

## **DRAFT Strategy Paper**

### **Protection interventions in response to internal displacement in north-western Central African Republic**

**July 2006**

#### **Introduction**

This strategy paper outlines the background to the current humanitarian situation in north-western Central African Republic and describes the humanitarian response implemented to date, which only partially covered the needs of internally displaced persons in the northwest. The paper furthermore describes how UNHCR, in cooperation with UNICEF, other UN agencies and NGOs, intends to implement protection activities, under a project funded through the Rapid Response window of the CERF and a follow-up project submitted under the Mid-Year Review of the 2006 CAP. Both projects aim at improving the protection situation of an estimated 50,000 internally displaced persons in the Ouham and Ouham Pendé prefectures, and complement the humanitarian interventions carried out by other UN agencies in their respective areas of responsibility.

#### **Background**

##### *Situation in north-western Central African Republic*

According to the 2003 census, the Central African Republic is a country of approximately 3.9 million people, 95% of whom live on less than a dollar a day. The plight of the country continues to be largely ignored by the international community even though CAR exhibits all the characteristics of a complex emergency<sup>1</sup>. The lack of attention towards the multitude of problems of a political, security, economic, social and humanitarian nature would appear to be confirmed by the limited response to the CAP appeal, which stood at 34.8% of required funding as of 22 June 2006. The 2006 CAP sought USD 46.8 million in emergency aid, revised down to USD 35 million in the Mid-Year Review.

The country endured political instability and military crises throughout the 1990s, including two military mutinies in 1996 and 1997. Following a failed coup attempt on the regime of former President Ange-Felix Patassé in May 2001, suspected plotters were hunted down. One of them, General François Bozizé, Chief of Staff for the CAR Armed Forces, fled to Chad where he was granted refuge by Chadian President Idriss Déby. Supported by Chad, General Bozizé organized a rebel force relying heavily on Chadian Zaghawas<sup>2</sup> which began conducting cross-border raids and by 2002 were in full conflict with the forces of President Patassé.

The resultant fighting was particularly destructive in the north, heartland of the party in power at the time of President Patassé, the Movement for the Liberation of the Central African People (MLPC).<sup>3</sup> In the two main affected regions, Ouham and Ouham Pendé, with a population of approximately 800,000 according to the 2003 census, most

---

<sup>1</sup> Report of OCHA Mission to CAR, 8 to 15 April 2006.

<sup>2</sup> An ethnic group from the eastern Chad/Sudan border region to which Chad's President Déby belongs and which supported his seizure of power in Chad in 1990.

<sup>3</sup> The Mouvement pour la Liberation du Peuple Centrafricain (MLPC) now largely backs Bozizé's rival, Martin Ziguèle, who finished second in the 2005 presidential elections.

residents were temporarily displaced<sup>4</sup>, three quarters of the schools and health clinics were destroyed and the cotton industry, upon which the local population depended, was devastated, having yet to recover.<sup>5</sup>

After another failed coup d'état in October 2002, General Bozizé finally seized the CAR capital, Bangui, in March 2003. President Patassé went into exile in Togo. Upon attaining power, the new regime pursued a programme of political pluralism and national reconciliation culminating in successful legislative and presidential elections in two rounds in March and May 2005, which General Bozizé convincingly won<sup>6</sup>. The electoral process greatly benefited from the political support of the UN peace-building mission in CAR, BONUCA<sup>7</sup>, and the logistical and financial support of UNDP.

With the support of France and the CEMAC peace-keeping force (FOMUC)<sup>8</sup>, General Bozizé endeavoured to re-establish normal military structures for the CAR armed forces, estimated to number some 4,000 men. This left many of his erstwhile rebel colleagues out in the cold, which in turn led to clashes between the rebels and CAR regular forces outside Bangui in April 2004. Chad's President Déby was called to mediate. A number of rebels were flown to N'djamena where Déby brokered a deal by which the rebels agreed to return to civilian life, a deal which many of them seem to have since repudiated<sup>9</sup>.

