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**North Ubangi: insufficient aid for Central African
Republic Refugees!**



Photo 1 one CAR Refugee living alone in an improvised camp in
Gbogbo (60 km from Gbadolite)

Gbadolite, November 11, 2017 (caritasdev.cd): In view of the influx of Central African refugees flocking to North Ubangi Province and their living conditions, voices are being unanimously raised to emphasize that aid is not enough for them. This is what emerges from the interviews that a delegation of the Caritas Congo Asbl had from October 31 to November 4, 2017 with various

stakeholders in this crisis (refugees, host population, humanitarian actors), in the margin of the monitoring of the Program of « Veille Humanitaire », led by Caritas International Belgique (CIbe) in this north-eastern part of DR Congo.

«I have been in Yakoma since 2013, we were well received by Congolese people. However, we are still concerned about the health and food, especially for small children (...). If UNHCR could establish a camp for us in this Territory, we will all go to live there; since assistance and many other things will be well organized », said Tshindombi Ibrahim, **the Central African Refugee Representative in Yakoma**, the latest statistics issued by both UNHCR and DGM, give an estimated number of nearly 50,000 refugees since the wave of 2013. They do not live in the same place. Some of them have settled down in remote villages.

Tshindombi noted that refugee children do not study for free. They pay like native children while they cannot afford it.

As for food, Tshindombi reported that, «*When we arrived in 2013, we bought a basin of cassava flour at 1,000 Congolese Francs (CF). Today it's 5,000 FC. The chicken went from 1,500 to 6,000 / 7,000 FC (...). Eating here, becomes a challenge. This is why we are asking you, the humanitarian workers who work with UNHCR, to help both the refugees and the host families who have offered us their hospitality.* »

Mr Tshindombi also cited the case of two refugees (an adult and a 13-year-old girl) who died recently for lack of health care. As for the protection, according to him, the Seleka conflict (mainly Muslims) and Anti-Balaka (mainly Christian) does not appear in Yakoma. He concludes: "*We are suffering from the lack of supervision by the UNHCR and humanitarian actors, especially in the field of food, health and education of children*".

Speaking of the second wave, **the Administrator of the Territory**, Jean-Norbert Mpetsi wa Mpetsi, first noted: "*Here in Yakoma, we have welcomed Central African refugees since April (Editor's note: 2017). From April to these days, their numbers have gradually increased with the deterioration of the situation on the other side of the Oubangi River, reaching today 20,100 people.*

Refugees live only in host families and do not receive assistance from the Government or from humanitarian agencies. We saw UNHCR once distributing mats and pots to a small number of these refugees. " Jean-Norbert Mpetsi wa Mpetsi notes that some refugees do not have identification documents. "*As they live in host families, they suffer. Sometimes they come to seek help from the politico-administrative authorities, We would have liked to see them all be in a camp. This would boost a regular and systematic response from the humanitarian organizations and perhaps from the Congolese government. Their plight is known only to foster families* », said the Administrator of the Territory. "*What we are certain of is that food has become scarce in the local market with the arrival of refugees. And when it's available, it's very expensive,*" he added. "*Until now, there have been no cases of security incidents attributable to militia forces that may have crossed the river to Yakoma,*" says the TA. He further acknowledges that he did not receive any instructions from his superiors to order free schooling for the children of the refugees.

Moreover, out of fear of land conflicts between the local population and the refugees whose number continues to grow, he believes that the opening of a camp for refugees would allow the Public Authority to impose itself to find them arable lands.

The territorial President of the Yakoma Red Cross speaks of 11,500 refugees registered in this territory and who are established on several sites: Limasa, Ndayo, Ngazamba, City of Yakoma and surrounding villages. *"These people live with difficulty from a social stand point, although some of them have their own means of livelihoods. But, the reality is that the most vulnerable are not assisted,"* said Jean-Léon Tosenge Kosaso. *"We are recommending that the DRC Government find a place for them to better coordinate assistance on their behalf,"* he concluded.

