

**Testimony of Kasper Agger  
Field Researcher, Enough Project  
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**Introduction**

Thank you very much for the opportunity to testify, Chairman Smith and Ranking Member Bass, at this crucial moment for the Central African Republic.

I traveled to the Central African Republic in February 2014 and spent three weeks in Bangui analyzing the interests, the activities, and the funding sources of armed groups and governments that have become involved in CAR. During my stay, I interviewed Séléka fighters, Anti-Balaka fighters, and Central African government officials. I visited a barracks where about a thousand Séléka fighters were waiting for disarmament to begin. I spoke with many people about the revenues and funding sources for the Séléka and other armed groups in CAR. I began to identify the ties between these armed actors and elephant poaching and the illicit diamond trade.

Combatants, politicians, businessmen, and diplomats were all giving me the same reasons for the crisis in their country. They said it is lack of leadership and exclusion of citizens from the decision-making process that is fueling the violence. I also came to realize from the interviews that natural resources and the often overlooked regional interests of CAR’s neighbors are major causes of the conflict.

The U.S. government is starting to contribute to the solution to the CAR crisis, but a low-cost initiative to boost this effort would have a major impact in preventing the next round of mass atrocities. The United States has responded to developments and advocacy efforts with financial and diplomatic support. The recent appointment of Ambassador Symington as U.S. Special Representative for CAR will add momentum to these diplomatic efforts.

As the U.S. crafts the future of its critical engagement in CAR, I urge Congress and the Administration to not only target the acute, immediate needs created by the conflict but also pursue sustained U.S. engagement that addresses the core underlying drivers of conflict that could incite continuing cycles of violence. This can be done at a low cost with diplomatic efforts within CAR and outside to pressure CAR’s neighbors and the financiers of violence. The U.S. should work with the U.N. to encourage an inclusive, bottom-up peace and reconciliation process. The U.S. should work with international partners to cut off sources of financing to actors who perpetrate violence. And the U.S. should adopt a regional approach to diplomatic engagement. A wide range of armed actors and governments have a history of involvement in CAR’s affairs. Addressing the economic and security interests that motivate these actors is vitally important to building a successful international approach.

## **The need for an inclusive peace process**

CAR has been on a downward development spiral since its independence in 1960 from France. It has experienced five military coups and ranks 180 out of 186 countries on the U.N. Human Development Index. Previous leaders of CAR, including former President François Bozizé, monopolized power and turned the country into a profitable venture for family and personal friends, while the population suffered. CAR has never addressed its troubled past, and former leaders enjoy impunity. In the past 12 months, however, CAR has experienced unprecedented levels of violence and mass killings of thousands of civilians. Roughly one million people, a quarter of the population, have been displaced. The Central African state has come close to a complete standstill and lacks a functioning army, police force, and justice system. When I visited, I saw that the political process has stalled, and the transitional government has very little leverage over those who carry arms and kill.

The decentralized nature of the conflict in CAR, the profusion of different actors, and the lack of a central command for many armed groups, all mean that the nation requires a bottom-up peace approach that addresses armed groups through local negotiations. Central Africans cannot wait for a ceasefire; they need a political reconciliation process to begin immediately at the local level. The U.S. can, through the leadership of Special Representative Symington, work alongside a diverse group of CAR leaders and the international community to begin building such a process immediately. Top-down negotiations among leaders of armed factions and political elites in Bangui will not break the political deadlock and end the violence—because those leaders cannot control the myriad armed groups. National and local-level dialogues must instead prominently feature the voices of civil society actors, including women, traditional leaders, religious figures, and youth.

## **Drivers of violence: Diamonds and poaching**

What appears on the surface as religious violence between Muslim Séléka rebels and Christian Anti-Balaka militias actually goes much deeper. In speaking with many of these combatants, I found that both Séléka and Anti-Balaka fighters are actually united less by religion than by socio-economic and political grievances. These groups have been marginalized for decades by political leaders. Many are motivated by revenge for past grievances, the need for self-defense, and the promise of economic gains. These Central African fighters and their allies are part of a broader regional and international conflict system in which outside countries and armed groups pursue state control, natural resources, economic gains, and influence in Central Africa. Sustained regional U.S. diplomatic engagement that recognizes and addresses the interests of these many actors, and that targets the illicit sources of financing for violent actors, can directly contribute to sustainable peace in the Central African Republic.