While a majority of those from the north who were displaced during the fighting have since returned to their areas of habitual residence following the accession to power by General Bozizé, a restoration of basic services and security did not accompany them. Indeed, the situation worsened. Long-standing problems such as (a) highway banditry (known as *coupeurs de route* or *bandits de grand chemin*), (b) Chadian pastoralists, grazing their cattle on and thereby destroying CAR farmers' land,<sup>10</sup> were compounded by (c) heavily armed and well organized gangs constituted predominantly by former rebels, as well as fighters<sup>11</sup> who had supported the former regime and remained in the bush after power changed hands (*éléments armés non identifiés*).

---

<sup>4</sup> Relatively few sought refuge abroad. Approximately 30,000 did, however, flee to Chad where they live in refugee settlements at Amboko (near Gore) and Yaroungou (near Maro).

<sup>5</sup> Cotton production facilities were looted. A number of problems include non-payment of deliveries since 2002, decline in cultivation, reduced sales, rises in transportation costs as a result of insecurity. As a result, observers suggest that some of those who used to survive on their earnings from cotton production may have turned to banditry, further increasing already difficult living conditions for the remainder of the population and postponing the return of large scale cotton production.

<sup>6</sup> Thanks to the mediation of Gabon's President Omar Bongo, all 11 candidates to the presidential elections eventually took part, except for former President Patassé, whose exclusion was requested by the National Dialogue Forum in September/October 2003, and who is subject to criminal proceedings for war crimes committed under his rule both inside CAR and before the ICC.

<sup>7</sup> The Bureau des Nations Unies en Centrafrique (BONUCA) is headed by the Special Representative of the Secretary General (SRSG) in CAR, and comprises human rights, civilian police and military observers.

<sup>8</sup> The Force Multinationale de la CEMAC (FOMUC) is the peace-keeping force deployed by the Communauté Economique et Monétaire des Etats d'Afrique Centrale (CEMAC) in 2003 to stabilize the security situation and assist with training and capacity building for the new FACA (Forces Armées Centrafricaines). FOMUC currently has 380 troops on the ground. FOMUC benefits from logistical support from France.

<sup>9</sup> Apparently, rebel soldiers had been told that they would be paid 7 mio. (approx. USD 13,500) per head at the end of the fighting, but they only received 300,000 (approx. USD 575) for soldiers and 1 mio. (approx. USD 1,900) for officers. This is said to have caused deep resentment still lingering today.

<sup>10</sup> Since the 2002-2003 conflict in which Chad played a major role, Chadian nomads have become more brazen and violated even modest customary rules which kept such migratory grazing (transhumance) to specific routes.

<sup>11</sup> Many from Chad, said to be still under the command of a former Chadian rebel, Abdullaye Miskine, who was allied to former President Patassé.

Developments since the third quarter of 2005 suggest clear political undertones in attacks (September 2005: Markounda, November 2005: Kabo, December 2005: Bemal, January/February 2006: Paoua, May 2006: Tiringoulou, June 2006: Gordil) carried out by armed groups in the north. The Government is in fact presently facing an armed rebellion<sup>12</sup> in the north, whose aim is to overthrow the regime of President Francois Bozizé. The Government has officially recognised the existence of several politically motivated armed rebellions.

The nature of abuses perpetrated against the civilian population by various armed groups and government forces alike include theft, rape, pillaging, burning, kidnapping, targeted assassinations, poaching,<sup>13</sup> and as direct consequences population displacement, destruction of (already weak) infrastructures, a moribund economy, pauperization of the population, capital flight, and destruction of protected species and habitats<sup>14</sup>.

Women and children are the primary victims of this situation of extreme and chronic poverty as minimum standards of food security, access to clean water, health, education and sanitation have not been met. Years of instability and precarious living conditions have taken their toll on the population in northern CAR.

According to information provided by NGOs working in northern CAR, there are an estimated 50,000 IDPs in the Ouham and Ouham Pendé prefectures: 25,000 persons on the axis Paoua-Bemal, 15,000 persons on the axis Markounda-Maitikoulou and 10,000 persons on the axis Kabo-Batangafa.

