

## Emergency Item on the Central African Republic

### Speech by Mike Gapes MP at the 130<sup>th</sup> IPU Assembly Geneva, 18 March 2014

I am pleased to give my support to this Emergency motion.

The Central African Republic has had a difficult history and a series of coups and attempted coups over twenty years which overthrew weak governments.

Even in 2007 the Small Arms Survey pointed out how the country was a tinderbox awash with small arms from the Democratic Republic of Congo and Chad where armed groups ran wild and were better equipped than government forces.

The situation now is even worse.

There are wider regional lessons. Conflicts in one country can have knock on consequences on neighbours.

The events in Libya in 2011 have had unintended consequences and have increased instability and exported weaponry and former mercenaries into many neighbouring countries in North and West Africa and the Sahel Region including into Mali as we have heard earlier in this meeting.

Yesterday Human Rights Watch's Emergencies Director, Peter Bouckaert, had published an article in the Washington Post. It outlines the appalling situation in CAR due to the ongoing conflict in the country.

The article provides an insight into the exodus of the country's Muslim population, during which many vulnerable Muslims were left behind and only protected by the Catholic priests and nuns.

Entire Muslim communities have disappeared. Tens of thousands have had to flee.

He says "Too few peacekeepers were deployed too late; the challenge of disarming the Seleka, containing the anti-balaka and protecting the Muslim minority was underestimated. Now, their only option seems to be to facilitate evacuations, at the risk of contributing to the ethnic cleansing they were deployed to prevent."

Sadly this is not the first time that the international community has acted too little too late. As we saw in Mali it was only the intervention of France which prevented a disaster.

There is a danger of wider Christian / Muslim violence which would have serious consequences and could be exploited by extremist groups in other countries for wider conflict.

The UK shares the concerns of the international community about the appalling conditions in the Central African Republic.

As a permanent member of the Security Council the UK worked to secure a UN resolution in December 2013 which mandated African Union and French troops to respond to the security and humanitarian crisis in the Central African Republic. The UK also played a strong role in securing a UN Resolution in January which strengthened the mandate of the UN political office in CAR (BINUCA); sets up a UN sanctions regime for political spoilers and human rights violators and abusers; and authorised a temporary EU military operation.

The UK has increased in aid to CAR by £10 million, bringing the total to £15 million and making the UK one of the biggest humanitarian donors to CAR.

The UK also provided a further £2million to the African Union to cover some of MISCA's operational costs. We will continue to review our contribution in light of events.

The UK provided logistical support to the French mission, at the request of the French Government, in the form of three flights to carry French equipment to CAR.

But the International community the United Nations, the African Union and the European Union have not done enough. We must do much more. Support the motion.