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# Internal displacement in Central African Republic: a protection crisis

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## Table of content

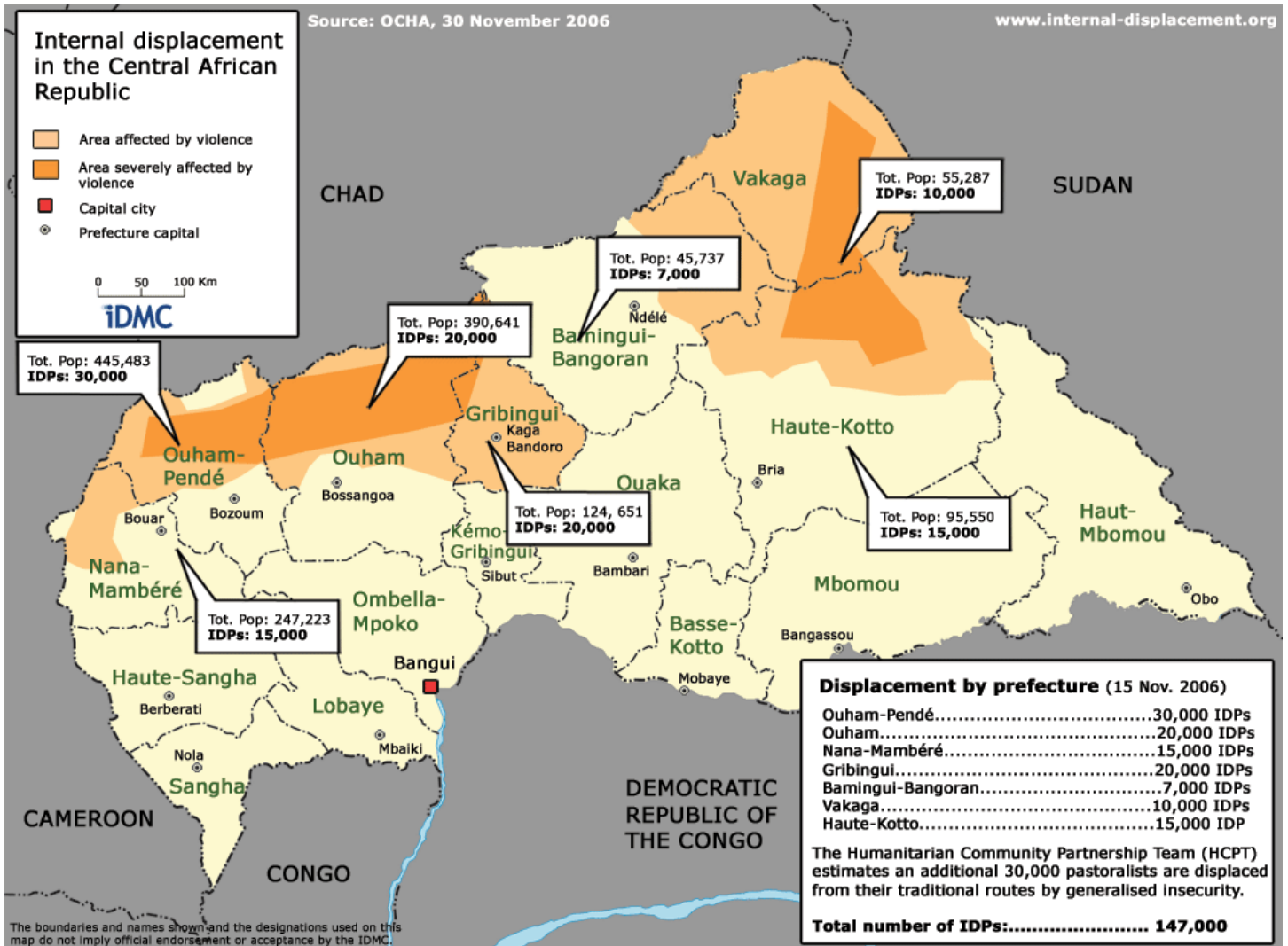
|   |    |
|---|----|
| Map of Internal Displacement in Central African Republic.....                       | 3  |
| Executive summary.....  | 4  |
| Key recommendations .....   | 6  |
| Background.....   | 9  |
| Insecurity: main cause of displacement.....   | 11 |
| Pattern of displacement.....  | 12 |
| Numbers guesswork.....  | 13 |
| Urgent need for protection.....   | 14 |
| Obstacles to return .....   | 17 |
| A hidden humanitarian crisis .....  | 17 |
| Urgent need for emergency education.....  | 19 |
| Shelter.....  | 20 |
| Health and Sanitation.....  | 21 |
| Food and nutrition.....   | 23 |
| National Response .....   | 24 |
| International Response.....   | 25 |
| Sources.....  | 29 |
| Testimony: Internally displaced man from Kadjama Kotta in Markounda prefecture..... | 31 |

### **Acknowledgements**

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*Cover photo: Burned houses in northern CAR (Photo: COOPI)*

## Map of Internal Displacement in Central African Republic



## **Executive summary**

*Forced displacement in the Central African Republic (CAR) – along with deaths, physical injuries and material destruction – is one of the main consequences of more than a decade of political instability caused by a series of mutinies, military coup attempts and armed conflicts. The number of internally displaced people (IDPs) is reported to have tripled during 2006, from 50,000 in April to an estimated 150,000 at the end of the year. This increase is largely due to persistent insecurity in the north of the country where the government is fighting several rebel groups. Roaming bandits (so called coupeurs de route or Zaraguinas) and livestock thieves also plague the north, where the state presence – as in much of the rest of the country outside the capital – is weak or non-existent. Some 50,000 people are estimated to have fled across the border into neighbouring Chad, and another 30,000 into Cameroon. There are also reports about civilians fleeing towards Sudan in the north-east.*

*Among the rebels operating in northern CAR are fighters linked to the previous president, Ange Félix Patassé, who was ousted in the coup that brought François Bozizé, the current president, to power in March 2003. In addition, some of Bozizé's former supporters have taken up arms against the current government, claiming that they have not been adequately compensated for their participation in the coup. The government accuses neighbouring Sudan of backing the armed groups, a claim the Sudanese government has repeatedly denied. In an effort to stem the rebellion, Bozizé has appealed to France and Chad to provide his government with military support in the form of troops and equipment.*

*Most of the people forced out of their homes by the insecurity caused by fighting and banditry in different parts of the north have taken refuge in the bush, not far from their villages and fields. The most affected areas are the northern prefectures of Nana-Mambéré, Ouham-Pendé, Ouham, Nana-Gribizi (Gribingui), Bamingui-Bangoran, Haute-Kotto and Vakaga.*