In addition to internal displacement, the situation in the north-west has generated cross-border movements into Chad and Cameroon, bringing the total number of CAR refugees in Chad to more than 50,000, including those displaced during the 2001-2003 crises, and to an estimated 20,000 in Cameroon according to recent unconfirmed reports.

Recent missions<sup>15</sup> to northern CAR confirm earlier assessments of the precarious humanitarian situation, which represents a serious crisis.

According to the latest report of the Secretary General covering January to June 2006<sup>16</sup>, the security situation in CAR remains precarious and worrisome. The overall human rights situation has clearly deteriorated since the beginning of the year, and in particular over the past few months<sup>17</sup>. In addition to the deteriorating security situation, concern

---

<sup>12</sup> The rebellion includes four armed groups: the Union des Forces Républicaines (UFR) of Lieutenant Florian Ndjadder, a former FACA officer, the Armée Populaire pour la Restauration de la République et de la Démocratie (APRD) whose spokesman is Lieutenant Larma, a deserter from the FACA recently arrested in Bangui, the Mouvement Patriotique pour la Renaissance Centrafricaine (MPRC) led by Steve Guèret, who claimed responsibility for killing the mayor of Bossangoa, and the Front Démocratique du Peuple Centrafricain (FDPC) of Abdoulaye Miskine, once a militiaman under former President Ange-Felix Patassé and previously considered to have close ties with the APRD.

<sup>13</sup> See the report of the High Level Tripartite Meeting on Trans-Border Insecurity, convened by BONUCA in Yaoundé, on 25 and 26 August 2005. The meeting gathered together the Ministers of Foreign Affairs, Interior and Defense of Cameroon, Chad and CAR, as well as the Chiefs of Staff of their respective armies, to identify means of strengthening security in the border regions of the three countries.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Report of OCHA Mission in April 2006 and UNHCR-OCHA joint contingency planning mission in March - April 2006

<sup>16</sup> United Nations Security Council: *Report of the Secretary General on the situation in the Central African Republic and the activities of the United Nations Peace building Support Office in the Central African Republic, S/2006/441, 27 June 2006* 8 (hereinafter Report of the Secretary General).

<sup>17</sup> Report of the Secretary General, supra note 2

was expressed in relation to an increase in poverty in the country and the fragility of economic recovery.

### **Humanitarian response**

Against this background, the UNCT agreed to undertake emergency humanitarian interventions, bringing together UN agencies and NGOs to alleviate the suffering of IDPs. These interventions could also reduce the number of those seeking asylum in Chad, thus decreasing pressure on the overstretched resources in that country.

Following the deterioration of the situation at the beginning of this year, humanitarian actors began increasing their presence in the areas of northern CAR mostly affected by the crisis. In particular, various UN Agencies (UNICEF, WFP, WHO with contribution from UNHCR and UNDP) in collaboration with NGOs (COOPI, CARITAS, MSF-Holland and Croix Rouge Centrafricaine) have started an emergency assistance programme. This assistance consists in providing health services through mobile clinics, distribution of medicine to operational health centers and hospitals, and distribution of food and non-food items to persons with specific needs.

- **UN:** WFP has a field presence, with three offices in Bambari, Kaga Bandoro and Bouar and undertakes food distributions to persons with specific needs. UNICEF has reconstructed its office in Bossangoa in the Ouham prefecture and plans its reopening in July 2006. The office premises will be opened to staff from other UN agencies, and UNHCR staff deployed for IDP protection activities (two Protection Officers) will be based there. BONUCA also maintains a field presence in Bossangoa.
- **ICRC** is operational in seven provincial centers, including a logistics base, and has increased the number of staff. It recently distributed 8,000 tarpaulins, 24,000 mats and blankets, 4,000 buckets and 8 tons of soap. The operation was conducted in collaboration with the Central African Red Cross Society and several NGOs.
- **MSF Spain, Holland and France** operate mobile clinics in the northern prefectures, on the axes Kabo-Batangafo, Markounda-Maitikoulou and Paoua-Bemal respectively. MSF-Holland has rehabilitated the hospital in Boguila-Kota, which caters for patients in the wider area. MSF-France provides support to the hospital in Paoua. **COOPI**, supported by UN Agencies has established a presence in Markounda on the Chadian border, where they distribute food and other services to displaced persons<sup>18</sup>.

