINE SAMBA-PANZA

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PARTICIPANTS:

Introduction:

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Featured Speaker:

HER EXCELLENCY CATHERINE SAMBA-PANZA
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Head of State of the Transition

Moderator:

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P R O C E E D I N G S

MR. BENNETT: Good afternoon. My name is Steve Bennett. I'm the chief operating officer of Brookings Institution and it's my great pleasure to welcome you all here today. On behalf of The Brookings Institution and the Africa Growth Initiative, we are delighted to be hosting this event. We are co-hosting this event today with Mercy Corps and Search for Common Ground. Both Mercy Corps and Search, as it's known, have active development projects in the Central African Republic and are widely commended for excellent work on behalf of peace and development issues there.

Our own Africa Growth Initiative is a research unit within The Brookings Institution that is dedicated to high-quality expertise, policy analysis, and innovative solutions to promote Africa's economic development. So we are delighted to have such terrific partners in Mercy Corps and Search, and we are even more delighted to welcome Shamil Idriss from Search and Mercy Corps' vice president, Andrea Koppel. We thank you both for being here.

I'd also like to welcome members of the U.S. diplomatic team that has been involved in the Central African Republic and many members of the African Diplomatic Corps. So welcome, everyone, to Brookings.

If you will be tweeting today, please use #carprez, C-A-R-P-R-E-Z. That's hashtag C-A-R-P-R-E-Z, and we welcome as much social media as you would like to put out there because this is a terrific opportunity and a great event.

Just very briefly, it's my privilege, it's my great privilege and honor to welcome Her Excellency Catherine Samba-Panza for an important discussion on peace and development in the Central African Republic. Her Excellency assumed the role of president of the transitional government of Central African Republic in January, with the

dual mandate of ending the ongoing violence and preparing the country for national elections in 2015. In June of this year, her government took a step towards that goal with the release of a four point plan to promote peace and reconciliation.

President Samba-Panza's agenda to stabilize her country serves as a focal point for the international community's effort to address both the security crisis and to consolidate peace. Before serving in her current capacity, Her Excellency Samba-Panza was the respected mayor of Bangui, the capital of the Central African Republic. She's also been a leader in the private sector, as well as an activist in civil society and on women's issues.

To that end, it's important to point out that Her Excellency, President Samba-Panza is only the third female president in Sub-Saharan Africa and the first in Francophone Africa. So that is an important note and it makes it even more of an honor to welcome her here today.

So she will be giving a short keynote address, followed by a Q&A with the director of our Africa Growth Initiative, Amadou Sy, and then we'll open it up to questions from the floor.

So without further ado, I would like to welcome to the stage the interim president of the Central African Republic, Her Excellency President Catherine Samba-Panza. (Applause)

PRESIDENT SAMBA-PANZA: President, commander, vice president, and director of global economy and development, vice president of Mercy Corps, those from The Brookings Institution, distinguished guests, ambassadors, heads of mission, and consulates, first and foremost I would like to tell you that I am deeply grateful. And I say this on behalf of the people of the Central African Republic, I would like to thank you

for inviting me to your institution. This shows that you pay a great deal of attention and consideration to me personally. This gives me the opportunity to speak to you about the situation in my country.

Political instability and repeated internal conflicts have gone on for two decades and this has plunged our people into a situation where all are very vulnerable. And since December 2012, the Central African Republic has been deeply shaken by one of the most serious crises that it has ever known. Our people are now in a dramatic situation. Over 2,000 people have been killed; 12 percent of the population has been displaced; 8 percent of our population have become refugees in neighboring countries; 54 percent of the population, about 2.2 million, people are in need of humanitarian assistance; over 30 percent of our schools and health establishments have been destroyed; about 28,000 children are affected by severe malnutrition; and thousands of children are a part of armed groups; thousands of women are victim of rape and sexual violence. There is violence along community and religious lines, where people are killed on both sides. And people are unable, refuse to live together.