*The displaced have been exposed to serious human rights violations, committed by both regular government forces and the rebel groups. These include arbitrary killings, rape, torture and destruction of houses and other property. Extortion and racketeering are rampant especially in the north-western part of the country. In the absence of functioning law enforcement structures, crimes have been committed with total impunity on all sides.*

*The displaced are extremely vulnerable as the minimum conditions for an adequate standard of living are not being met. Displaced children currently living in the bush with their parents have no access to education. They have missed the 2005/2006 academic year and are missing the following school year too. In addition, the displaced generally have no or only extremely limited access to health care, proper nutrition, water and sanitation facilities, thus being even worse off than the poor resident population of the remote areas of the northern parts of the country. They are scattered in the bush in small isolated settlements and live in makeshift shelter or in the open, exposed to diseases. Al-*

*though they sometimes receive food distributions from aid agencies, these are insufficient and many of the displaced are forced to live on wild leaves, fruits and roots.*

*The response to the internal displacement crisis in the CAR has been wholly inadequate at the national level. Although the Economy, Planning and International Cooperation Ministry appears to be responsible for coordinating the humanitarian response, and the Ministry of the Family for the protection of IDP rights, the government lacks the necessary expertise and resources to deal effectively with acute situations of internal displacement, and a response strategy has yet to be developed.*

*At the international level, at least until mid-2006, the response suffered from a low level of funding, and weak monitoring, information management and coordination between UN agencies and NGOs. This was partly due to the absence of a humanitarian coordinator between October 2005 and June 2006, and the lack of sufficient humanitarian presence in the displacement affected-areas. The new humanitarian coordinator has started to address the weaknesses of the international response, but there are still too few aid professionals in the conflict areas and the level of funding for protection and humanitarian assistance has yet to match the needs on the ground. The Consolidated Aid Programme (CAP) 2007 for CAR is requesting \$49.5 million for programmes aimed at the promotion of human security, the provision of protection and assistance to IDPs, the reinforcement of local and national capacities and the strengthening of coordination.*

*The funding and implementation of the action plan included in the CAP 2007 is crucial to limiting the disastrous consequences the current conflict has for the civilian population. At the same time, the government must stop human rights violations committed by the security forces, reinforce attempts to find political solutions to the ongoing conflicts, and seek increased international support for the process of recovery if the country is to break out of the current cycle of violence and instability.*

## **Key recommendations**

### To the government of Central African Republic

- Appoint a clear IDP focal point with overall responsibility for protecting IDPs' rights
- seek assistance from the international community to develop a National IDP Policy including clear protection and return strategies in line with the Guiding Principles
- through the IDP focal point, seek technical support and training in contingency planning as well as improved emergency preparedness and response to conflict-induced internal displacement
- seek assistance from the international community in order to provide emergency education to internally displaced children
- allow national and international organisations full and unconditional access to IDPs in their places of refuge
- issue clear orders to security forces to respect international humanitarian and human rights law and to end attacks and abuses against civilians (comprising IDPs)
- restore security in the prefectures most affected by conflict and highway banditry
- allow IDPs to move freely and to return to their home areas without fear of harassment or attacks, in particular those from Ouham-Pendé and Ouham prefectures wishing to return or to resettle in other areas
- Do not force the displaced to return home unless safely and voluntarily
- help put an effective end to impunity by ensuring that perpetrators of violence and human rights abuses are identified, including members of the security forces, and brought to justice

### To the rebel armed groups

- Issue clear orders to all combatants to respect international humanitarian and human rights law and to end attacks and abuses against civilians (comprising IDPs)
- allow national and international organisations full and unconditional access to IDPs both in their places of refuge and in areas of return

To the National Committee for Human Rights

- The creation of the National Committee for Human Rights with the mandate to promote and protect the rights of vulnerable groups including IDPs is a welcome step that should be followed up by measures by the Committee to quickly set up office and become operational:
- to support the government in developing a policy on IDPs in the CAR
- to develop a monitoring programme with regards to the situation and the rights of IDPs situations in the CAR

To Donors

- Support projects, particularly within the framework of the Coordinated Aid Programme 2007, that focus on emergency IDP response and on more longer-term needs, including development-related programmes in potential areas of return
- support and fund new projects initiated by NGOs planning to establish a presence in the CAR

To the *Bureau des Nations Unies en Centrafrique* (BONUCA)

- Further strengthen the capacity of BONUCA's Human Rights Division to collect IDP-specific information and to advocate for IDPs' rights at various levels
- further facilitate and support initiatives to establish conflict resolution mechanisms

To the Representative of the Secretary-General on the Human Rights of IDPs

- Pay a visit to the CAR to take stock of the IDP situation, engage in a dialogue and make recommendations to the government on ways to improve respect for IDPs' rights

To the *Force Multinationale en Centrafrique* (FOMUC)

- Advocate for respect of humanitarian and human rights law at various levels of the government security forces

To the UN agencies and international NGOs in the Central African Republic

- Implement the recommendations of the Multidisciplinary Mission to the Central African Republic (4-11 November 2006)

- in consultation with each other, UN agencies and NGOs should increase their presence in the CAR (mainly in the conflict-affected areas) to provide assistance and protection to IDPs
- where return or resettlement is feasible, ensure appropriate longer-term support in terms of income-generating activities and community development projects closely linked to ongoing recovery activities
- where durable return or resettlement is not possible, ensure appropriate protection and assistance for IDPs in areas of refuge, while urging the national authorities to fulfil their responsibilities in this regard
- carry out assessments of possibilities for sustainable IDP return or resettlement in key localities, in line with the UN Guiding Principles, including “go and see” visits with humanitarian monitors

To the International Criminal Court

- Without further delay, open investigation into the crimes within its jurisdiction committed in the CAR since 1 July 2002



## Background

The landlocked Central African Republic (CAR) which emerged after independence from France in 1960 has never been strong and large tracts of the country remain up to the present beyond the reach of state institutions. Throughout its history the CAR has been plagued by political instability due to the weakness of the state and the impact of successive mutinies, military coups and armed conflicts which have progressively destroyed the limited state institutions, infrastructures and the local economy. The potential wealth of its natural resources (diamonds, gold, uranium and timber) has not prevented the country from appearing on the UNDP's Human Development Index as one of the world's poorest countries during the last few years.