Despite the aforementioned interventions, no protection-related activities on behalf of IDPs have been undertaken as yet by the UNCT, both due to the security situation prevailing in the area and the absence of suitable direct implementing partners in CAR.

Overall efforts remain constrained by (a) precarious security conditions in areas mostly affected by the crisis in the north, (b) chronic under-funding of humanitarian programmes combined with insufficient capacity to address the needs of the most vulnerable segments of the population, (c) difficulties in identifying experienced and reliable

---

<sup>18</sup> Report of OCHA Mission supra note 1.

implementing partners, especially as concerns development partners and (d) an absence of foreign and local private investment.<sup>19</sup>

## **Strategy**

Within the framework of the rapid response window of the CERF, the UN Country Team elaborated a number of interlinked projects to assist displaced populations in the north. In this context, WHO would provide health services, FAO would conduct emergency distribution of seeds and agricultural tools, WFP would address the IDP food situation, UNICEF would provide both assistance (NFIs) and protection, mainly to displaced children, and UNHCR would lay the groundwork for the implementation of an integrated protection strategy.

In particular, protection of IDPs as a specific group, protection of children and women, prevention of and response to SGBV, individual support to survivors of violence and community-based support to populations affected by the conflict are critical issues that must be addressed. Protection gaps need to be identified through close monitoring in order to reduce incidents, to allow individual follow-up and appropriate capacity building of local authorities, and to improve the protection environment in the north. Monitoring is especially crucial in order to identify and refer those cases to appropriate structures and to take responsive and remedial action in a timely manner.

In order to support protection interventions in favour of internally displaced persons, with particular attention to children and women, UNHCR and UNICEF jointly require USD 225,000 for core life-saving activities which have been approved from the CERF. The follow-up project submitted under the Mid-Year-Review of the 2006 CAP amounts to USD 436,016, including monitoring of and advocacy against gross violations of human rights; prevention, protection and care against all forms of violence, abuse and exploitation; psycho-social, medical and legal support and recovery.

Protection-related activities for affected populations in the northwest will benefit IDPs, other affected persons, and – in the long term – CAR returnees from Chad. These activities, as well as protection monitoring activities, are urgent to reduce and prevent violations of basic human rights, including violence against civilians, sexual abuse and exploitation.

UNHCR is in the process of sensitizing the relevant government authorities on the nature of protection-related interventions, with a view to fostering a consensus on the need for broader humanitarian interventions in favour of IDPs and conflict-affected families, and including protection, assistance and solution aspects. In this context, in close cooperation with the Ministry of Social Affairs and the Family, UNHCR is organising a workshop to sensitize the relevant government officials on the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement.

UNHCR will deploy two protection officers (one ProCap and one SURGE Protection Officer) and UNICEF one Emergency Officer in Bossangoa. Together, these staff will form a joint protection team in Bossangoa to work in partnership with other UN agencies and NGOs on the ground.

---

<sup>19</sup> Report of OCHA Mission supra note 1.

UNHCR will work in partnership with UNICEF (as far as its protection mandate is concerned), other UN agencies and NGOs, in order to achieve the following protection objectives:

- Ensure IDPs live in condition that meet minimum standards, paying particular attention to physical safety;
- Ensure that the affected population, and especially persons with specific needs, have access to basic services and enjoy basic rights;
- Enhance child protection;
- Monitor the general protection situation and human rights violations of IDPs;
- Ensure that survivors of SGBV have access to legal redress, adequate health and psycho-social support;
- Prevent future displacement and facilitate attainment of durable solutions for internally displaced populations.