There is a lack of security in our capital and in the provinces. There is violence being committed against the populations there. The administration and the capacity of the private sector have been severely affected. There are terrorists and jihadists in our country, and there are exactions against the population by the Lord's Resistance Army of Joseph Kony. This is also a threat to regional peace and stability, as well as international peace and stability.

Ladies and gentlemen, distinguished guests, in January of this year, the Central African Republic was on the verge of imploding. There was widespread insecurity and unprecedented acts of violence. There was also interreligious conflict,

massive violations of human rights, and people who were displaced internally and externally.

In light of this catastrophic situation the international community came to our side. Nonetheless, the challenges that we must face are tremendous and affect each and every one of our people.

More than ever, our country needs a leader, a leader that is able to bring people together and to provide reconciliation, to give back hope to each and every person. And so I made the decision to ask the Transitional Council if I could run for the position of president of the transition. This was a key choice because it was a very serious time and we could not stand by and do nothing.

I fully understood the heavy responsibility that would soon weigh upon me, and the Transitional Council voted for me so that I could lead the transition. I then committed myself to lead the transition and to move forward with a new approach aimed at reconciliation among all Central Africans, and to urge our brothers and sisters in Africa who have been forced to leave their homes, I've urged them to come back and live alongside their brothers and sisters in Central African Republic as they did before.

I committed myself to making sure that there was public order and respect for the government throughout the country. I also made the commitment to respect the rules of the game of the transition, that is to not run in the elections that will take place at the end of the transition, and I will uphold this engagement, this commitment, at any cost.

When I became president, many people asked if I was up to the task and I said that I had all the qualities necessary to carry out this noble mission, that is to lead the transition that we all want to see happen so that we can arrive at free, transparent,

and democratic elections. My election as president led to a great deal of hope within the international community and especially among the people of the Central African Republic who have been so deeply hurt and wounded and who only want to live in peace and dignity. There needs to be a new Central African Republic that is based on values that can lead to development of its people.

This hope rests a great deal on my ability to bring people together and this has had a tremendous impact on the country. I am a woman. I am a mother. I want to see my children live in peace. Women in Africa and elsewhere experiencing political transitions have also passed the test. And I said why couldn't that also be the case in the Central African Republic?

I thought that the time had come in my country to put an end to the hostilities, the destruction, and the violence that has been committed against our peaceful population. I believe that the time had come to put an end to all sorts of exactions, to facilitate the return of displaced peoples, to relearn how we can live together, and to begin a national reconciliation process to bring our people out of the crisis, and that is what I've done. I have brought people together and I've worked towards reconciliation. This is the top priority every since I became head of state. At that point, I immediately understood that hate, bitterness, and fear of others are deeply rooted in each person in the Central African Republic.

When I took office and through the actions that I have taken, I have repeated my firm commitment to ongoing dialogue into peace and to inclusive management of the transition. My first words to the Central African Republic, this wounded country, and this is something I say again, this was a call that I made to my fellow citizens to work towards peace and to lift the country out of total chaos. And very

early on I understood that by stopping hostilities, then tolerance, dialogue, and national reconciliation can take place. This will lead to true social cohesion in our country.

Early on, I understood that I needed to analyze, understand, and overcome the contradictions, and unite our nation despite our ethnic, religious, or tribal differences. My belief was that it was high time to lay down our weapons and ask all those involved in the crisis to work towards resolving it peacefully so that our country could once again find peace and stability.

Ladies and gentlemen, an analysis of political-military crises that the Central African Republic has experienced shows that there are many deeply rooted causes that are closely linked to a lack of governance, a lack of justice systems, and a lack of strong institutions. Over several decades, these shortcomings have made the Central African Republic become a fragile state that is marked by ongoing rebellions.

In addition, the Central African Republic finds itself in a geopolitical environment that is marked by instability. Aside from Cameroon and the Central African Republic, there's also Congo, Brazzaville, Sudan, and Chad. All of these countries have experienced conflicts over the last 10 years. These current conflicts in our neighboring countries have also led to the circulation of small arms and light weapons that have also contributed to conflict in the Central African Republic.

