



COORDINATION DES ORGANISATIONS MUSULMANES DE CENTRAFRIQUE

SUBMISSION TO THE UN HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL 31st SESSION OF THE UNIVERSAL PERIODIC REVIEW WORKING GROUP THIRD CYCLE REVIEW OF THE CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC

ABOUT THE COORDINATION DES ORGANISATIONS MUSULMANES DE CENTRAFRIQUE

The Coordination des Organisations Musulmanes de Centrafrique (COMUC) is an umbrella organization of Muslim civil society actors. COMUC was founded in June 2014, during the civil conflict in the Central African Republic (CAR). COMUC monitors, records, investigates, and advocates against discrimination experienced by Muslim Central Africans. There are more than 60 associations and NGOs affiliated with COMUC. COMUC has 32 branches across CAR. Since its creation, COMUC has campaigned for the defense of the rights of ethnic and religious minorities, and their meaningful participation in the affairs of CAR. COMUC represented the Muslim community in 2015 at the Bangui National Forum, and was recently invited by the CAR government to be part of the Truth, Justice, Reparation, and Reconciliation Commission. Since June 2017, COMUC has also been involved in identifying victims of war crimes and human rights abuses with the purpose of pursuing criminal justice.

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1. BACKGROUND

- 1.1. Despite transition to a democratically elected national government in 2016, armed groups continue to govern large parts of the country. While the conflict has had an impact on all Central Africans, the Muslim population, constituting almost 25 percent of the total population, has been particularly impacted. Members of the Muslim population face persistent discrimination. Muslims are subjected to acts of violence and are excluded from fully participating in public life.
- 1.2. The CAR government has failed to fulfil its international human rights obligation to respect, protect, and fulfil the right to non-discrimination, leaving Muslim and other minority religious groups particularly vulnerable to abuse and violence.

2. MUSLIM CENTRAL AFRICANS' RIGHT TO BE FREE FROM DISCRIMINATION HAS BEEN VIOLATED

- 2.1. The State has made efforts to improve social cohesion in CAR through the adoption of the *National Recovery and Peacebuilding Plan of 2017*, and the National Network of Local Peace and Reconciliation Committees that were agreed to as part of the 2015 Bangui National Forum. Despite these efforts, the Muslim population in CAR continues to face persistent discrimination. Muslims are frequently harassed, physically attacked, and are not adequately protected by the State or international actors. There is a harmful popular discourse that Muslims are foreigners and that a Muslim cannot also be Central African.ⁱ The government has not taken adequate steps to counter this discourse.
- 2.2. COMUC has recorded over 3,000 cases of human rights violations against Muslims during the armed conflict in CAR. Some of the cases involve murder, rape, gender based violence, abduction, extrajudicial execution, forced marriage, and forcible transfer of children. COMUC has also recorded instances of Muslim citizens living in conditions incompatible with the proper exercise of the right to life, liberty and security of the person. Many Muslim Central Africans are unable to go to school, find jobs, or travel freely. They are harassed in the street and often violently attacked.
- 2.3. In particular, COMUC has recorded 1,130 cases of violent attacks against Muslims since 2013. One such case occurred on 13 May 2017 when more than 3,000 Muslim Central Africans were attacked by armed groups in the city of Bangassou. During the attack, MINUSCA, the UN peacekeeping force in CAR, retreated to protect their base and failed to adequately protect the Muslim civilians.ⁱⁱ Following the attack, the remaining Muslims in Bangassou were forced to flee to a local Catholic church and were unable to leave for 10 months.
- 2.4. Muslims are also discriminated against in their access to and participation in the public sphere. Muslims are not adequately represented in either the government or the judiciary. Currently, there are only six Muslim deputies in a government made up of 140 deputies. COMUC is also concerned about the absence of Muslim judges within the judiciary. For example, none of the current judges or prosecutors appointed to the Special Criminal Court is Muslim, and only one member of the 20 investigative police is Muslim. The lack of Muslim representation in positions of public authority engenders national policy that does not adequately address the needs of Muslim Central African. It also creates a heightened risk of unconscious bias and perpetuates the idea that one cannot be both Muslim and Central African at the same time.

3. COMUC RECOMMENDS THAT THE CAR GOVERNMENT:

- 3.1. Improve reconciliation efforts between Muslim, Christian, and other minority groups by ensuring proper and meaningful consultation and proportionate representation in all reconciliation efforts, including the National Network of Local Peace and Reconciliation Committees and the Truth, Justice, Reparation, and Reconciliation Commission.
- 3.2. Implement and enforce an anti-discrimination law that will protect individuals and groups from any distinction, exclusion, or restriction based on race, religion, color, gender, or national or ethnic origin for the purpose or effect of nullifying or impairing the recognition, enjoyment or exercise of that individual or groups' rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural or any other sphere of public life.
- 3.3. Mainstream policies of inclusion and diversity across all government departments and agencies, public institutions, and law enforcement to ensure the representation and participation of minority groups at all levels with the aim of having at least 15 percent of civil servant positions held by members of minority groups by CAR's next UPR review cycle.
- 3.4. Instruct law enforcement to apply the provisions of the Penal Code without distinction as to the victim's ethnicity, religious affiliation, or gender in order to investigate, prosecute, and punish perpetrators of crimes.
- 3.5. Develop and implement a mandatory education program on cultural competency to be undertaken by all law enforcement agents which includes training on religious, ethnic, and gender sensitivity.

ⁱ See, eg, Enrica Picco, "I Am 100% Central African: Identity and Inclusion in the Experience of Central African Muslim Refugees in Chad and Cameroon" (International Center for Transitional Justice, Report, 2018).

ⁱⁱ UN Security Council, "Midterm report of the Panel of Experts on the Central African Republic extended pursuant to Security Council resolution 2339 (2017)" (26 July 2017), UN Doc S/2017/639, paras 87-89.