



# Ambassador's Activities

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Speech by HE Bernard Emié,  
French Ambassador to the United Kingdom

at the meeting on the Central African Republic  
with the Africa All-Party Parliamentary Group

07 May 2014

Lords, ladies and gentlemen,

I'm very pleased to be taking this opportunity to discuss the Central African Republic and our engagement in Africa more generally. We must play a more active role in that continent's key issues.

In the CAR, the situation on the ground seems to be stabilizing (I), after several months of engagement by the French and African armed forces (II). Our active role in Brussels and New York has enabled us to build a robust peacekeeping operation, which is beginning to be deployed in the country (III). However, we must not relax our efforts, given how crucial the period we face is for consolidating the political process (IV).

More broadly, the crisis must lead us to consider the nature of our military engagement in Africa, be it at national level (V) or in the framework of Franco-British (VI) or European Union (VII) cooperation. So I'll conclude my remarks with a few reflexions on these issues.

**I/ The situation on the ground today: a security and humanitarian context which has improved but remains fragile**

After renewed tension at the end of March, the situation – still fragile – is stabilizing in Bangui. Economic life has resumed and displaced people are beginning to return home. There are now 177,000 of them, compared to 512,000 at the height of the tensions.

In the rest of the country, however, tensions are still high and bloody. The recent attack on a care centre in Nanga Boguila, during which three staff members of the NGO Médecins Sans Frontières were killed along with 19 other people, showed what a dangerous environment the humanitarian missions are working in.

The withdrawal of the former Séléka fighters is exposing Muslims in the west to reprisals by the anti-balaka militias. Nevertheless, things seem to be calming down wherever MISCA and Sangaris are present. Above all, the main trade route, linking Bangui to the Cameroon border via the west of the country, has now been made safe. Having retreated to the north-east, the ex-Sélékas have talked of secession plans and continue to represent a threat. Sangaris began

its deployment in the east at the beginning of April and, with MISCA, has reached the town of Bria.

## **II/ In the CAR, France had to react urgently to violent interfaith conflicts and to the risk of regional destabilization**

Foreign Minister Laurent Fabius recalled this at the National Assembly last week: in the CAR, “we’ve avoided what will have to be called a genocide”. President Hollande sounded the alarm at the United Nations General Assembly as early as September.

Everyone was aware of the region’s fragility. The CAR shares borders with South Sudan, the DRC and Chad. Boko Haram is active in neighbouring Cameroon and the LRA in the south-east of the country itself. The French President has said that what we’re doing in the Central African Republic isn’t simply for the Central African Republic, it’s for the whole continent.

However, when we called on the international community to respond with us to the urgency of the crisis, many of our partners seemed to grasp neither its gravity nor its depth. Our friends at the Foreign Office, who were very worried, first reminded us how ill-equipped they still were to analyse the crisis, with practically no sources of their own on the ground. There’s no British embassy in the CAR and no DFID office.

So the rapid deterioration of the situation in Bangui on 5 December 2013 led the French President to shoulder his responsibilities and speed up the deployment of the 1,600 troops in the Sangaris force. On 14 February 2014, the French engagement was increased to 2,000 troops.

The goals of this intervention were set by the United Nations Security Council: to provide operational support to the African Union force, MISCA – which today has 6,000 troops – in its mission to protect civilians. Let me remind you that three French and 21 African soldiers have already lost their lives in the CAR, and I want to pay tribute to them.

### **III/ We had to convince our main partners and build a robust response on the part of the international community**

A/ The need for European Union support was quickly recognized, in particular to relieve French forces totally focused on bringing security to Bangui, its airport and the central districts.

Last Wednesday, the EUFOR RCA operation began providing security to Bangui airport. This is an important stage, marking the completion of initial operational capability. However, we must not relax our efforts to achieve full capability, which we hope to do in June.

I want to pay tribute to the analytical work done by your Parliament, which enabled the deployment of this mission to be authorized in what was – given the urgency of the situation on the ground – a very short timescale.

B/ The second aspect of this international response is a UN peacekeeping operation, MINUSCA, which will be fully operational from 15 September onwards, with the deployment of 10,000 soldiers and 1,800 police.

So it will have taken us nearly a year to build a robust peacekeeping operation in the CAR.

C/ The third aspect of our response is to tackle the humanitarian crisis.

France has strengthened its bilateral assistance, bringing its humanitarian aid to €7 million and its development aid to €28 million for 2014.

The European Union, the main humanitarian aid donor, has also committed itself, with €45 million of humanitarian aid and €131 million of development aid planned for 2014.

