

# Central Africa

## Regional perspectives for the White Paper on Peacebuilding

Charlotte Arnaud, Violette Tournier and Thierry Vircoulon

### Introduction

Despite the multiplication of multi-million dollar peacebuilding programs, Central Africa is still in turmoil. In 2013, the Central African Republic (CAR) completely collapsed and is currently experiencing the most dramatic crisis in its history. The United Nations (UN) sponsored peace process in the Great Lakes has stalled and political tensions are on the rise in Rwanda, Burundi and Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). Foreign peacebuilding assistance has not delivered its promises as there is no genuine consensus between international actors and post-conflict rulers whose main goal is to stay in power and perpetuate their post-conflict authoritarian rule. Despite signing peace agreements, there is little political will from ruling elites to genuinely carry out the long-term reforms defined within them. As a result, many peacebuilding programs lack coherence, coordination and political will and are, therefore, blocked. Moreover, peacebuilding 'fatigue' pushes international actors to slowly disengage from these policies that instead require long-term financial and political support.

The CAR collapse and the risk of reigniting conflict in the Great Lakes means it is essential to rethink peacebuilding in Central Africa. Peacebuilding support must be based on consensus building between various conflict-related parties. If a shared vision of the main actors on the ground is missing, international partners should think twice before engaging and distributing funds in such a context. Honest dialogue and assessment are needed to fix the politics of peacebuilding in Central Africa and to prevent the resumption of future conflicts.

### Main challenges to building peace in Central Africa

#### Post-conflict authoritarian rule and the reduction of peacebuilding space

The context of the upcoming presidential elections is already reshaping the region. Unlike the previous elections, these ones represent a real stake as they may cause power changes. Indeed, the presidents of Burundi (Pierre Nkurunziza), Rwanda (Paul Kagame) and the DRC (Joseph Kabila) have completed the two mandates allowed by the constitution and are meant to

**The Geneva Peacebuilding Platform is a joint project of four institutions:**



QUNO  
Quaker United Nations Office

step down in 2015, 2016 and 2017, respectively. The fact that they have been strategising in order to stay in power has led to a rise of political tension. Nowadays, the issue of anti-constitutional re-election is compromising the whole peacebuilding effort in these countries.

The political space has been dramatically reduced. In Rwanda, opponents and dissidents in exile are at risk. Paul Kagame publicly declared that Rwanda 'will continue to arrest suspects and when needed kill in broad daylight those threatening to destabilise the country'.<sup>1</sup> State agents are allegedly involved in disappearances and political murders.<sup>2</sup> In Burundi, the ruling party tries its best to deconstruct the Arusha Peace and Reconciliation Agreement (2000) and to jeopardise the ethnic-political balance that is the cornerstone of the peacebuilding process. Poor land governance and the absence of a consistent restitution policy are undermining ethnic reconciliation and fuelling resentment between Hutus and Tutsis. No sustainable solution has been implemented for the hundreds of thousands of refugees – now resettled in Burundi – who are still deprived of their lands. Moreover, the government tried to pass a constitutional review in March 2014 that failed by one single vote, aimed at strengthening the power of the executive and modifying the ethnic quota defined in the Peace Agreement. Last but not least, the grip on power is materialising through a militarisation of politics. Since the 2010 elections, the National Liberation Forces (FNL) have organised armed groups on the other side of the border (DRC) that frequently clash with the Burundian forces and, in Burundi in April 2014, the UN accused the ruling party of providing arms with the Imbonerakure, the youth wing of the ruling party.

### **No justice in Central Africa**

Post-conflict justice has been a contentious issue in Central African peacebuilding, with many past crimes remaining incompletely addressed. Despite attempts to foster local ownership over the justice process, justice institutions are either biased or an empty shell. The ruling parties' members' involvement in the past crimes is the main reason why the process has always been hindered by actors in power. In Burundi, for instance, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) and Special Tribunal stipulated in the Arusha Peace Agreement have never been created. In fact, the government intends to put in place only the TRC and rejects the idea of prosecutions.<sup>3</sup> In Rwanda, the *gacaca* courts are based on the traditional justice system. But despite its success in dealing with a massive backlog of criminal cases, the *gacaca* system has been criticised for its lack of impartiality and the absence of legal safeguards. In the DRC, the transitional justice process planned by the Pretoria Agreement never even got off the ground. The TRC never achieved anything during the transition (2003-2006) and, since 2006, its members have been unsuccessful in obtaining any donor support. The only answer proposed by the government so far has been a series of amnesty laws aimed at buying the peace with armed groups (the last one was passed this year to deal with the M23 fighters). The issue of post conflict justice remains unresolved, fuelling a culture of impunity and grievances that in themselves are two factors of the dynamics towards renewed conflict.

### **Resource-based conflicts**

Conflicts over natural resources (land, minerals, timber, etc.) are part of the history of the Central Africa region. Their root causes – dating back to colonial or even pre-colonial times – are well-

---

<sup>1</sup> Cited from *The New Times*, 'Rwanda: Kagame On Terrorism - I Am Not Threatening, I Am Warning', 16 June 2014, available at <http://allafrica.com/stories/201406170206.html>.