My research on the economic drivers of conflict in the Central African Republic, published today, documents the alliances, rivalries, and motivating interests between senior Séléka leaders and the Chadian and Sudanese governments. It identifies the alliances between senior Séléka leaders and Janjaweed fighters, elephant poachers, and mercenaries from Chad and Sudan. It specifies the resource-rich areas in CAR that are controlled by Anti-Balaka fighters. It describes areas in northeastern provinces near the border with Chad and Sudan that are rich in diamonds and gold and are controlled by Séléka fighters and leaders—including the former CAR president Michel Djotodia, among others. One diamond trader in Bangui told me,

“Séléka needed cash to pay soldiers, to buy food for the soldiers, to get petrol for their vehicles, and to buy arms. The diamond trade helped them to get some of that cash.”<sup>1</sup> Senior-level Séléka members and their associates sell diamonds to local traders in CAR or to sellers in Chad, Sudan, Cameroon, and the DRC. Some traders in Bangui claim that considerable amounts of the Séléka diamonds go through South Darfur.<sup>2</sup> The traders and intermediaries then bring the diamonds to trade hubs in South Africa, Belgium, India, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and the United Arab Emirates.<sup>3</sup>

The findings from my trip also identify the national parks in CAR where mass elephant poaching was ordered or condoned by Séléka leaders as a form of payment for foreign mercenaries. Park rangers from CAR’s two northern national parks, Bamingui-Bangoran and Manovo-Gounda Saint Floris, told me, for example, that a group of 70 to 75 Séléka fighters, including former park rangers, attacked the ranger post in Sangha on December 12, 2012. They looted pickup trucks and obtained 24 AK-47 machine guns.<sup>4</sup> The Séléka returned to the area in February 2013 and killed a group of 12 fully grown elephants that had regularly visited areas around the ranger camp.<sup>5</sup> Séléka forces were also responsible for the slaughter of at least 25 elephants in May 2013 at the Dzanga-Sangha Reserve<sup>6</sup> and for the killing of an unknown number of elephants close to Yaloke in February 2013.<sup>7</sup> One interviewee told me that Sudanese poachers supported the Séléka groups by providing weapons and then went to Dzanga-Sangha and Yaloke to kill elephants as payment for their support.<sup>8</sup>

### **Regional approaches to diplomatic engagement**

The connection between natural resources and conflict in CAR became more clear to me as I analyzed the history of security and natural resource-related interests of neighboring countries as well as China, with oil exploration agreements, South Africa, with oil and diamond interests, and France. CAR’s northern neighbor, Chad, has particularly keen security and economic interests tied to the Salamat and Doseo oil reserves along the border with CAR. Chadian President Idriss Déby depends heavily on revenues from oil to maintain patronage relationships. He seeks a situation in CAR that denies his opposition a safe haven and allows Chad to retain access to the oil basins on the border, which would decline if CAR began extracting oil.<sup>9</sup> CAR’s state fragility and leadership changes affect the Chadian government’s calculations about its security. Any developments with exploration or drilling rights could shift alliances among leaders and again destabilize CAR and Chad.

Revenues from oil exploration, diamonds, elephant poaching, and endemic looting in CAR, are directly tied to actors with histories of violence and significant human rights abuses. Investigating these supply chains, identifying the actors who profit from the illicit trade in natural resources, cutting off the financial resources of those who perpetrate violence, and promoting accountability for violence and economic critical activity is crucial.

Congress can help. Congress should urge the Administration to take action on blood diamonds from CAR. The United States and China, as current chair of the Kimberley Process, should work with the Kimberley Process to send review missions to the United Arab Emirates, Belgium, and India to investigate the smuggling of conflict diamonds from CAR. Dubai has not had a Review Mission since 2008 despite numerous reports that diamonds are smuggled through its markets. Review missions and investigations in international diamond trading hubs like that in Dubai could tighten controls and identify individuals and companies against whom the United States and the United Nations could issue targeted sanctions. The

U.S. should also support the U.N. Panel of Experts on CAR and the U.N.-appointed Commission of Inquiry on CAR as they coordinate their efforts to investigate and document economic criminal activity. The U.S. should support efforts by the International Criminal Court in efforts to investigate those most responsible for the violence in CAR, including those involved in sexual violence and economic criminal activity.

CAR's rich natural resources and fragile state institutions have for decades attracted many actors who seek to profit from and also fuel violence that has killed, wounded, and displaced millions. There is an urgent need to recognize the regional implications of these dynamics and the interests of the many transnational actors involved in the illicit trade of natural resources. If U.S. policymakers are able to identify these interests and adopt a regional approach to the diplomatic strategy in CAR, they can play a vital role in the effort to cut off the revenues of violent actors.

### **Diplomatic engagement and presence**

Sustained engagement in any troubled context requires a diplomatic presence that is subject to local security conditions. Discussions about balancing these needs with security for those on the frontlines of foreign service have sparked bitter debates. Some of the most eloquent appeals for expanded diplomatic presence, however, have come from American service officers themselves. I recognize these sensitivities and stand with those who advocate for the reopening of the U.S. Embassy in Bangui, if security conditions allow.