Ladies and gentlemen, distinguished guests, despite this, my country has shown important indicators, socioeconomic indicators that are very critical. Over 80 percent of the population lives with less than \$2 a day. GDP per capita is, on average, \$80. This was for 2011 and is now about 300 for 2012 to 2014. The Central African Republic is among the five lowest countries throughout the world in terms of these indicators. These indicators show that there are shortcomings due to socioeconomic

challenges. And the Central African Republic must face these challenges of security, good governance, social cohesion, restoring authority of the government, restarting the economy, and the development process.

In order to answer these challenges, upon my election in January 2014, I have asked the government to set up a program to come out of the crisis. This is how an emergency program was implemented. This document is now a framework for a dialogue and consultation with our stakeholders in order to provide assistance to my country. My vision through this program is to build by 2015 a prosperous society, a united society living in security, peace, and respecting democratic values.

This vision is based on my determination to create the conditions in order to reestablish peace, security, constitutional order, and good governance. This program that has been rolled out has a strategy bringing together humanitarian actions and early recovery in order to strengthen the general objective of fighting against poverty in order to -- by bringing together international institutions and the communities in order to overcome this crisis. This strategy is built around four pillars.

First and foremost, security. During this transitional period I would like to give the people of the Central African Republic generalized security. And I would like to give to the actors of security more trust. This will be useful to the country and in line with international standards. This pillar will allow us to reestablish security and ensure the free circulation of goods and people throughout our territory in order to launch our economy. This will entail a disarmament program, demobilization programs, and the reintegration of DRRs.

We need to have the RSS security forces in order to have true security forces in the Central African Republic that will promote the rule of law and ensure free

and fair elections in the best possible conditions. We must reestablish judicial institutions in order to fight against impunity and corruption and allow for a real reconciliation and a consolidated peace.

With the support of stakeholders, the international community in my country, we have launched this reform of the security sector. There is one ministry that oversees the police and gendarme forces. We have one organization that oversees these forces. We are progressively developing these security forces in the provinces and this deployment will continue in order to cover the entire territory of our country, together with the peacekeeping forces of the U.N.

I have also headed the National Security Council and, together with the U.N., we would like to roll out the best possible strategy regarding our national army. Sanctions have been imposed by the Security Council of the United Nations and, because of that, the Central African Republic cannot equip its army. But, of course, the existence of these forces in the country is paramount. As you all know, our country is surrounded by regional conflicts and we are at the crossroad of regional and sub-regional terrorists with the advancement of terrorist groups in the region. With the support of grand nations, such as the United States, in the field of the fight against terrorism, we will be able to do away with these risks. Security issues must be dealt with in the framework of dialogue with our neighboring countries, and I have deployed efforts together with the SAAC.

Distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen, my will is to promote democratic governance and political governance. And even in the hardest times of these crises, dialogues and consultations were held on a regular basis with all the forces of the country. The fact that we are all mobilized allowed for an inclusive dialogue and an

inclusive procedure. And in July, we even organized a reconciliation forum in Brazzaville. This led to an agreement to cease hostilities. Thanks to this agreement armed groups, civil society, and political parties committed to work together in order to reestablish a sustainable peace. This was a common will and reconciliation initiatives within communities, together with associations and armed groups, are encouraged every day.

There will be popular consultation within the 16 districts of the country and this will prepare the National Reconciliation Forum that will be held in Bangui. These consultations will allow us to identify the major problems that are an obstacle to living together in communities. This will call for participation of communities and of people in order to raise awareness within communities with regards to their role in reestablishing peace and sustainable development in the country.

As far as the national dialogue is concerned, its main objective will be to create the foundations of a new society in the Central African Republic. And this will have a main pillar: a new social pact based on good governance and patriotism within the framework of this dialogue and the openness of a government that will be open to all the different stakeholders.