While the state has been unable to consolidate its institutions for nearly half a century, for the last decade it has been in decline. During 1996, the CAR was shaken by a politico-military crisis, punctuated by three successive mutinies by elements of the Central African Armed Forces; these stemmed to a large extent from widespread public discontent over social and economic problems, exacerbated by prolonged non-payment of the soldiers' salary arrears. Despite the signing of agreements between forces loyal to the former president, Ange Félix Patassé, and the rebels, and the presence of peacekeepers with a mandate to oversee their implementation, different parts of the territory remained insecure, with civilians regularly subject to attacks by armed men. Patassé was re-elected in 1999 in elections considered by the international community as free and fair, but armed clashes and unrest were reported in the capital Bangui.<sup>1</sup>

Despite the persisting precarious economic situation and insecurity in the countryside, in 2000 the United Nations Mission in the CAR was transformed into a United Nations Peace-Building Support Office whose main mandate was to support the government's efforts to consolidate peace and national reconciliation. Mounting political tensions aggravated by the government's refusal to engage in a dialogue with the opposition, simmering social tensions and further economic decline culminated in the failed military coups of 28 May 2001 and of 25 October 2002. As a result of this second coup attempt, suspected to have been carried out by the former army chief of staff, General François Bozizé, the regional organisation the *Communauté Economique des Etats de l'Afrique Centrale* mandated a Multinational Force for the CAR (FOMUC) supported by France and the European Union, to ensure the security of the president, help secure the borders of the CAR with Chad and assist the government in restructuring the armed forces. Until then, Patassé's political survival was mainly due to support provided by Libyan troops and the *Mouvement de Libération du Congo* from the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) under Jean-Pierre Bemba, who controlled the region of Equateur bordering Bangui.

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<sup>1</sup> UN SG report, 15 July 1999, paras.3-8; 14 January 2000, para.21.

The two military coup attempts of 2002 were part of a series of seven which Patassé survived during his presidency, before succumbing to the second coup attempt carried out by Bozizé with the assistance of Chadian forces in March 2003.

The violent shift of power of March 2003 was preceded by months of intense fighting mainly affecting five prefectures – Ouham, Ouham-Pendé, Nana-Gribizi (also referred to as Gribingui), Kemo and Ombella-Mpoko. It destroyed the limited state infrastructure there, caused the internal displacement of more than 200,000 people – 13,000 others fled to southern Chad – and led to massive human rights violations such as rapes, summary executions and looting by the warring parties.<sup>2</sup> The country was destabilised as well by increasing opposition from the army and government employees, some of whom had not received their salaries for several years. This led to repeated strikes and protests by teachers, civil servants, students and pensioners, undermining the government's legitimacy and pushing an already fragile economy further towards collapse. Salary arrears, which were partially settled in late 2003 after the coup thanks to the support of some donor countries, have accumulated again since the first half of 2005.<sup>3</sup>

A transitional government was set up by Bozizé. Meanwhile in the countryside, there was persistent insecurity caused by armed clashes between militia groups. Following legislative and presidential elections in March and May 2005, Bozizé was declared winner by an independent electoral commission as the elections were generally accepted as free and fair by national and international observers. The majority of the displaced were reported to have returned home.<sup>4</sup>

There was hope that the May 2005 elections would bring political stability and improved security and the country would start to recover from a decade of crisis. However, the security situation has since seriously worsened due to recurring fighting between a number of armed groups hostile to Bozizé, and the armed forces (*Forces Armées Centrafricaines* – FACA) and Presidential Guard in different parts of the north since mid-2005. Furthermore, the area of insecurity has gradually expanded from the north-west to the north-east, mainly from the Ouham and Ouham-Pendé prefectures towards the Vakaga region bordering Darfur in Sudan. The northern provinces of the CAR bordering Cameroon, Chad and Darfur – Ouham-Pendé, Ouham, Bamingui-Bangoran and Vakaga – remain volatile because of the presence of former Chadian troops, the FACA and the Presidential Guard, CAR rebels, highway bandits and Chadian rebels, leading to killing, looting and kidnapping of civilians.<sup>5</sup>

More than a year after the first major attacks, in September 2005, the precise political agenda, the source of financing, the political support and the rear bases of the different rebel groups are unclear.<sup>6</sup> However, the identity of the armed groups seems to be known; the rebels reportedly include former members of Patassé's presidential security forces as

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<sup>2</sup> UN Human Rights Committee, 22 July 2004; ICRC, 8 July 2003.

<sup>3</sup> UN OCHA, 11 November 2006, p.5; UNHCR, 13 July 2005.

<sup>4</sup> IRIN, 24 May 2005; IZF, 15 March 2005.

<sup>5</sup> UN SG report, 19 October 2006, para.9.

<sup>6</sup> UN SG report, 27 June 2006, para.26; Reuters, 21 November 2006.

well as demobilised fighters who took part in a previous rebellion led by the current president. The *Union des Forces Démocratiques pour le Rassemblement* (UFDR) is a coalition of rebel groups including the so called “ex-liberators” who helped overthrow Patassé in March 2003, and who were not paid what they were promised for their support.

The CAR government has accused Patassé and Sudan of backing the rebel movement, something officials in Khartoum and the rebels themselves have repeatedly denied. In an effort to stem the rebellion, Bozizé has appealed to Chad and France to provide his government with military support in the form of troops and equipment. Similarly, the CAR has called upon the UN Security Council to deploy troops on the Sudan/CAR border with reference to its Resolution 1706 which provides for the establishment of a multidimensional presence in Chad and if necessary in CAR.<sup>7</sup>

### **Insecurity: main cause of displacement**

The main cause of displacement in the CAR is the general insecurity – recurrent political violence, all-out fighting between the armed forces and different rebel groups, and banditry. Counter-insurgency operations mainly by the Presidential Guard are one of the sources of insecurity in conflict-affected areas of the north-west because civilians are directly targeted. During the past year, a recurrence of attacks by the rebels triggered army reprisals against civilians the army suspected of supporting growing rebel activity, causing further displacements both internally and across the border with Chad.<sup>8</sup> Some areas in the north-western regions of Ouham-Pendé and Ouham voted during the May 2005 elections for the opposition and not for the current president Bozizé. They are considered supporters of the ousted president Patassé.

Incursions by Chadian mercenaries and Sudanese rebel groups into northern CAR are also reported to have led to the displacement of civilians. The Central African Republic/Cameroon/Chad tripartite initiative, which since December 2005 has authorised the three countries’ regular armies to cross their common borders in pursuit of rebels or armed groups blocking roads, and the support France and the FOMUC are providing to the FACA, have not been able to fully restore security by preventing rebel and bandit activities in north-western CAR.<sup>9</sup>

The UFDR briefly took control of Birao and two other towns in the north-eastern prefectures of Vakaga and Haute-Kotto in October and November 2006. Several thousand civilians reportedly fled before the armed forces – assisted by the French military – drove the rebels back into the bush. There were fatalities among both civilians and the military.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> SC Resolution 1706, para.9 (d).