Addressing the acute, immediate needs in CAR, targeting the core drivers of violence, and understanding the interests and revenue sources of mercurial actors with fluid alliances requires sustained on-the-ground diplomatic engagement with a regional perspective and approach. Histories and relationships matter. The deft, skillful, persistent diplomacy by Americans, with Ambassador Symington in the lead, can have a significant and lasting impact in shaping the incentives of those who foment violence.

### **Recommendations**

- **Congress should urge the United Nations to deploy experienced mediators to work with U.S. Special Representative Symington and a diverse group of CAR leaders to spur a bottom-up peace process for CAR.**
- **The Administration should call on the International Criminal Court to prioritize investigations and prosecute those most responsible for the violence in CAR, including those involved in sexual violence and economic criminal activity.**
- **The Administration should work with the African Union to appoint a special envoy to address transnational security and economic matters that involve CAR, Sudan, and Chad.**
- **Congress and the Administration should urge the African Union and United Nations to mediate negotiations between the governments of Chad and CAR on a bilateral agreement for the exploration of the cross-border oilfields between the two states.**

- **Congress should urge the Administration to work with the Kimberley Process to send review missions to the United Arab Emirates, Belgium, and India for investigation into the smuggling of conflict diamonds from CAR.**
- **The U.S. should, if security conditions allow, reopen the embassy in Bangui.**

## Conclusion

The United States has led in its response to the intensifying conflict in CAR. Congress has worked hard and consistently to encourage the Administration to take action. With your help, the U.S. has given substantial financial support and helped ensure a transition to a UN Peacekeeping Operation in CAR this September. Several senior diplomats have travelled to the region, including a recent delegation that included Ranking Member Bass. As the U.S. continues to respond to the immediate humanitarian needs of the country's most vulnerable people, the U.S. government must recognize its long-term interests in sustainable peace and stability and work with partners to address the underlying root causes and drivers of conflict. Sustained international attention by the U.S. through a response to financial drivers and economic interests has the potential to make the difference in the struggle for peace.

As U.S. lawmakers chart a path forward on CAR policy, with Ambassador Symington's leadership and engagement, Americans must continue to lead sustainably—with and alongside international partners. The U.S. must press for a bottom-up peace process in CAR. It must work with partners—including the Kimberley Process, the U.N. Commission of Inquiry, and the International Criminal Court—that document, investigate, and pursue accountability for violence and economic criminal activity that sustains violent actors. The U.S. must adopt a regional approach to its diplomacy and engage in a way that recognizes the economic and security interests of a range of actors that have played roles in CAR's troubled history. CAR's most precious resource—its people—deserve nothing less.

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<sup>1</sup> Diamond trader, interview with author, Bangui, CAR, February 15, 2014.

<sup>2</sup> Diamond trader, interview with author.

<sup>3</sup> Diamond trader, interview with author; Civil servant from CAR Bureau d'Evaluation et de Controle de Diamants et d'Or, interview with author, Bangui, February 21, 2014.

<sup>4</sup> Park rangers and WWF program officer, interviews with author, Bangui, CAR, February 2014.

<sup>5</sup> Park rangers and WWF program officer, interviews with author, Bangui, CAR, February 2014.

<sup>6</sup> WWF program officer and senior civil servants from the CAR Ministry of Forest and Environment, interviews with author, Bangui, CAR, February 2014. See also Laurel Neme, "[Chaos and Confusion Following Elephant Poaching in a Central African World Heritage Site.](http://newswatch.nationalgeographic.com/2013/05/13/chaos-and-confusion-following-elephant-poaching-in-a-central-african-world-heritage-site/)" *National Geographic News Watch*, May 13, 2013, available at <http://newswatch.nationalgeographic.com/2013/05/13/chaos-and-confusion-following-elephant-poaching-in-a-central-african-world-heritage-site/>.

<sup>7</sup> WWF program officer and senior civil servants from the CAR Ministry of Forest and Environment, interviews with author. See also WWF, "Poachers kill over 11,000 elephants in Gabon," February 6, 2013, available at <http://wwf.panda.org/?207520/Poachers-kill-over-11000-elephants-in-Gabon>.

<sup>8</sup> Moussa Dhaffane, interview with author.

<sup>9</sup> Senior civil servant in the CAR Ministry of Geology and Mining, interview with author, Bangui, CAR, February 20, 2014. See also Simon Allison, "Conflict of Interest: Chadian peacekeepers may be leaving the Central African Republic, but will the war-torn country ever really be free of its meddling northern neighbor?", *Foreign Policy*, April 9, 2014, available at [http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2014/04/09/conflict\\_of\\_interest\\_chad\\_peacekeepers\\_car?wp\\_login\\_redirect=0](http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2014/04/09/conflict_of_interest_chad_peacekeepers_car?wp_login_redirect=0).