As far as elections are concerned, the electoral code was adopted on November 13, 2013, and the members of the National Authority for Elections took oath on December 24, 2013. The different regulatory entities, as the High Council of Communication, have been set up, as well, in August. There is a strong will on behalf of all these institutions to organize these elections. We must, of course, deal with some challenges -- the persistence of insecurity in some regions of the country and, of course, the lack of financial means -- in order to finance these elections and to organize them.

The second pillar of the transition authorities is reestablishing the state's

authority throughout the territory of the country. This is a prerequisite in order to relaunch the economy and organize elections. We must create the conditions in order to ensure the return of displaced people and refugees. We must reinforce the protection of civilians and people working in humanitarian organizations. We must carry out actions that bring closer administrations from the administrators. We must protect civilians and promote human rights.

This is why I have agreed to delegate part of national sovereignty to the U.N. mission that is present in order to reestablish peace, MINUSCA, to increase the capacities of judges. With the presence of MINUSCA since September last year, we will have a mechanism in place very soon.

We have focused on basic social services: health, drinking water, sanitation, hygiene, education, and our national communications network. The measures that have been carried out aim at enabling community recovery and capacity-building for the resilience of communities. This is why I have decided that these services will be free of charge for vulnerable communities and groups such as children and women.

In the Central African Republic, there is strong mobilization of humanitarian organizations with the intervention of more than 90 international NGOs. In spite of this, there is a weakness in accessing basic social services in the country. And I seized the opportunity to launch an appeal for everyone to support my government in reestablishing access to basic social services in the country.

These actions will be possible with economic reforms and the promotion of sustainable growth. This is why it is urgent in the short run to create wealth and jobs in order to cover the expenses of the state, but also to create opportunities for training and new jobs for these young people who are not working and who become soldiers in armed

groups.

The same goes for women, more than 61 percent of our population. These women have become, against their will, heads of their families and they are solely in charge of their children. This is why it is important and urgent to offer these women new opportunities in order to consolidate their livelihood and ensure their empowerment.

Based on this vision, these economic reforms will allow for a rapid financial assistance and budgetary assistance in order to strengthen the main stakeholders of the economy and create new jobs. In the long run, this will create a better environment. This will enable public-private partnerships and will boost growth in the sectors of agriculture, mining, and forestry. This will also allow us to have better infrastructures and more sustainable infrastructures. This will also strengthen financial governance by implementing global public finance reforms.

We must reduce fiduciary risks and this is why a committee has been formed in order to deal with public spending and finances. This is organized in addition to the capacity building of an entity dealing with public spending. We must give the state good financial capacity and we must, first and foremost, deal with the mining sector and we reintroduce our country in the Kimberley process. The U.N. forces deployed in our country will provide their support to this priority action.

Ladies and gentlemen, distinguished guests, my intervention is not exhaustive, but it does highlight the efforts that are made every day in order to reduce the suffering of the Central African Republic's people, in order to increase security, put an end to impunity, ensure the recovery of communities, and carry out a development process. I have also highlighted that under my leadership the people of the Central African Republic have faced with a lot of courage the crisis that is underway.

In a short time, progress can be made in the governance of the country with a significant change in the living conditions. This is possible thanks to the support of international forces, thanks to the reestablishment of security in the different provinces. Our country is slowly becoming more livable and this is also illustrated by the return of the U.S. embassy in Bangui. This shows that security is progressively reestablished in the country.

With the return of peace and security, slowly children are going back to school. Hospitals and healthcare centers are progressively reopening their doors. Employees and civil servants are progressively going back to work, namely in Bangui. The traffic between Bangui and Dwolla and the availability of first necessity products is ensured. But, of course, this is not to the expected level because of the control of some regions of the country by armed groups.

The U.S. has understood since February 2014, when I spoke to the secretary-general of the U.N. and I asked for actions to be taken in the Central African Republic, there is a humanitarian emergency. And I am happy that my cry and my call for help was heard by the international community. Never before had the international community been so present in my country. My country was a forsaken country and I managed to bring back the Central African Republic to the heart of the international community's preoccupations.