<sup>8</sup> UNHCR, October 2005, p.5.

<sup>9</sup> SG report, 27 June 2006, para.26; Reuters, 21 November 2006.

<sup>10</sup> IRIN, 1 December 2006; UN OCHA, 3 November 2006.

Civilians are also forced to flee violence committed by armed "roadblockers" and highway bandits in particular in the prefectures of Ouham, Ouham-Pendé and Nana-Gribizi. These groups have been preying on civilians, for instance by kidnapping the children of herdsmen for ransom and attacking traders on the main highways. Up to 30,000 people from the CAR have reportedly sought refuge in neighbouring Cameroon to escape harassment and child abduction, while others remain internally displaced. These are mainly Mbororo, an ethnic group which lives on both sides of the Cameroon-CAR border. They first began arriving in Cameroon from CAR in April 2005 and the flow has risen in recent months.<sup>11</sup>

The easy availability of firearms is a major factor behind the insecurity. The extensive proliferation of small arms and light weapons in the CAR is the consequence of both the internal crisis and recurrent conflicts in neighbouring countries (Chad, Sudan, Republic of Congo, DRC), as well as a cross-border trade in small arms. There are reportedly at least 50,000 small arms circulating in the CAR, which has a population of some four million. Although over the last two and half years a project to reintegrate ex-combatants and restore communities has made efforts to reduce and control the availability of small arms and light weapons, much needs to be done to tackle this element at the root of insecurity.<sup>12</sup>

## **Pattern of displacement**

During past armed conflicts and political violence, internal displacement in the CAR was a temporary phenomenon. However, more recent displacements appear to be of a longer-term nature due to the recurrence of violence in the area of origin of the displaced.

There are two types of conflict-induced displacement. There is a category of people who have fled to Bangui and regional towns such as Bokaranga, Kabo and Bria, where they have sought refuge with friends, families and host communities. However, the majority of the displaced have fled far from the main roads to the bush and are living a few kilometres away from their villages near their fields, many of them traumatised and in fear of attack, mainly by the CAR security forces.

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<sup>11</sup> IRIN, 30 November 2006; UNHCR, November 2006, p.62.

<sup>12</sup> UN OCHA, 30 November 2006, p.17.



IDP settlement in a forest, November 2006 (Photo: ICVA)

Many of the displaced are located in isolated settlements. They are camping in temporary huts or under the open sky, without protection and exposed to diseases. They may come back to their village to retrieve water when security allows such movement. In the bush, there are reportedly civilians still internally displaced as a result of the conflicts of 2002 and 2003.<sup>13</sup>

### **Numbers guesswork**

Helping and protecting IDPs in the CAR is severely impeded by uncertainty about the scale of the crisis. No systematic and comprehensive survey has been carried out of the number of IDPs or the conditions they are living in. Long-term and urban IDPs are being ignored. Reliable information on the numbers, location, demographic composition and specific needs is urgently required.

However, based on rapid assessments and information collected from NGOs working in the affected areas, it is estimated that since the latest conflict flared up in mid-2005 in the north-western provinces of Ouham and Ouham-Pendé, rebel attacks as well as govern-

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<sup>13</sup> IDMC/NRC interviews, CAR, October 2006.

ment anti-insurgency operations have internally displaced some 150,000 people country-wide, sent up to 18,000 into neighbouring Chad – joining the 32,000 refugees who had previously fled there – and an unknown number into Sudan. The number of IDPs has reportedly tripled from 50,000 as originally reported in April 2006.<sup>14</sup> It is estimated that out of 150,000 IDPs, 50,000 are women, 70,000 are children and 30,000 are men.<sup>15</sup> It is not known if this number includes civilians reportedly displaced since the 2002/2003 conflict and by ongoing fighting in Kaga Bandoro area, Paoua sous-prefecture and Vakaga and Haute-Kotto prefectures.

| <b>Préfectures</b>                                   | <b>Total population</b> | <b>Number of IDPs</b> |
|--|-------------------------|-----------------------|
| Nana-Mambéré   | 247,223                 | 15,000                |
| Ouham-Pendé  | 445,483                 | 30,000                |
| Ouham  | 390,641                 | 20,000                |
| Nana-Gribizi/Gribingui                               | 124,651                 | 20,000                |
| Bamingui-Bangoran                                    | 45,737                  | 7,000                 |
| Vakaga   | 55,287                  | 10,000                |
| Haute-Kotto  | 95,556                  | 15,000                |
| Pastoralists displaced from their traditional routes |                         | 30,000                |
| <b>Total</b>   | <b>1,404,578</b>        | <b>147,000</b>        |

Source: UN OCHA, November 2006, p.IV.

## **Urgent need for protection**

The absence of state institutions in rural areas and the pervasive nature of the conflict make it hard to find physical protection and stability, especially in remote areas where most IDPs are located.<sup>16</sup> Poor infrastructure and lack of confidence in state institutions and mismanagement of funds by successive governments are at the root of the widespread insecurity that has plunged populations into acute vulnerability.

Since the 2002/2003 armed conflict that brought Bozizé to power, both UN and human rights organisations have reported continuing human rights and humanitarian law violations committed by different parties with total impunity. Bemba's Congolese forces, which helped Patassé repel Bozizé's attacks in 2002, reportedly committed abuses against civilians. Similarly, Central African and Chadian soldiers who subsequently helped overthrow Patassé in March 2003 were apparently not paid what they were promised for their support to the coup d'état and engaged in banditry, kidnappings, killings and looting, both inside the country and in neighbouring Cameroon.<sup>17</sup> Human rights violations such as summary executions have also been committed by the security forces with the implicit approval of the 2003-2005 transitional government.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>14</sup> UN OCHA, 30 November 2006, p.IV.

<sup>15</sup> UN OCHA, 30 November 2006, p.23.

<sup>16</sup> RI, 8 November 2006.

<sup>17</sup> Reuters, 14 April 2005; OCHA, 8 December 2004; UN SC, 16 June 2004.

<sup>18</sup> FIDH, 4 March 2005; Afrol News, 26 May 2005.

