



Protecting Humanitarian Space in the Central African Republic

IRC policy paper, November 2016

Improving Humanitarian Access is crucial to prospects of peace and stability in the Central African Republic

In the Central African Republic, political crises over the past three years have resulted in violent conflict affecting nearly the entire population and leaving some 2.3 million people, over half the population, in dire need of assistance. The election of President Faustin-Archange Touadéra in February 2016 marked the return to constitutional order but the security situation remains volatile. In early November the Government of CAR published the final document of the Recovery and Peace Consolidation Plan (RCPCA), which will be presented during the Donors' Conference on November 17th in order to mobilise funding from the international community. A humanitarian response plan (HRP) for the 2017-2019 period will follow and will focus on life-saving interventions, acute malnutrition, protection against acts of violence and the provision of basic services in unstable or inaccessible areas.

Urgent action is needed in the following areas:

- Moving forward with the adoption, implementation and extension of the civil-military guidelines for an improved and sustained security in CAR.
- Implementing a more proactive civilian protection strategy to guarantee effective security of populations and humanitarian staff.
- Providing vital protection to civilians, particularly in the most insecure areas.
- Better collaboration between the government and civil society in order to facilitate humanitarian activities, particularly in hard to access areas.
- Increased humanitarian funding in order to enable NGOs to respond to the most urgent needs.

The vital role of humanitarian assistance

Hundreds of thousands of people remain totally dependent on humanitarian aid to survive and recover their dignity. The recent increased insecurity has further reduced the humanitarian space, thus limiting the capacity of humanitarian actors to respond to immediate needs. The successful implementation of the RCPCA would contribute to a smooth and sustainable transfer of activities and services from humanitarian actors to the government. However, the success of this plan is contingent on the improvement of humanitarian access and the protection of civilian populations. Currently, the situation in Kaga Bandoro is the most worrying and reflects the difficulties and security challenges faced by humanitarian workers who are being targeted all over the country. The recent events in Kaga-Bandoro last October resulted in the killing of 35 and the wounding of 60 civilians, the burning of IDP camps and a number of houses and villages. Humanitarian workers have also been systematically targeted¹, thereby hindering any support to the most vulnerable populations. In addition, an anti-NGO feeling is being spread by some of the opinion leaders. This culminated in the recent alleged accusation of organ trafficking against an international NGO and international aid workers being held under arrest for several hours.²

“If the necessary security actions are not taken now, we risk having a humanitarian-free zone instead of a weapon-free zone.”

Mr Fabrizio Hochschild, CAR Humanitarian Coordinator, during his visit of Kaga-Bandoro on October 15th after the Arm Group attack.

¹ Since the beginning of the year, five humanitarian workers have been killed. In October 2016, in Kaga Bandoro 95% of humanitarian workers had their houses looted and/ or burned and all NGO offices have been robbed or looted.

² At the time of this paper, an international NGO worker is still assigned at residence without authorization to leave the country because of the investigation.



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In October 2015, the NGOs' Coordination Committee in CAR identified several challenges faced by humanitarian actors in delivering aid to the most vulnerable, including: the proliferation of armed groups; repeated attacks against humanitarian convoys and the lack of secure trade routes. Since then, the situation has worsened and restricted the humanitarian space even further. New challenges include the systematic and repetitive robbing or looting of NGO compounds and vehicles; the systematic targeting of humanitarian workers, particularly national staff; increasing negative perception of NGOs and the increase in administrative and police harassment against NGOs.

INSO RCA recorded 108 incidents against NGOs during the third quarter of 2016, an increase of 42% on the previous quarter. This followed another significant increase in incidents during the second quarter "post-election" (36%). It is noteworthy that among 11 high-risk countries where INSO coordinates NGO security platforms (including Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan), CAR still leads in the number of NGOs incidents.

([Http://www.ngosafety.org/keydata-dashboard](http://www.ngosafety.org/keydata-dashboard)).

As a leading provider of relief assistance to the Central African Republic, the European Union and its Member States have a key role to play in protecting the humanitarian space in CAR. Enabling NGOs to meet humanitarian needs in CAR is crucial to contribute to the success of the RCPCA.

The IRC urges the EU Institutions and Member States:

- To call on all parties to move forward with the adoption, implementation and extension of the civil-military guidelines to ensure compliance with humanitarian principles and the distinction between humanitarian and military. The only way humanitarian workers will be able to deliver much-needed aid and services to the affected population is through improved and sustained security in CAR.
- To ensure MINUSCA implements a more proactive civilian protection strategy in line with its mandate that guarantees effective security of populations and humanitarian staff.
- To call on MINUSCA to appropriately reinforce its presence in the most insecure areas, restore order, and provide vital protection to civilians.
- To reiterate in all dialogue with the CAR Government the need for active collaboration between the government and civil society. This will be pivotal in order to facilitate humanitarian activities, particularly in most hard to reach areas
- To continue supporting humanitarian programme funding in order to enable NGOs to respond to the most urgent needs and progressively transfer responsibilities to the Government as recommended by the RCPCA.

The IRC in the Central African Republic

The IRC has been present in CAR since late 2006, following violence and population displacement. Over the past decade the IRC has delivered programmes to improve health, economic wellbeing, and safety for people in Ombella, M'Poko, Nana Gribizi, Ouham Pendé, and Kémo prefectures. From now until the end of 2020, the IRC's new strategy in CAR will prioritize keeping people healthy and safe, increasing decision-making power, developing economic wellbeing and improving the quality of education. The IRC will reach 290,000 people in CAR by the end of 2020, specifically targeting Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) and host communities, with a focus on women and girls. The IRC's commitment to gender equality strives for equal outcomes for women and girls, and men and boys.