

# Central African Republic's message to UN: 'The only thing we want is peace'

23 October 2017 – It was once known as the 'Bridge of Death,' the frontline between warring factions in the capital of the Central African Republic (CAR). Legendary tales were shared of the bridge being drenched in blood, with even Government security forces scared to set foot on it.

Fast forward to 2014, when the United Nations peacekeeping mission was deployed to CAR and steps began to be taken to bring together the militias in attempts at community reconciliation. It was not till October 2016, that local leaders joined forces with the UN peacekeepers to convince the militia groups to disarm and re-open the bridge.

Today, it is simply known as the Yakite Bridge. Located in the PK5 neighbourhood of Bangui, the strife-torn capital, it is booming with traffic and local merchants from both Christian and Muslim communities, thanks in part to the stabilization efforts of the UN peacekeeping mission.

This commercial suburb of Bangui is crowded with small traders trying to get back to normal business. Many traders have returned from neighbouring countries, including Cameroon, Chad and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, where they escaped violence.

"We are looking for peace. Now we want reconciliation, but they are still killing Muslims," says Lawadi Ismael, a representative for the neighbourhood, adding: "When the fighting broke out in 2013, I never left. Now, business is slowly resuming, but these attacks against Muslims must stop," as he blames the Government for its alleged passivity, while asking the UN peacekeeping mission, known as MINUSCA, to do more to protect them.

**VIDEO:** Keeping the Peace in the Central African Republic.

We followed a joint patrol of the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the CAR ([MINUSCA](#)) to the PK5 neighbourhood, the site of numerous clashes between the mainly Muslim Séléka rebels and the anti-Balaka militia, which are mostly Christian, during the civil conflict that erupted in 2013.

A unique aeronautics surveillance unit supports the patrol with live information gathering capacity: a camera equipped aerostat balloon, and three hover masts mounted on vehicles, send videos in real time to the joint operation centre, indicating any crowd movement or potential threats. This is used to guide the patrol to areas which need security, while protecting their members.

Even as technology helps the peacekeepers, reconciliation is still fragile, especially after recent attacks in the south-east and the centre of the

country, often targeting minority communities.

“The police assist mostly when we apprehend a suspect; the military takes the lead when the use of force is required,” explains Jean-Marie Vianney, commander of the 36-strong Rwandan military platoon, as they head together with the 12-member Cameroonian Formed Police Unit (FPU) towards PK5.

“We need to reassure the population and discourage bandits,” says Sergeant Epouba Martine Martial, a Cameroonian police officer with MINUSCA.



Monitoring and surveillance technology using balloons fitted with a camera.  
UN Photo/Eskinder Debebe



Monitoring and surveillance technology using balloons fitted with a camera.  
UN Photo/Eskinder Debebe



UN military and police personnel conduct a joint patrol in the PK5 neighbourhood of the capital, Bangui. UN Photo/Eskinder Debebe



UN military and police personnel conduct a joint patrol in the PK5 neighbourhood of the capital, Bangui. UN Photo/Eskinder Debebe



UN military and police personnel conduct a joint patrol in the PK5 neighbourhood of the capital, Bangui. UN Photo/Eskinder Debebe



UN military and police personnel conduct a joint patrol in the PK5 neighbourhood of the capital, Bangui. UN Photo/Eskinder Debebe

[<](#) [>](#)

Despite noteworthy progress and successful elections, and a UN presence to shore up stability, support governance and provide humanitarian assistance, CAR has remained in the grip of instability and sporadic unrest.

The deteriorating situation has driven about a quarter of the people in the country from their homes and since the start of 2017, the number of IDPs has reached 600,000 and refugees in neighbouring countries number over 500,000.

More than 1 million Central Africans are displaced – inside the country or abroad – and in Bangassou, the camp for internally displaced persons (IDPs) has reached 1,800 people and is still growing.



Scene from a camp for internally displaced persons known as 'Site du Petit Seminaire St.Pierre Claver' in the town of Bangassou. UN Photo/Eskinder Debebe



Scene from a camp for internally displaced persons known as 'Site du Petit Seminaire St.Pierre Claver' in the town of Bangassou. UN Photo/Eskinder Debebe



Scene from a camp for internally displaced persons known as 'Site du Petit Seminaire St.Pierre Claver' in the town of Bangassou. UN Photo/Eskinder Debebe

[<](#) [>](#)

When he arrives in the area on 24 October, which is also United Nations Day, [Secretary-General](#) António Guterres is expected to pay tribute to the 12 peacekeepers who have died since January 2017 due to hostile acts.

“Across the country, communal tensions are growing. Violence is spreading. And the humanitarian situation is deteriorating,” said Mr. Guterres, who made it a point to mark UN Day with peacekeepers who put themselves on the frontlines in some of the most dangerous areas of the world.

In his latest report to the Security Council on CAR, the Secretary-General has requested reinforcements of 900 additional troops for the mission.

Lieutenant General Balla Keita, Force Commander of MINUSCA, is quite clear that the effect of this surge in capacity will help the mission stabilize the situation. However, he noted: “There will never be a military solution for a peacekeeping operation. The solution will be a political one – a genuine negotiation with all parties.”