The overall human rights situation has further deteriorated since the beginning of 2006. Abuses documented include arbitrary arrests and detention, summary executions, torture, cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment, violation of time limits on police custody, restriction of the freedom of movement, forced recruitment, sexual violence and looting of private property.<sup>19</sup> According to the *Fédération Internationale des Droits de l'Homme*, government security forces routinely subject civilians to extortion, killings, robbery and physical attack. Rebel armed groups are similarly guilty of extortion and harassment. The breakdown of the judicial system and its incapacity to carry out effective investigations and prosecutions have exacerbated the problem of impunity that exists across the country.<sup>20</sup>

There is a pattern of rebel groups occupying a village and looting the possessions of inhabitants. This triggers the intervention of the army, mainly the Presidential Guard, which usually enters the village a few days later, pillaging what has been left by the rebels, burning down houses, and harassing the inhabitants who the army accuses of supporting the rebels.



Food stocks hidden from army and rebels, Markounda, February 2006, (Photo: COOPI).

In January 2006, the rebels attacked a military base in Paoua; in reprisal, the army occupied the three districts of Nana Barya, Babessar and Mia Pende, burnt down houses and killed civilians, sending thousands of others fleeing into the bush.<sup>21</sup> The towns and areas around Kabo, Markounda, Paoua and Kaga Bandoro experienced a similar scenario.<sup>22</sup> At

<sup>19</sup> UN SG report, 27 June 2006, para.18; UN OCHA, 11 March 2006; UN OCHA, November 2006, p.10.

<sup>20</sup> FIDH, 5 November 2002, 13 February 2003, 12 October 2006.

<sup>21</sup> UN SG report, 27 June 2006, para.23; IDMC/NRC interviews, Paoua, 24 October 2006.

<sup>22</sup> UN OCHA, 18 July 2006, pp.2-3; WFP, 5 December 2006; IRIN, 19 December 2006.

the beginning of October 2006 some 27 villages were attacked and burnt by the Presidential Guard.<sup>23</sup> Over the past year, more than 100 villages have reportedly been burnt down by different parties to the conflict. Previously, in December 2005, more than 900 homes were burnt in about ten villages in the Markounda area, while some villages were completely destroyed.<sup>24</sup>



Burned houses in Béboua, October 2006, (Photo: Mpako Foaeng/IDMC).

Some officials recognise that the behaviour of the army is one of the causes of displacement. Like the rebels and the bandits, the army relies on the civilian population to feed itself. The army is understaffed, and has irregular pay, limited logistics and training, and poor discipline. With roughly 4,500 troops, the CAR army needs restructuring. Most of the soldiers are over-age. Enrolment in the army is often based on ethnic or regional loyalties, making it more regional than national.<sup>25</sup> There is a need to monitor the role of the army in committing serious human rights violations leading to the displacement of civilians, and to urge the government to stop assaults by the army on the civilian population, including IDPs, in the conflict zone, and ensure their physical protection.

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<sup>23</sup> IDMC/NRC interviews, CAR, October 2006

<sup>24</sup> UN OCHA, 18 July 2006, pp.2-3; UN OCHA, 30 November 2006, p.10.

<sup>25</sup> IDMC/NRC interviews, CAR, October 2006; IRIN, 10 November 2006.



In a decision of 11 April 2006, the highest criminal court (*Cour de Cassation*) of the CAR has recognised the incapacity of the CAR justice system to carry out effective investigations and prosecutions for the most serious crimes committed in the country, and that the International Criminal Court is the only means to prevent impunity.<sup>26</sup>

## **Obstacles to return**

The greatest barriers to IDP return, resettlement or reintegration are the continuing fighting and harassment from the army and bandits. In Ouham-Pendé and Ouham, some communities are stuck in the bush and are unwilling or unable to return because they fear becoming targets on their way home. Those coming from conflict-affected areas are frequently harassed as rebel sympathisers by the army at checkpoints. Along the main roads, people run away on hearing the sound of vehicles for fear that they might be carrying government troops.<sup>27</sup>

Efforts by the government to encourage IDPs to return have failed due to the ongoing fighting. The government recently launched a campaign with the aim of convincing the displaced to return home although the security situation had not improved. In Nana Barya and Bémal-Békay, those who tried to return home after a lull in fighting, were subsequently attacked and their village burnt to the ground again by government security forces. Sometimes, security forces shoot randomly at civilians when they pass through a village, causing panic.<sup>28</sup>

Given the security situation, return does not seem to be an option for many IDPs. Therefore, the humanitarian response should aim at easing current living conditions of IDPs in their area of refuge.

## **A hidden humanitarian crisis**

Most IDPs have sought refuge in the wilderness not far from their fields and are living in dire conditions. The seriousness of their situation is hard to grasp given the endemic poverty and under-development of the whole country, caused in part by the protracted socio-political and military crises and subsequent collapse of even basic services.<sup>29</sup> The CAR has a population of about 3.9 million, with 532,000 living in the capital Bangui, and is one of the poorest countries in Africa. Some 73 per cent of the population live below the poverty line of an income of one dollar per day. Life expectancy at birth which stood at 49 in 1988 has slid to 39 as of 2005. According to the UNDP development index 2006,

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<sup>26</sup> FIDH, 13 April 2006.

<sup>27</sup> IDMC/NRC interviews, CAR, October 2006.

<sup>28</sup> IDMC/NRC interviews, CAR, October 2006.

<sup>29</sup> ICRC, 3 July 2006; RI, 8 November 2006.

the CAR is ranked 172 out of 177 countries.<sup>30</sup> It is currently estimated that one fourth of the whole population is affected by the ongoing conflict in the north.<sup>31</sup>

The humanitarian conditions of the displaced are generally worse than that of the general population, as they often are isolated from areas where services are provided and are living where there are no civilian authorities.<sup>32</sup> Additionally, internal displacement-affected areas are those where public infrastructures and private property, including dwellings and livestock have been stolen or destroyed.



IDPs belongings in an isolated settlement, November 2006, (Photo: ICVA)

While the emergency needs of IDPs in the wake of large displacement are being fairly well addressed in other countries as they are often easily identifiable in camps or centres, the humanitarian situation of the vast majority of IDPs scattered in isolated settlements in the bush in the CAR has never been properly addressed. Despite a slight increase in 2006 of humanitarian activity in some of the most affected areas of the north-west, the displaced are still in urgent need of emergency assistance.<sup>33</sup> There are considerable gaps mainly in the areas of education, shelter, health and food.

<sup>30</sup> UNDP, *Human Development Report 2006*, p.286, 294.

<sup>31</sup> UN OCHA, 30 November 2006, p.1

<sup>32</sup> UN SG report, 27 June 2006, para.11

<sup>33</sup> UN OCHA, 11 November 2006, pp.6-7.