I would like to thank the American humanitarian organizations for their support. The fabric of our society and our economy has been destroyed and I have started cooperating with international financial institutions. This is one of my main objectives. There are negotiations -- negotiations will be held with the IMF and the World Bank during my stay here in the United States.

The main outcome and that hope is back in the Central African Republic and there is a population now that is more reassured. Of course, progress still needs to be made and this is where the United States can help us. Your entities and structures can help us a lot to ensure advocacy in order to provide a support for the efforts of the Central African Republic's people in order to ensure dignity of the people and integrity of the territory.

There are people behind leaders and all they want is to be accompanied in order to come out of this crisis. We have many needs and scarce resources. In order to implement this plan we need colossal means and we need the support of the strongest and richest country. And the United States will part of all the partners that we wish to mobilize.

I would like to thank The Brookings Institution for the attention that was given to us. And I think that you will be the defenders of the interests of the Central African Republic. It was an honor to be able to talk to you today and to describe the situation in my country.

The people of my country need your people, the American people, to reestablish dignity in the country. And this is why I can say together we can do better. Thank you. (Applause)

MR. SY: Thank you. *Merci, Madame la Présidente.* You can join with a round of applause, once again, the president of the Central African Republic. (Applause) We are a little bit behind, so what I will do is I will shorten my conversation with the president to give you an opportunity to ask questions because that's one thing that Brookings prides itself in doing.

First I would like to say why is the Central African Republic important for

us? First of all, the Central African Republic, I mean, resolving the crisis in the Central African Republic is important for the people of Central African Republic and as Africans, citizens of the world, and also as sometimes guests, because one thing that needs to be noted is that many people from neighboring countries lived in the Central African Republic. So peace, security, prosperity in Central African Republic is important for the people in Central Africa, but also Africans.

Second, I think at the time when we're talking about this Africa Rising narrative, it's important, also, to show that Africans can solve their problems themselves.

And third, you know, as a global citizen, and with one look at the crisis in the Middle East, in Syria, in Iraq, and so on, this particular case in the Central African Republic shows that the global governance is somehow functioning because it's thanks to the international community, to the people -- to the neighbors, and to the people of the Central African Republic that we are now at a stage where, you know, there is some hope.

So my first question, *ma première question*, Madame President, we are now at a critical and historic time. Are we moving towards a historic moment? And is there a tipping point? And if so, do you have concrete examples that you can give us that will give us hope of breaking the cycle of violence that has been going on in your country for the past two decades and for -- since independence practically?

PRESIDENT SAMBA-PANZA: After the Malabo meeting, which brought together heads of state and government from the economic community of Central African states, a decision was made to truly move towards national reconciliation, to stop hostilities and violence. We believed that by bringing together all of the stakeholders involved in the situation we needed to hold a forum outside of the Central African

Republic to ensure security and to have a sense of calmness in approaching these discussions.

We spoke with members of civil society and armed groups at the forum. Many people did not want to attend this forum, in fact, because people thought that Central Africans should be the ones to solve these problems, but we convinced most stakeholders to attend this forum in the end. And those who did not come to Brazzaville, those who did not follow the agreement, well, we believe that the meeting in Brazzaville was a first step, a fundamental first step, in the reconciliation process.

All stakeholders needed to become involve and support the transition in a peaceful fashion. We needed to put an end to exactions, to hostilities, the destruction of property. We managed to get this agreement signed and there was a lot of emotion in Brazzaville. Commitments were made in Brazzaville.

And so then we came back to Bangui after that with a great deal of hope, hope of not hearing gunshots anymore, hope of not seeing violence anymore. But, as you know, agreements are often broken. They're not always followed. And, unfortunately, we have seen some cases of violence since then, but these are perhaps more isolated cases of violence. And because of this we should not question that there is really true will on the part of Central Africans to come out of this crisis and to reconcile, to have reconciliation between Christians and Muslims, so that they can worship side by side. There is Kilometer 5 where we see a lot of Muslims. And when the market is able to open back up along this -- in this area and when this market can open back up and welcome everyone, all populations, we will know that we are on the right track and that we are allowed to have hope.