The deployment of the EUFOR CAR mission includes an important humanitarian dimension: it must ensure that Bangui airport – through which the large majority of emergency and humanitarian aid is transported – is made safe. You're no doubt aware that the airport has become a vast camp for displaced people and home to up to 100,000.

#### **IV/ The coming months must be devoted to implementing the political process**

The political transition and the rebuilding of the state are a crucial dimension.

The election of Mrs Samba-Panza as transitional president, following Michel Djotodia's resignation in January, was a strong, positive signal.

The political horizon was set by the agreements reached under the aegis of the regional organization [ECCAS, Economic Community of Central African States], which were ratified by the African Union and endorsed by the UN Security Council and provide for elections to be held by February 2015. This is a very tight deadline. No corners must be cut in these elections. They must be fair and credible. Nonetheless, we must strive to keep to this deadline, so that the Central African people can regain confidence in the institutions.

The other priority is the reconstruction of the state and the operation of government. The payment of salaries has resumed thanks to contributions from the states in the region. Since March, Congo, Gabon, Cameroon and Equatorial Guinea have each paid \$8 million, the equivalent of a total of four months' salary for Central African civil servants. Angola has paid \$10 million, among other things to cover pensions and student grants.

This shows that we must play an active role collectively to stabilize the CAR, where the situation is still very dangerous.

#### **V/ French engagement in Africa**

France maintains a special relationship with Africa. The French President recalled the close ties linking us to the continent when he hosted 53 African countries at the Summit for Peace and Security in Africa last December. I quote him: "France is aware of what is expected of us. Because of that proximity – a proximity that is simultaneously geographic, sentimental, cultural, linguistic and economic – we have a particular responsibility."

France's goals focus first on the conditions for peace: development (with the commitment to devote €20 billion in donations and loans to Africa's development over the next five years), the promotion of democracy and human rights and the battle against global warming, which is a serious threat to the African continent.

Working in this spirit of responsibility, and in order to face up to new security challenges, France has also begun profoundly changing the architecture of its military capability in Africa. Fewer static forces stationed at bases – even though prepositioned forces have remained highly relevant, as we've seen in Mali, then the CAR –, greater mobility and more cooperation with African armed forces: these are a few central priorities of this change.

## **VI/ Importance of Franco-British cooperation**

UK support for the French operations in Africa has proved decisive – in Mali, which continues today, but also in the Central African Republic, with the provision of strategic transport capabilities: round trips between Istres and Bangui by C-17 planes – the first of which took place the day before the French intervention began, transporting the first of Operation Sangaris's soldiers to the Central African Republic. The last of these was made last week; the next round trip will be for soldiers taking part in EUFOR.

More broadly, the influential role our two countries play on the continent requires deeper cooperation. It was with this in mind that President Hollande and David Cameron took the decision at the last bilateral summit, on 31 January 2014, to create a strategic dialogue specifically dedicated to Africa.

Among other things, this dialogue recognizes that our two countries should perhaps look beyond a traditional approach whereby the UK alone is called on to take the lead in East Africa, with France having to restrict itself more naturally to the French-speaking western areas.

This, for example, is the case with the Sahel-Saharan strip. The report recently issued by the House of Commons Foreign Affairs Committee (*The UK's response to extremism and instability in North and West Africa*, March 2014) on the challenges in North and West Africa, draws conclusions along these lines.

## **VII/ European Union's role in Africa**

The challenges arising on the African continent threaten the security interests of all Europeans. Europeans must be united in confronting the terrorist threat, drugs and arms trafficking, migration problems and maritime piracy.

But our goal is still for Africans to eventually take charge of their own security.

So in order to prepare the future, the challenge of structuring, training and supporting the African armed forces is emerging as a priority.

In this area, the European Union has already proved its worth. We've witnessed this in Somalia, where the soldiers trained by the EUTM have made an essential contribution. We're also seeing it today in Mali. The theme of capacity building showed itself to be key at the latest EU-Africa summit, at the beginning of last month.

By combining political, economic, commercial, development, security and defence tools, the EU is developing a comprehensive approach and unique expertise in many areas: stepping up border controls, reforming its security sectors, training armed forces and police and combating piracy.

The European Union's successes in the Horn of Africa also owe a great deal to the EU's ability to activate a wide range of tools. This, incidentally, was one of the conclusions of the report issued by the House of Lords EU Sub-Committee for External Affairs in 2012 on combating piracy off the Somali coast.

Among the decisions taken at the December 2013 European Council, devoted to defence issues, very many central objectives first and foremost concern challenges in Africa. We must now put them into practice together. This is the task we're now vigorously dedicating ourselves to, because our two countries, within the European Union, are the most involved and most mobilized when it comes to all African issues./.