## Urgent need for emergency education

No emergency education has been provided to children currently living with their parents in the bush. In the five conflict-affected prefectures bordering Chad, there are some 290,000 school-age children – including 140,000 girls – of whom more than one-third have no access to education. As mentioned earlier, there are some 70,000 internally displaced children in the CAR, out of which it is known that 30,000 displaced in 2006 have had no access to education. It is unclear if the rest of internally displaced children are among the 100,000 children who have had no access to education in 2006 due to the closure of schools as a result of insecurity.<sup>34</sup> Furthermore, in the communes of Nana Barya, Babessar and Mia Pende, at least 20,000 children have missed the 2005/2006 academic year and will miss the next one too.<sup>35</sup> Even in some areas where civilians have reportedly been able to return, parents are reluctant to send their children to school – considered an easy target in case of attack. They prefer to keep their children at home in order to be able to flee with them in case of danger.<sup>36</sup>



Displaced children, November 2006, (Photo: ICVA)

<sup>34</sup> UN OCHA, 18 July 2006, p.4; UN OCHA, 30 November 2006, p.21.

<sup>35</sup> IDMC/NRC, interview with Paoua sous préfet, 24 October 2006; UN OCHA, 30 November 2006, p.13.

<sup>36</sup> COOPI, 13 June 2006, p.4.

In displacement-affected areas, the education sector has been seriously damaged as a result of years of instability. Prior to the conflicts, there were not enough schools facilities available in Ouham, Ouham-Pende and Nana-Gribizi prefectures and the school enrolment was low. To date, it is estimated that one-third of the existing school buildings have been destroyed as a direct result of the ongoing conflict. Benches and other school equipment were looted or damaged during the 2002-2003 conflict. Most teachers have fled the violence. Furthermore, most of these teachers have not recently received any basic training. During the 2005/2006 academic year, only two schools were operational in the whole sous-préfecture of Markounda.<sup>37</sup>

Adolescents fleeing to the capital and other cities are particularly affected as they lack the necessary training to find jobs. There are reports of underage girls resorting to prostitution to survive.<sup>38</sup>

In areas where they were not burnt to the ground, schools were closed because of insecurity, including those managed by the Roman Catholic Church. The main consequence is a fall in primary school attendance from 63 per cent in 1996 to 43 per cent in 2000 and 40 per cent in 2003-2004, one of the lowest rates in all Africa. In 2005, more than 117 schools were closed, leaving some 370,000 children (207,300 of them girls) without education, and more than 280,000 (130,000 girls) with only precarious education, teachers being often replaced by untrained parent teachers. In 2006, insecurity caused the closure of even more schools in the north. Meanwhile, the government institutions responsible for turning around these dismal indicators are themselves weakened by the years of civil strife, salary arrears and low capacity.<sup>39</sup>

It is therefore urgent to provide emergency education in the areas of displacement, rehabilitate school infrastructures, replace destroyed equipment and facilitate the return of teachers and pupils within conflict zones in order to give effect to the right for internally displaced children to receive education which is compulsory at the primary level.

## Shelter

Given the number of villages burnt and destroyed and the living conditions of the displaced, shelter was among the highest needs among IDPs as showed by a UN multi-agency rapid assessment mission to the north-west in July 2006.<sup>40</sup> IDPs have been living in makeshift shelters near their fields, often many kilometres from their villages. They lack even the most basic necessities, such as toiletries, materials for rigging improvised shelters, blankets and mats to sleep on.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> UN OCHA, 30 November 2006, p.19; COOPI, 13 June 2006, p.4.

<sup>38</sup> UN OCHA, 30 November 2006, p.21.

<sup>39</sup> UN OCHA, 18 July 2006, p.4.

<sup>40</sup> UN OCHA, 30 November 2006, p.11.

<sup>41</sup> IDMC/NRC, interviews, CAR, October 2006.



A displaced man in his shelter, November 2006 (Photo: ICVA)

One of the main challenges is to provide IDPs in the bush with provisional shelter in order to ease their living conditions without making their situation permanent. In some cases tarpaulins distributed to IDPs have exposed them to further attacks by the army and the rebels because they became more visible. Some displaced need local materials to build their shelters.<sup>42</sup>

## Health and Sanitation

The absence of viable medical centres and medical personnel in most conflict-affected northern regions, not to mention remote areas of the bush where most IDPs are located, is appalling. Medical infrastructures were destroyed during the various politico-military crises. Until 2000, some organisations including the German Agency for Technical Cooperation/German Development Bank and UNICEF were instrumental in the establishment of facilities throughout the northern regions. But most of these facilities have since been damaged during the conflicts. Limited information is available on the current level of access to such facilities, but very few actors are operational in the sector.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> IDMC/NRC, interviews, CAR, October 2006.

<sup>43</sup> UN OCHA, 30 November 2006, p.13.



IDPs in a settlement, November 2006, (Photo: OCHA)

The deterioration of medical facilities shows the precariousness of IDPs' health situation. The displaced are living in the bush with no access to drinkable water and sanitation facilities. They are exposed to diseases such as diarrhoea and malaria which are important in flood-prone areas of the north especially between the months of May and October every year. Moreover, since they are scared of moving about, IDPs have little access to health structures to get treated. Some displaced people hiding from government forces are reported to have died from wounds they had sustained during attacks, from snake bites and from illnesses for which they could not access medical care in the bush.<sup>44</sup> Women and children are particularly affected. While nationwide less than 50 per cent of children are vaccinated against transmissible diseases, in conflict-affected areas this rate is much lower.<sup>45</sup>

In terms of response, taking advantage of food distribution to IDPs, NGOs such as Italy's Cooperazione Internazionale (COOPI) have been providing some medical care to the displaced. The ICRC and MSF are similarly providing medical care through mobile clinics. However, the current level of response remains below the overall needs.

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<sup>44</sup> IDMC/NRC, interviews CAR, October 2006; AI, 30 November 2006.

<sup>45</sup> UN OCHA, 18 July 2006, p.4.

There is a need for supporting the local health structures in monitoring and addressing epidemics. Preventive measures should be taken against the high risk of epidemic, especially for IDPs scattered in different isolated settlements in the bush.