I could give you many examples like that. There are also religious

leaders, youth leaders, women leaders, who are on the ground to work towards reconciliation, and they speak of peace. This is all very important because we know that the people in our country want to be involved in the peace process, but it's very difficult because people experienced terrible things. It will be hard to turn the page from one day to the next. When you are so wounded, when you have seen and lived through such terrible things, I think you need time. You need time in order to be able to forgive and move on.

MR. SY: A few months ago, we welcomed religious leaders from the Central African Republic, as you might remember. My second questions, Madam President, in September, MISCA handed over the reins to MINUSCA. In terms of resources, when we look at the difference between the promises made and the money that's actually been disbursed, I think only about 50 percent of the promised funds have been disbursed. What's the message that you have? On September 26th, you will be attending the General Assembly of the United Nations in New York. Could you give us a little preview, if you will, of the message that you will have to give to your external partners at that time?

PRESIDENT SAMBA-PANZA: First of all, the international community and the African community came to our side and I have a message for them. I want to express the gratitude of the people of the Central African Republic who have benefited from this spontaneous sense of solidarity from the sub-region, from FOMAC, from MICOPAX. This has all led to MISCA that is the African Union mission. And now we have MINUSCA, the U.N. mission.

When I took office in January 2014, I asked those close to me to bring back peace how many troops do we need? And I was told we need 33,000 troops. And I

was told we only have about 5,000 and then 2,000 Sangaris troops and then a few thousand more from the European Union. And I saw that this was not enough and I needed to mobilize more troops. Throughout the Central African Republic there needed to be the presence of troops to deter armed groups and to bring back peace, so I understood that I had to go to the United Nations, and it was the U.N. that had the capacity to mobilize the funds necessary. There are many contributing countries that were able to contribute to the peace mission.

I do not want to downplay the important role that was played by the African Union, but they do have limitations in terms of troops and means and resources. And with the support of Ban Ki-moon, the secretary-general of the U.N., there was a Security Council vote and this famous Resolution 2149, which allowed the deployment of blue helmets in the Central African Republic.

They began to arrive. About 65 percent of the troops have arrived. And little by little, other troops will arrive that have been promised. So I think we are only at 65 percent right now, but there have been other announcements that other troops will soon arrive and be deployed.

Regarding the support of financial support and mobilization of resources, there are humanitarian -- emergency humanitarian programs because we saw that the people needed assistance. And with the support of the United Nations, there was an emergency plan that was drawn up and an amount was set. There were a lot of announcements about this, but, unfortunately, no money has actually been sent out.

So I think only about 45 percent of the funds promised have been delivered, so there is a significant gap. We need to make up for this gap. I think it is due to the state of affairs in the world right now. We need to deal with Ebola, Ukraine, South

Sudan, among others. And Central African Republic can only get a small part of these resources. This is why it is so important to continue to capture the attention of the international community regarding the crisis in Central African Republic, so that we are not forgotten and so that we continue to receive resources and support that we need from the international community.

MR. SY: I will not asking because you have the proof here. So I will just open the floor because we don't have a lot of time. And, yes, so there's one question here. If you could keep it very brief for the sake of time, I'd like to go to different sides. Then the lady in the back and I have to go to this. I'll take the first three questions first. Very briefly, please, yes.

SPEAKER: Okay. You didn't speak about gender, but I wanted to ask her about sexual minorities and how do they play in your effort to include all the people to participate in the development of your country.

SPEAKER: Thank you very much, Madam President, for being here. I am pleased to be here myself. I am from Burkina Faso, which is also another country in difficulty in Africa. You said something that I was very much touched by. You said you're only here for the transition and you're not going to run for office in 2015 during the elections. What do you think about Blaise Compaoré?