The coordinator of the Civil Society Forces Vives of the Yakoma Territory, Mr. Marconi Modeste, specifies from the outset that this territory has hosted thousands of Central African refugees: *"Following the war that shakes the Central African Republic, thousands of people have crossed this side as we are separated from them only by the Ubangi River. Opposite is Ngbanzinga Commune, village of Bema".* More than 26,000 refugees are registered by the Directorate General of Migration (DGM). They live in host families. Mr Marconi Modeste emphasizes that refugees speak the same language as them and that this facilitates relations and promotes solidarity. *"Perhaps the humanitarian organizations and the Congolese Government do not want to help us because of this good neighborly relationship. Finding food for them and for the Aboriginal population is becoming more and more difficult."* He remembers the distribution of Essential Household Items (MEAs) to a group of refugees two months after their arrival by UNHCR the NGO AEDESS and the CNR (National Commission for Refugees). *"But, the food is lacking,"* he laments. *"In Yakoma, there is no paid employment other than teaching. The circulation of money is therefore weak. Because of that, everyone lives in Yakoma with difficulty, the indigenous population as well as the refugees and even the agents of the state. Hence, our appeal to the Congolese Government and the humanitarian organizations to come to create a site of regrouping of refugees which will be able to make it possible to organize the assistance to the refugees and to the local population. This will no doubt allow us to live better here in Yakoma. This camp could be established for example by 45 km in the grassy savannah",* concluded the Coordinator of the Civil Society which also expresses fears, the export in Yakoma of the conflict between the two rival Central African factions and the "Zaragina", Central African robbers.

In Kutu-Yomba (45 km from Mobayi-Mbongo and 130 km from Yakoma), the head of the locality said he had hosted Central African refugees for six months. *"At first, we gave them permission to collect cassava leaves for free in our fields. I gave them beaks to build small makeshift toilets,"* said Mr Gobe Waba Yaoundé. *"The challenge here is health care. There are no drugs. They suffer. We just buried a refugee last Sunday, 2 kms from their site. They also lack food, but*

also agricultural tools they ask, "notes the head of locality. He said he was ready to give them land to cultivate, the humanitarians handed them agricultural tools. But he is also advocating for Essential Household Items (MEAs) for refugees. "The development of water sources would be welcome because they and we drink unsuitable water from the river that causes us diseases."

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The parish priest of St Jean de Yakoma *is of the same view: « Since May 2017, the population of Yakoma suffers. We are trying to eke out a living with this population. We reached out to the diocesan Caritas of Molegbe to ask for help. I hope your arrival will move this issue forward. We intervened with our small means during the arrival of the refugees but now our meager means are exhausted. Father José Abakaya draws attention to the lack of « health care as a critical issue»: «Ten minutes ago, a refugee came to ask for help for his child who had to be operated at the hospital but I could not help him ...*

We are limited. Every Sunday, his parish receives refugees, who are in search of food. Some people ask for two to three thousand Congolese francs (about US \$ 2) to pay their rent. The Priest calls on the Congolese Government, the national and international community «not to turn a blind eye to this catastrophic situation that the refugees and the local population are going through in Yakoma». He concludes: *«I continue to pray that the Lord opens our hearts and our hands to give, because the poor are in front of our homes crying, even if our means are limited. »*

The Mgr Dominique Bulamatari, Bishop of Molegbe, speaks of a «*dramatic situation*». He noted two waves of Central African refugees, the first in 2013 and the current one in recent months.

«A fairly large wave in the Yakoma Territory which means that we have almost as many refugees as in the Inke camp, set up for the first wave. » He mentioned the interventions of the Catholic Church: «Thanks to Caritas Congo and Caritas

Germany (DCV), we are beside these refugees. We try to help them as much as possible. We have already benefited from three projects on their behalf from DCV in all of the four camps set up to accommodate these refugees.

We brought them clothes, plates and for the moment we moved to the aid that could empower them: to produce themselves what they need to feed themselves ». And appeal for help: «If this situation persists, we risk having clashes between refugees and natives because we will be overwhelmed. I take this opportunity to launch an appeal to all partners, starting with UNHCR, 'please, if there is a way, we must create a 5th camp to gather and better control all Central African refugees that arrive in the second wave, especially in the Yakoma Territory '».

Caritas delegation was received on Tuesday 31 October 2017 by the acting Governor of North-Ubangi and UNHCR's Head of Sub-Delegation in Gdabolite. The situation of Central African refugees was at the heart of the debate. The delegation was made up of the Caritas Congo Asbl Communication Officer, the Provincial Caritas and the « *Veille Humanitaire* » Project Manager , the Diocesan Caritas Director of Molegbe and the Red Cross Disaster Management Officer of North -Ubangi.

As a reminder, Caritas Congo Asbl is a technical body responsible for the Catholic Social Teachings in the DR Congo. Created in 1960, it deals with the promotion of a person as a whole (Emergency responses, promotion of health and sustainable development). Its Executive Secretariat is at the service of 47 Diocesan Caritas Offices. Its roles include the Coordination of Diocesan Caritas, their representation, capacity-building needs, advocacy on the behalf of populations in their area as well as the mobilization of resources and the promotion of a responsible partnership, in the light of the social teaching of the Church

Caritas Congo Asbl¹

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