## **Food and nutrition**

IDPs scattered in the bush are in many cases surviving on wild leaves, fruit and roots in the absence of properly nutritious food; food distributions do not cover the overall needs.<sup>46</sup> Furthermore, displacement has rendered food provision unstable, with a consequent degradation of nutritional standards. According to a nutritional investigation of 2005 carried out by UNICEF, malnutrition has reached alarming levels, in particular among children under five in most conflict-affected zones. At least 30 per cent reportedly suffer from chronic malnutrition, and four per cent from severe malnutrition.<sup>47</sup> Before COOPI in partnership with Caritas, the national Red Cross Society and local actors started distributing food delivered by the UN World Food Programme (WFP) in mid-2006, more than 70,000 people – mostly IDPs – were at risk of starvation around the towns of Markounda and Paoua.<sup>48</sup>

Instability and insecurity reduced crop production, rendered agricultural practices almost impossible for IDPs and for other people affected by the conflict. Entire harvesting seasons were lost in the bread basket regions of the north-west for up to four consecutive years (prefectures of Ouham-Pendé, Ouham, Nana-Gribizi, Nana-Mambéré and Kémo) and prices for staple food have risen sharply, causing more hardship for most people. Many harvested crops, food and seed stocks were looted or set on fire.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Reuters, 23 November 2006; WFP, 26 May 2006.

<sup>47</sup> UN OCHA, 18 July 2006, p.3.

<sup>48</sup> UN OCHA, 30 November 2006, p.12.

<sup>49</sup> UN OCHA, 30 November 2006, p.22.



Burned seed stocks, October 2006, (Photo: COOPI)

Afraid to move about, IDPs and people affected by the conflict have reduced their everyday life activities. Consequently, their temporary plantations produce limited quantities.<sup>50</sup> Recent attacks have targeted food supplies, just a few weeks after the harvest, leaving villagers with almost nothing on which to survive until they can harvest again, late in 2007.<sup>51</sup>

Unless agricultural production is revitalised, and sufficient food aid is also provided, lack of food can lead to disastrous consequences for the health and survival of the displaced.

## National Response

The government response to the situation of internal displacement has been minimal, not least since at both the policy and operational levels there is little knowledge or experience of tackling humanitarian crises in general. Although the Economy, Planning and International Cooperation Ministry apparently has responsibility for coordinating the humanitarian response, and the Ministry of the Family, responsibility for protecting IDP rights, the government lacks the necessary expertise to deal effectively with acute situations of internal displacement, and a response strategy to the internal displacement situation has yet to be developed. In November 2006, a National Committee for Human Rights was set up

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<sup>50</sup> UN OCHA, 30 November 2006, p.23.

<sup>51</sup> WFP, 5 December 2006.



with *inter alia* the mandate to promote and protect the rights of vulnerable groups including IDPs. However this newly-created body still has to elaborate and adopt its national action plan.<sup>52</sup>

The situation has been compounded by the continuing absence of viable local administrations and social service workers in many parts of the country, particularly the conflict-affected areas of the north. Some local authorities complained that humanitarian agencies had better access to the conflict-affected areas than they did.<sup>53</sup> Therefore, humanitarian organisations de facto have been in many cases substituting government institutions.

The government has plans to create more military outposts in the areas affected by conflict in order to provide security and better protection to the population. However, parts of the government security forces are among those perpetrating abuses against civilians in conflict-affected areas. Although the perpetrators of these crimes are well known, no action has been taken to bring them to justice. The government has not yet fully incorporated into domestic law the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement and other international human rights and humanitarian law instruments which the CAR has ratified. These lacunas in the legal and judicial systems together with lack of political will and law enforcement structures are at the root of the ongoing gross human rights and international humanitarian law violations perpetrated against civilians with total impunity. Indeed, the Human Rights Committee recommended that the CAR should “ensure that all cases of human rights violations brought to the attention of the government be investigated, and that those responsible for such violations, including civil servants, army personnel and police officials, are prosecuted and punished”.<sup>54</sup>

Some national NGOs have responded to the needs of the displaced. The national Red Cross and Caritas CAR are involved in sensitising people with respect to the use of water (treatment and food security) and disease prevention. In collaboration with the ICRC the National Red Cross is distributing non-food items in conflict-affected areas.<sup>55</sup>

## International Response

At the international level, at least until mid-2006, the response was very weak as it suffered from a low level of funding, and shortcomings in monitoring, information management and coordination between UN agencies and NGOs which was rather ad hoc and informal. This was partly due to the absence of a UN humanitarian coordinator between October 2005 and June 2006. There was a need for an improved and more systematic and well-planned coordination; with a newly-appointed humanitarian coordinator, the UN agencies have started to address this problem.

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<sup>52</sup> Le Confident, 6 November 2006.

<sup>53</sup> Interviews, Bossangoa, Paoua, 23-24 October 2006.

<sup>54</sup> CCPR, 27 July 2006, para.7.

<sup>55</sup> ICRC, 3 July 2006.

The lack of a sufficient humanitarian presence in the country, including the displacement-affected areas, and the limited human resources within humanitarian organisations also explain the poor reporting and lack of attention to the humanitarian situation in the CAR during the first half of 2006. Since the beginning of 2006, the number of IDPs reportedly rose threefold from 50,000 to 150,000. Yet, only a handful of aid agencies are providing assistance. The shortage of NGOs as implementing partners further limits the capacity to deliver aid, with only Médecins sans Frontières (France, Spain and Netherlands), COOPI, ICRC, the International Partnership for Human Development, National Red Cross, Caritas CAR and a number of Roman Catholic missions directly providing assistance to the affected populations. More international UN agency and NGO staff are needed in conflict-affected areas to improve assistance and protection to IDPs, and increase the sense of security of the affected population.<sup>56</sup>

Yet with limited capacities, since mid-2006 the UN agencies have decided to organise the humanitarian response in the CAR by sectors with clear leadership and accountability, headed by the Humanitarian Coordinator supported by UN OCHA. A key pillar of coordination is the Humanitarian Community Partnership Team consisting of UN agencies, the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, and national and international NGOs. UNHCR has taken responsibility for IDP protection and assistance in the country and has hired two seconded protection officers to conduct a rapid assessment of protection needs in the two prefectures of Ouham and Ouham-Pendé. UNHCR is sensitising the relevant government and local authorities on the need for IDP protection and has conducted a number of training courses for local authorities on the Guiding Principles, and together with the IDMC, for humanitarian monitors deployed by Caritas.<sup>57</sup> UNICEF has taken responsibility for education, shelter and non-food items, and water and sanitation, FAO for food security, WHO for health and UNDP for the economic recovery and infrastructure.<sup>58</sup>

Consequently, UNDP, UNICEF, WHO, WFP, UNHCR in partnership with COOPI, with Caritas and the national Red Cross as local partners, and ICRC, started food and non-food items distributions in the regions of Ouham-Pendé and Ouham. Taking advantage of the fact that the population came out of the bush to benefit from the food distributions, they provided medical care and medicines to the displaced. MSF-Spain in Batangafo, MSF-Netherlands in Boguila and Markounda, and MSF-France in Paoua are delivering medical services mainly through mobile clinics, health centres and hospitals.<sup>59</sup> In collaboration with Caritas CAR and Roman Catholic missions, the International Partnership for Human Development is reconstructing wells and sanitary facilities in different areas including those affected by insecurity such as Bozoum, Bossangoa and Kaga Bandoro.