Within the overall framework offered by the inter-agency cluster approach, and according to the related areas of responsibilities, the following activities will be carried out:

Protection of IDPs, with particular attention to individuals and groups with specific needs:

1. Sensitize local authorities and promote the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement with a view to reducing reported cases necessitating protection interventions;
2. Advocate with political and military actors to prevent internal displacement, and to prevent and limit violations of IDPs' human rights;
3. Build protection capacity among displaced populations and host communities (conduct information campaigns through local media channels; empower women's groups and others, etc.);
4. Promote community-based responses for protection of IDPs with specific needs, such as single-headed households, minorities, elderly persons, disabled persons, etc.;
5. Counsel survivors of violence and torture, who are reported through a network of trained observers.

Child protection:

1. Promote human rights and humanitarian law and principles applicable to the protection of children;
2. Advocate with political and military actors to prevent and limit violation of children rights;
3. Tracing and family reunification;
4. Put in place care arrangements and activities to preserve family unity;
5. Prevention of recruitment, release, demobilisation and reintegration;
6. Provide integrated care and counselling to affected populations, in particular adolescents and young people, through the creation of child protective environments (child-friendly schools, etc.).

#### IDP protection monitoring:

1. Set up a network of trained observers based in key locations, including Markounda, Paoua, Kabo, Batangafo, Bozoum, to monitor the general protection situation and specific human rights violations in order to take appropriate actions;
2. Identify persons with specific protection needs for individual follow up;
3. Conduct investigations, document and report on human rights violations;
4. Monitor patterns of internal displacement for purposes of early warning, contingency planning, emergency preparedness and response.

#### Prevention of and response to SGBV:

1. Prevention activities involving information, education and training to various groups (community leaders, local associations, government officials etc.);
2. Identification of incidents of violence, and provision of legal assistance and protection follow-up to survivors of SGBV;
3. Development of gender-sensitive programmes for support to survivors, including legal and medical and psycho-social assistance and protection programmes;
4. Advocacy with political and military actors to prevent and mitigate SGBV.

Below are the main expected results:

- Analysis of trends in internal displacement to be used for purposes of early warning, contingency planning, emergency preparedness and response both within CAR and in Chad and Cameroon;
- Collection of data on violation of women's and children's rights;
- Collection of relevant data on protection and assistance needs and gaps and identification of priority areas of intervention;
- Sensitization of political and military actors on the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement and the protection of women and children;
- Reduction of the number of violations of IDP rights, with particular attention to women and children;
- Establishment of programs on prevention of and response to SGBV aimed at local support groups for SGBV survivors.

Within the established framework, UNHCR will carry out monitoring of the overall human rights situation and of patterns of internal displacement, while UNICEF will focus on abuses of children's rights. Activities related to direct IDP protection and advocacy, trainings, campaigns, and sensitization, and SGBV prevention and response, will be carried out by UNHCR, while UNICEF will focus on activities related to child protection.

One of the main challenges for the implementation of the above-mentioned activities is the fact that IDPs scattered in the local surroundings seem to be particularly traumatized and so far remain in hiding. Many villages in the areas of Paoua and Markounda still remain empty. Mechanisms to overcome the difficulties of access to the beneficiaries will be put in place through local observers, regular contacts with community leaders and field visits. Although it is difficult to access those in need of assistance/protection, UN agencies have already, through previous interventions, demonstrated their capacity to gain access to and provide assistance to these groups.

The overall implementation of this strategy is based on the assumption that there is low-level civil strife and that the security situation is manageable and does not reach critical proportions, in order for the UNCT and its NGO partners to continue to operate regularly. It is also assumed that adequate human, financial and material resources are in place to facilitate the smooth implementation of all planned activities.

## **Conclusion**

Advocacy activities, sensitization of local authorities and promotion of the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement would facilitate access to beneficiaries and hopefully result in improvements in the rule of law and in the respect for basic human rights standards of IDPs and the civilian population in general. This could have a positive effect on the general security situation, which in turn could facilitate resumption of economic activities in the region.

Improvements in the security and socio-economic environment in the north-western region would help achieve prevention of further displacement and attainment of durable solutions. If expected results are obtained, IDPs who wish to return to their villages voluntarily would be able to do so. This situation could equally benefit other conflict-affected persons, including CAR refugees in Cameroon and Chad, who would ultimately be able to return to their country of origin if overall conditions become conducive.