MR. SY: I'll move over here and then I'll move -- somebody else later. For the second round we'll start with you and take one more here and one here.

SPEAKER: Thank you so much, Madam President, for taking your time to speak to us. As a woman, a young woman from Africa, I have a question about how involved were African women and women from Central African Republic in the ceasefire? And do you think going forward they are going to have a more equal standing in

leadership and in all parts of Central African Republic's life considering that they're now the heads of families and they have new roles that challenge patriarchy that pervades most of Africa? Thank you.

PRESIDENT SAMBA-PANZA: Regarding the first question, you are speaking about minorities? Sexual minorities specifically? Was that the question?

SPEAKER: Gay men, transgender (inaudible).

PRESIDENT SAMBA-PANZA: Okay, I've understood now. There are so many problems that we need to resolve. We need to feed people. We need to take care of them. That to also look after sexual minorities, that's, unfortunately, and I'm sorry to say, not a priority for us at this time.

To answer the question asked by the woman from Burkina Faso, as you may know we experienced a crisis in 2012 because the commitments made were not followed through and our word was not kept. And so when I came to office the rules of the game were clear: The president of the transition does not have the right to run in the upcoming presidential elections. The transition is only supposed to last 24 months. And I agreed to commit to those rules and I will do my utmost to follow them because I want to send a message to show that these promises can be kept and problems can be avoided this way. (Applause)

Regarding advice that I could give to your president, I'm sure that people of Burkina Faso know how to best look after their own affairs. Regarding women today, I am the president of the transition and it is thanks to women that I am here. Once I came back from N'Djamena, Michel Djotodia had stepped down and there were many women who came to see me the following Sunday. They called me on Sunday, I should say, and they said, Madam Mayor -- I was mayor at the time -- we would like to see you Monday

morning. Because my doors are always open, I said, yes, please come see me at 10 a.m.

There was a woman who said -- who came to see me. And she was with another group of women and they said, Madam Mayor, we would like for you to run for president, to become the transitional president. I said, no, I don't want to do this, it's not my goal. And they said to me politicians have failed and there needs to be a woman in power and we think you're that woman.

I took three days to make the decision because I had never thought about running for office, running for president. I had mainly been involved in the private sector and civil society, but those women ended up convincing me and I did not want to disappoint them and the trust that they had placed in me, and that is why I agreed to run. And the transitional council voted for me.

Regarding Brazzaville, many politicians did not want to go to the forum, but there were women who organized a sit-in to ask those politicians to go and sign the agreement. Many African women were involved in this. And day to day it's African women who are at the marketplaces, who are working so hard to improve the daily lives of the people. Women are so important. And as head of this transition I need to remember those women and I need to work to promote women in the area of entrepreneurship and other areas in order to improve their lives.

MR. SY: The last round of questions. So I had a gentleman there. I had a gentleman here, too. I can take one more, maybe in the back there. Yeah, in the middle back.

SPEAKER: First of all, thank you very much for those remarks, Madam President. You mentioned that one of your priorities is to bring back displaced persons

and refugees to Central African Republic. My question is can you tell us if progress has been made in this regard? Specifically for Muslims in the Western part of the country, is there security? Is it safe enough for Muslims to return, whether it be to Bangui or elsewhere?

SPEAKER: Thank you for taking my question. In his book *The State of Africa: A History of 50 Years of Independence*, historian Martin Meredith writes that Africa's challenge, to a large extent, can be attributed to corrupt and sometimes incompetent national leaders who were preoccupied with maintaining power and self-enrichment. As interim president, and now I have just learned there is no chance of being the first woman president of CAR, my question is what priorities and steps will you take to put the nation back on the path to good governance?

And secondly, what hopes and expectations do you have for how the international community can best help you in that grueling task?

MR. SY: The last question, I had somebody in the back in the middle. The lady in the middle in the back.

SPEAKER: I represent the European Union and I wanted to ask you if you have any comments of the presence of the EU in your country.