Humanitarian access for the already very few active agencies has been limited to varying degrees by the endemic insecurity in the northern part of the country. Indeed, since the

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<sup>56</sup> UN OCHA, 11 November 2006, p.8; WFP, 5 December 2006.

<sup>57</sup> UNHCR, 1 October 2006, p.6.

<sup>58</sup> UN OCHA, 30 November 2006, p.18.

<sup>59</sup> UN OCHA, 30 November 2006, p.10, 23.

army is accusing residents of the areas where IDPs are located of being associated with the rebels, similarly humanitarian organisations were accused of feeding them. During November 2006, the CAR army told aid agencies to suspend their activities around the north-western town of Paoua until military operations against armed groups in the area could be completed. This order affected COOPI, MSF-France and the ICRC which have operations in or around Paoua. The ban prevented some 53 tonnes of WFP food supplies from being distributed to 25,000 vulnerable people.<sup>60</sup> Although this ban has been suspended, aid agencies are obliged to regularly advocate to the authorities at different levels for safe access to affected populations. Furthermore broken bridges and the poor state of roads, particularly during the rainy season, have made access to remote areas in the north of the country practically impossible.

The acute lack of funding for humanitarian programmes appeared also to be one of the main factors constraining the international response. Donors appear to be hardly involved in addressing the humanitarian crisis. The 2004 and 2005 UN Consolidated Appeals (CAP) for the CAR aiming at responding to humanitarian needs of vulnerable people and helping the country's socio-economic recovery from years of crisis and decline, were less than 40 per cent funded. Contrary to the previous years during which the CAR was one of the most neglected crises, the CAP 2006 was better funded with almost 65 per cent of the \$36 million requested. While funding for some sectors was insufficient or received only in the second half of 2006, the education sector was not funded at all; no school premises were rehabilitated or equipped and no teacher was trained as planned in the CAP 2006.<sup>61</sup>

Further constraints hamper the response of international agencies to the needs of IDPs in the CAR. The aforementioned lack of monitoring and information about IDP numbers, needs and locations has been a fundamental obstacle which is expected to be addressed by a UNFPA-led survey project planned for 2007. Within the framework of the Coordinated Aid Programme 2007 for the CAR, aid agencies are requesting \$49.5 million to address most of the gaps in the humanitarian response through the promotion of human security, the provision of protection and assistance to IDPs, the reinforcement of local and national capacities and the strengthening of coordination.

Working with the government, the UN revised the United Nations Development Assistance Framework covering the period 2004-2006 and in May 2006 finalised the UNDAF for 2007- 2011. The main aims of the cooperation are strengthening democratic governance, human rights, poverty reduction and post-conflict reconstruction.<sup>62</sup> However, it is unlikely that the UNDAF can be successfully implemented given the ongoing insecurity and humanitarian crisis. The displacement caused by lack of security has jeopardised the social cohesion which is a key prerequisite for a sustainable development.

By and large, the country's broader stabilisation and recovery can only succeed if the humanitarian needs of vulnerable groups are met. It is therefore essential that the IDP re-

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<sup>60</sup> WFP, 20 November 2006, p.16; 5 December 2006.

<sup>61</sup> UN OCHA, 30 November 2006, p.6.

<sup>62</sup> See UNDAF CAR, April 2006.

sponse strategy as defined in the CAP 2007 be funded and implemented, and that the UN and NGOs significantly increase their presence in the affected areas of the CAR to contribute to a swift transition to a post-conflict and recovery period.

*Note: For more detailed information on the internal displacement situation in the Central African Republic, please visit the [CAR country page](#) on the IDMC's online IDP database.*

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*Note: All documents used in this report are directly accessible on the [List of Sources](#) page of the Central African Republic country page.*

## **Testimony: Internally displaced man from Kadjama Kotta in Markounda prefecture**

I am a father of nine children; I am 41 years old, from Kadjama Kotta. I am a farmer. I have been living in the bush since September 2005. Before September 2005, the rebels attacked a neighbouring village to ours. On its way to the attacked village, the army was ambushed by the rebels. I took my children and wife and fled my village because we were afraid that the army would come to our village to attack us. In other places it happened that after the rebels controlled a village, the army came after their departure to harass, loot and kill the villagers. So we took our belongings and fled because we did not want to be attacked by the army as had happened to neighbouring villages. We went to the bush, near our field three to four kilometres from our village.

After calm returned, the FACA located at Bodjomo five km from my village and 30 km from Markounda, asked us to come back to our village because according to them the area was safe. We came back to our village in October 2005, and we resumed our normal activities. On the 27 December 2005, the rebels came from their base – maybe from Maitikoulou – to our village Kadjama Kotta at midnight. They took us hostage and asked each family to give them food and belongings. They occupied our village until 2 a.m. After we provided them with food supplies and belongings, they left for Bodjomo where they fought against the FACA.

After the fighting the rebels left. The day after, we heard that another detachment of the army went to Bogué where they burnt houses, took three young boys whom they brought and killed in Bodjomo. After that, they came to our village Kadjama and harassed us. I fled again with my wife and children without taking anything else. The army burnt all our belongings and our houses. We heard that they left and burnt other villages on their way back to their base.

In our area of refuge, we have built some huts and with the Red Cross tarpaulins we covered the roofs to protect ourselves from the rain. Women look for leaves in the bush to feed our children. Our children's schools were also burnt in 2005 and were never rehabilitated. Because I am a man of letters, I sent someone to buy a book in Bossangoa. I am using it to teach my children how to read.

We have very limited access to health care. Every two weeks the MSF mobile clinic comes to our village and takes care of us. We stay near our field because we are afraid to go back to our village where the army may attack us again. We are afraid of them. We would like security to be restored before we could go back home. We are even afraid to work our land. We would like to go back to our villages but we have lost everything including our clothes and our belongings.

We need new shelter. We would like our children to go to school. Their future is currently in danger. They have missed two academic years.

We would like peace to come back. We cannot seek refuge in other areas apart from the bush because on our way, we are subject to harassment and threatened by the security forces, mainly at checkpoints. Therefore, we prefer to stay in the bush.



## About the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre

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

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

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

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

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

For more information, visit the IDMC website and the database at [www.internal-displacement.org](http://www.internal-displacement.org).

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