<sup>2</sup> A former intelligence chief exiled in South Africa, Patrick Karegeya, was assassinated on 31 December 2014 and several murder attempts have been recorded by foreign intelligence agencies.

<sup>3</sup> See the International Crisis Group report, "Bye-bye Arusha" (2012).

See :<http://www.crisisgroup.org/~media/Files/africa/central-africa/burundi/192-burundi-bye-bye-arusha.ashx>.

known and include poverty, overpopulation in Rwanda and Burundi, elite formation based on economic control and land conflicts between farmers and herders, among others. These long-term issues have sometimes turned into a conflict within the conflict (for example, the mining guerrilla warfare that has been prevalent in Walikale territory, North Kivu for years), but have often become invisible in the bigger picture. Most of the time, natural resources have been used as a revenue-generating mechanism by armies or armed groups.<sup>4</sup> The post-conflict governments have not been willing to set up sufficient natural resource governance mechanisms that could end the war economy, reduce economic grievances and help them to manage natural resources conflicts. Despite international assistance, progress has been limited to elaborate new legal frameworks. New laws have been passed, but building capacity and institutions to manage natural resources and improving financial and ownership transparency are still very much a work in progress. Instead of improving the distribution of natural resource revenues, the post-conflict regimes try to reinforce their grip over these resources, antagonise artisanal mining communities and replicate the rent seeking strategies of their predecessors.

### **Peacebuilding failure in CAR**

The dramatic crisis that has been occurring in CAR for almost two years is a perfect example of the limits of foreign peacebuilding assistance. The former President's, François Bozizé, misrule slowed down the peacebuilding process and even stopped it completely at certain points, despite the fact that CAR was part of the Peacebuilding Fund portfolio, similar to Burundi. For instance, Bozizé's governmental team did not pay attention to the need for statebuilding, in particular Security Sector Reform (SSR). Despite the UN and European Union's (EU) willingness to support the SSR, Bozizé's lack of political will for implementing such a reform blocked the process and weakened the security forces. The former president did not respect the terms of the Inclusive Political Dialogue signed in December 2008 and organised fraudulent elections in 2011, thus signalling that a democratic change of power was unthinkable. The state's delinquency has been compensated by foreign non-governmental organisations' (NGOs) and churches' provision of social services, budget support from the EU and World Bank to pay civil servants' salaries, and foreign troops stationed in the country for security provision. Despite the presence of international forces in the CAR and the implementation of peacebuilding programs, the double predation committed by both political authorities and armed groups has caused state disintegration. Foreign assistance was unable to prevent the former regime from digging its own grave. In the field of public financial management, Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration (DDR) and SSR, the advice of the donors has been ignored and even rebuffed on behalf of CAR's 'sovereignty'. As a result, they disengaged and let Bozizé implement his suicidal policy.

### **Main opportunities for building peace in Central Africa**

The main peacebuilding issues that need to be addressed in Central Africa are the upcoming electoral cycle, finding the 'right' answer to the unsolved issue of armed groups and responding to the CAR crisis.

#### **Managing the elections**

Given the recent rise of tensions stretching from Kinshasa to Bujumbura, the third post-conflict elections are the main risk in the Great Lakes region. The usual way in which the international community deals with elections is not appropriate. Monitoring the electoral process three

---

<sup>4</sup> See the ICG report "The Central African Crisis: From Predation to Stabilisation".

months before the vote will not be enough to decrease the tension. The fairness of an election cannot be determined by its final result: it is the socio-political conditions in which elections were prepared that make the elections democratic or not. In Burundi, for instance, one year before the elections, the media are being intimidated, the opposition is not allowed to develop structures in rural areas and is prevented from exercising its political rights – all obstacles to fair elections. In the DRC, there is an increasing confrontation between the government and the opposition, and the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), members of the civil society and the opposition. The latter is poorly organised. Moreover, facing an influential INEC and a ruling party that is closing the political space, it has no means of action and little leeway. The peacebuilding agenda for elections should therefore start earlier. Monitoring the technical aspect of the elections (electoral code, census, adequate voting sites etc.) is not enough. The international community (especially the UN, African Union, EU, United States, United Kingdom, Belgium and France) should be proactive. For example, they should assess the current political contexts and clearly indicate the basic democratic requirements for national governments to get support for preparing future elections. These conditions could be based on the recommendations provided by the electoral observation reports of the last vote.