PRESIDENT SAMBA-PANZA: Thank you very much. As far as displaced people and refugees are concerned, much progress has been made even if, of course, the situation is still alarming. In January, when I took office, we had 69 camps for refugees and now we have 43 camps for displaced people, and 50 percent of these displaced people have now left these locations.

We had some issues and concerns for the communities around the airport. They were on the tarmac, which, of course, posed security issues. And we

carried out a survey and we realized that 83 percent of the people present there wanted to leave. These are not good living conditions. You do not have sanitation, drinking water, so the situation was very intricate. And with the arrival of heavy rainfall as of the month of May, many of these people left those grounds, but some people still remain on these locations because they have lost everything they had and they do not know where to go.

We are now lobbying and advocating in order to obtain funding to build social housing, buy some timber, some basic materials in order to build housing for these people. So the situation has improved, but things are still alarming, unfortunately, regarding displaced people.

Now, as far as refugees are concerned, most refugees are indeed Muslims, but you also have people of other faiths because they were in places that were not secure anymore. Imagine that all of a sudden you arrive in a country where you know no one and you cannot adapt. That is a problem. These people are attached to their country and, all of a sudden, are in Cameroon or Chad and they would like to come back as soon as possible, and some have already started to return.

You mentioned minorities. Well, the international community has raised the topic of minorities at risk, Muslim minorities, in some parts of the country, namely in Bangui on the 5th Kilometer. That was the stronghold of the Muslim community, but I refused the displacement of these communities. Some said that I was not respecting the law on the free circulation of people, but I said this is the last stronghold. This is the last symbol of the multi-ethnicity and the plurality of religions in our country. And so I refused to displace this community because I had a vision on this matter. And today, this population that I'm trying to protect and try to keep where they always lived is slowly

regaining hope and things are coming back to normal progressively.

Today, with the support of NGOs and with the support of international institutions and the international community, people are learning to live together again. And so there is progress in this field.

As for the question on good governance and the fight against corruption, as soon as I took office I formally called upon the international community in order to benefit from their support in the financial chain to improve our finances. I asked to have technical assistance at Customs, the Treasury, and we now have technical assistance that helps us improve our procedures and processes. Reports are regularly drafted and sent to the IMF and the World Bank in order to ensure follow-up in these sectors.

Fighting against corruption is a lengthy process. You cannot change things from one day to the next, especially in a poor country where people have very low salaries. Of course, you have the perpetrators of corruption and these are the people that have to be indicted because they're the culprits, but it is difficult to judge someone who accepts a bribe when you know that they do not have enough money to survive.

I would like to thank the support of the European Union because the question was asked. You must know that there is a fiduciary fund that has been set up the European Union in the Central African Republic, and it is called the Fund for Hope. It is a fund that has been formed thanks to the contribution of EU member states, and the minister of economy is here and she could better explain the details of this fund. But the main idea is that this fund will allow implementing community projects for young people, for women. I said that this fund has to be used proprietarily to encourage the involvement of women. So I would like to express my gratitude to the European Union for its support.

MR. SY: So I'll ask the gentleman here. Oh, we have to cut it? Okay, I'm sorry. I'm really sorry about that, but I have to cut it. And the president will be speaking at the U.N. General Assembly later this month and you'll have another opportunity, also, to listen to her.

So if you please could remain seated to give the president the chance to walk through. I would like to thank everybody for coming, and starting with the president. I think it makes a difference to see the president speaking rather than reading our reports, so with a round of applause, please thank Madam Samba-Panza. (Applause)

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I, Carleton J. Anderson, III do hereby certify that the forgoing electronic file when originally transmitted was reduced to text at my direction; that said transcript is a true record of the proceedings therein referenced; that I am neither counsel for, related to, nor employed by any of the parties to the action in which these proceedings were taken; and, furthermore, that I am neither a relative or employee of any attorney or counsel employed by the parties hereto, nor financially or otherwise interested in the outcome of this action.

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