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Central African Republic

Brussels Donor Conference: An Injection of Funds, or a Changed System?

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While Brussels is preparing to hold a donor conference for the Central African Republic (CAR) on 17 November, there remain deep uncertainties about President Touadera's guarantees to restore peace. Armed groups continue to wreak havoc and devastation in a country scarred by a long tradition of predatory management of its national assets. To break this deadlock, the international community must examine the causes of violence and prioritize action against impunity and illicit funding flows.

What has the succession of donor conferences achieved?

The Brussels Conference may seem to be the last hope, but it is nothing of the sort. It is in fact the fifth conference of this type to be held over the past ten years. Each time, the CAR authorities have presented a catalog of projects and gone away with tens of millions of euros in their pockets to fund projects.

Yet the track record is shocking. The Central African Republic is one of the poorest countries in the world. Humanitarian crises have become the norm. In Bangui, the elites fight for power and present a façade of government. Since 2013, criminal armed groups have continued to dictate the law and are threatening to divide the country. Conflict between communities means that civil war is a real risk. In 2016, UNHCR is still reporting more than 453,271 CAR refugees and 430,901 internally displaced people.

Unfortunately, we must conclude that these injections of funding have not resolved the crises. And the situation hardly seems likely to change, judging by the following words uttered off the record by a United Nations representative to describe the attitude of the current regime: "They are obsessed with the donor conference and the money they hope to obtain. They have no intention of reform; they just want to secure equipment and, if possible, training for the Central African Armed Forces."

The system of violent kleptocracy underlying instability

Although it is often overlooked in crisis management policies, [violent kleptocracy](#) plays a key role in political and military instability. Certain challenges in the Central African Republic have repeatedly thwarted traditional approaches to conflict resolution, in particular:

Appropriation of national sovereignty and assets by the ruling class. This activity is controlled by a small group of individuals and is restricted to the president's family and ethnic tribe. It includes management by the family of public assets and funding, cronyism, corruption, single party rule, oppression and repression of opponents, manipulation of young people, recruitment and arming of militia, impunity and lack of social investment. This explosive combination has formed the backbone of successive regimes and encouraged the emergence of armed groups which are just as predatory as the regimes themselves.



Armed violence established as a business model and normalized instrument for political negotiation. For the armed groups, violence — or the threat of recourse to violence — is a means of exerting pressure on the regime with the aim of infiltrating the system, often by demanding ministerial or military posts. Beyond traditional rebels, it is mostly mercenaries with military experience who are committing acts of violence or stirring up hatred in exchange for promises of privileges or payments. Kleptocrats, private investors and even foreign powers also have no hesitation in recruiting these mercenaries with the sole aim of creating favorable conditions to negotiate or secure specific interests.

A war economy, driving perpetual crises. In this toxic situation, a war economy, dominated by all sorts of trafficking, feeds the mafia networks while enslaving the vast majority of the CAR population. Warlords accumulate millions of dollars for private use. It is a bonanza for these people, who have no intention of losing their privileges, let alone negotiating disarmament. In Bangui, kleptocrats, in partnership with foreign investors, speculate on the granting of licenses and contracts for mining and oil.

The international community: passive or complicit participants?

Faced with this chaos, the CAR population is critical of the United Nations Peacekeepers' incomprehensible passivity toward the violence and their complicity with the kleptocratic system. To break this deadlock, the international community gathered in Brussels urgently needs to send out a strong signal, prioritizing two key strategies: effective introduction of legal mechanisms to stop the climate of impunity, and implementation of instruments to fight illicit funding flows, including [financial sanctions](#) against those who are fueling violence and corruption. Together, these instruments will make it possible to turn the funding injections of the past into investments for the future.

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