### **Going beyond security in Central African Republic**

The case of CAR embodies the limits of peacebuilding programs and external interventions. Existing international intervention is a necessary response to the humanitarian and security crisis, but does not address the crisis' direct causes. Since 1998, at least six international missions have been deployed. Yet, the situation is still far from being stabilised. The International Support Mission to the Central African Republic (MISCA) led by the African Union gathered 6,000 troops, while the French mission, Sangaris, has deployed 2,600 soldiers in the field, mandated to protect the population and re-establish the security order. The European Union has also contributed troops in order to secure parts of the capital city. To deal with the root causes of the conflict, the peace operation should be combined with the fight against trafficking, economic recovery and support to re-establish state services.<sup>5</sup>

Given the fact that economic predation, state collapse and warlordism have become interlinked, those who want to resolve the crisis in CAR will have to simultaneously implement several measures: undermine the economic foundations of the armed groups (e.g. fight against regional and international trafficking); work to re-legitimise the state by reinitiating or starting state social services where security allows it; and provide economic opportunities for youth and militiamen through labour-intensive projects (infrastructure reconstruction, agriculture, etc.).

### **Shaping the response to armed groups**

Most DDR programs in Central Africa have not achieved the desired effects, as demonstrated by the number of armed groups in the region. In cases where their implementation was relatively positive, they were nonetheless rarely complemented by a justice process (e.g. Burundi). Some DDR programs have in fact been associated with impunity and reward for crimes. One of the main challenges of peacebuilding in this region is to articulate DDR and justice in order to eliminate armed groups without sacrificing justice. Finding the right mix is key to reintegrate fighters into civilian life and to sanction the leaders who are responsible for massive human rights abuses. For sustainable community reintegration, the 'R' of DDR has to be prioritised by the national authorities and the donors (the new DDR program in DRC elaborated by the national government fails, for example, to provide credible socio-economic alternatives to fighters). DDR

---

<sup>5</sup> See the ICG report "The CAR crisis: from predation to stabilization" (2014).

has to be disconnected from SSR given the very poor state of security services in most of the countries in the region. Often, integrating former fighters into the security forces has weakened them, generating serious internal problems for already dysfunctional services. This option should only be considered when the state has robust security services. A new generation of DDR must be invented and institutional coordination should be built between DDR and justice: screening, vetting and prosecutions should be incorporated into the DDR process right from the start.

## Required support for building peace and the role of the UN

While post-conflict authoritarian regimes are being consolidated, political consensus is key for building peace in Central Africa. The UN is being pushed out of the region by post-conflict regimes, despite worrying indicators. The UN Office in Burundi (BNUB) will close in December 2014; the UN and Rwanda have been at odds since the genocide; two countries under the UN's watch (CAR and South Sudan) have collapsed; the organisation has accumulated a long series of failures in Congo (the last one being the fall of Goma in November 2012), and the Congolese government has officially requested the downsizing of the UN mission. In this difficult environment, the UN Security Council members have to decide whether they want to go against the will of the post-conflict regimes or whether they want to accommodate them. However, maintaining UN missions on the ground in such a tense financial and political setting is not enough. Their peacekeeping role must be enhanced and completed by mandates to reform governance. This implies that a strong political consensus must be obtained between the various international actors involved in peacebuilding and post-conflict reconstruction in Central Africa.

---

**About the authors:** **Charlotte Arnaud** is a graduate student in International Relations and Security Studies at Sciences Po Lille, France. Specialised on the Great Lakes region and the Central African Republic, she has worked as a consultant for various think tanks. **Violette Tournier** holds a Master's degree in International Relations and Security from Sciences-Po Toulouse, France. She is specialised in African issues with a focus on North, East and Central Africa and works as a consultant for various think tanks. **Thierry Vircoulon** is the project director for Central Africa in the International Crisis Group. He has more than 10 years' experience in the region and has published extensively on land issues, security sector reform and conflict analysis.

**About this Paper:** This paper is part of a series providing regional peacebuilding perspectives for the White Paper on Peacebuilding. The authors' task was to provide an authentic, original and honest analysis about three questions: (1) What are the main challenges for building peace in your region? (2) What are the key opportunities for building peace in your region over the next one or two years? (3) What would be the key support necessary to build peace in your region over the next one or two years? Is there any specific role for the UN?

**Disclaimer:** All views expressed in this article are the views of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs and the Geneva Peacebuilding Platform, or the four Platform partners: the Graduate Institute's Centre on Conflict, Development and Peacebuilding (CCDP); the Geneva Centre for Security Policy (GCSP); Interpeace; and the Quaker United Nations Office, Geneva (QUNO).

**About the White Paper on Peacebuilding:** The White Paper on Peacebuilding is a collaborative, multi-stakeholder process initiated by the Geneva Peacebuilding Platform and supported by the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs. It has the objective to situate UN peacebuilding within the broader peacebuilding universe and to articulate visions for the future for building peace in violent and fragile contexts. The White Paper places peacebuilding within the changing characteristics of armed violence and security, and within the practical evidence of engagements in peacebuilding contexts emanating from a diversity of fields. Ensuring a better relationship between UN peacebuilding and the broader peacebuilding field is a complementary effort to the existing work surrounding the 10-year review of the UN peacebuilding architecture and an effort to take stock of the nature and evolution of the broader peacebuilding universe.

