



**CAFOD**  
Just one world



### **Joint declaration of Catholic and Muslim Charities on Central Africa Republic**

May 8<sup>th</sup> 2014

CAFOD, Islamic Relief, Muslim Aid and the Muslim Charities Forum undertook a joint week long mission to Central Africa Republic, returning to the UK on Sunday May 4<sup>th</sup>.

We met with a variety of actors including religious leaders, and members of the national government, United Nations, international peacekeeping missions and Non Governmental Organisations. We were humbled by the many brave and courageous people we met who are deeply committed to helping those caught up in the violence. Often at considerable risk to their own safety, they are working to deliver much needed humanitarian aid and building bridges between communities caught in a worrying cycle of distrust, fear and vengeance. We were touched by the testimonies of the displaced people we met, but deeply concerned by the levels of fear and mistrust which we heard expressed.

The Interfaith Platform for Reconciliation, Catholic Archbishop of Bangui Dieudonné Nzapalainga, Imam Omar Kabine Layama and Pastor Reverend Nicolas Guerekoyame Gbangou have showed inspired leadership in calling for peace, tolerance and social cohesion. This message is being amplified by NGOs and civil society leaders. We heard of many projects to replicate this interfaith approach at the middle leadership level as well as at the community level and we met with Catholics, Muslims and Protestants working together to heal the wounds of this bitter conflict and try to bring about mediation and reconciliation. We were particularly inspired by the Plateforme de Femmes Croyantes (the Women's believers interfaith platform) and a group of youth also working together to bridge the divides which separate different faiths.

From our discussions, and from our own direct experience of being in CAR's capital, Bangui, it became clear to us that security is the primary concern for citizens. Violence is rife across the country, both between armed groups as well as the frequent targeted attacks on civilians. New displacements continue as people flee in fear of further violence, and crime and banditry has mushroomed in the face of impunity and the absence of even a semblance of a functioning justice system. The role of the international peace-keeping forces, Sangaris,

EUFOR and MISCA is of vital importance, and they will play a particularly pivotal role between now and the arrival of the UN peacekeeping force MINUSCA in September. However, they are under-equipped and under-resourced on virtually every level and they are unable to adequately fulfil their task of protecting the lives of civilians.

The transitional government needs greater support in leadership to address the root causes of the conflict and to lead peace and reconciliation efforts. There is a notable absence of state services, particularly in the fields of health, justice, and law and order. This is especially the case outside the capital, and much of the country is without functioning local government or service provision. We heard reports of some towns having been without health provision for two years.

Our visit strengthened our realisation that by working together as Catholic and Muslim charities we can send out a strong message of unity and hope. In the light of this we are resolved to address the following:

1. Jointly support projects which respond to the growing humanitarian needs in CAR, support livelihood initiatives as well as reconciliation and social cohesion programmes. As a result of what we have seen in this mission, together, through our partners in CAR, we will immediately provide support to communities in Bossangoa devastated by the conflict. Our support will enable 10,000 families to safely get the food they need by to ensure that they can provide for their families in the difficult months to follow.
2. Work together to publicise the situation in CAR within our own faith communities and spread the word to support the important work being done by the Interfaith Platform for Reconciliation.
3. Undertake joint policy and advocacy work to the international community to ensure the provision of sufficient and appropriate humanitarian aid as well as longer-term development assistance; to ensure that international peacekeeping operations effectively protect civilians and facilitate the provision of civilian-led humanitarian assistance and support nationally-led peace and reconciliation efforts in the run up to elections scheduled for 2015.