God's mercy in a time of misery

ACN offering help and hope in the Central African Republic



© Reuters

At St Paul's Church, Bangui, countless refugee families are receiving the love of Christ, including the children pictured here

Thanks to your charity, Aid to the Church in Need is helping thousands of displaced people – especially women and children – whose lives have been turned upside down by the violence assailing their homeland.

The exodus began when members of Séléka, a rebel militia group which seized power in the Central African Republic in March 2013, started a reign of terror: looting, raping, torching homes, and murdering innocent civilians. Christians in particular were targeted by militant Islamist units within the militia.

Bishop Juan-José Aguirre of Bangassou told ACN how the Church was in Séléka's sights. After attacking priests and Sisters in his diocese, **"they went into the chapels and stacked the pews up to set fire to them. They then broke open the tabernacle and took the consecrated hosts..."** Churches and chapels were razed by fire (See back page for more details).

Although Séléka was formally disbanded in September 2013, its 25,000 members continued to carry out atrocities, and the formation of anti-Balaka (literally meaning "anti-machette") militias opposing ex-Séléka soldiers intensified the crisis, leading to more than 1,000 deaths in December 2013.

With more than a million people displaced, ACN is coming to the aid of our suffering brothers and sisters with food, medicine and other essentials in the areas most directly affected.

The press has described the conflict as sectarian but Archbishop Dieudonné Nzpalainga of Bangui has stated that this is inaccurate:

"The media made shortcuts to say it was Christians versus Muslims, but when you hand out microphones to these people they never say they do it for religious reasons. They are warlords and have no respect for authority..."

(See inside for more details).



Quotation from a 2014 interview by The Catholic Herald.

Helping the suffering Church today

Aid to the Church in Need Malta

They are being tested in Faith,
we are being tested in Love

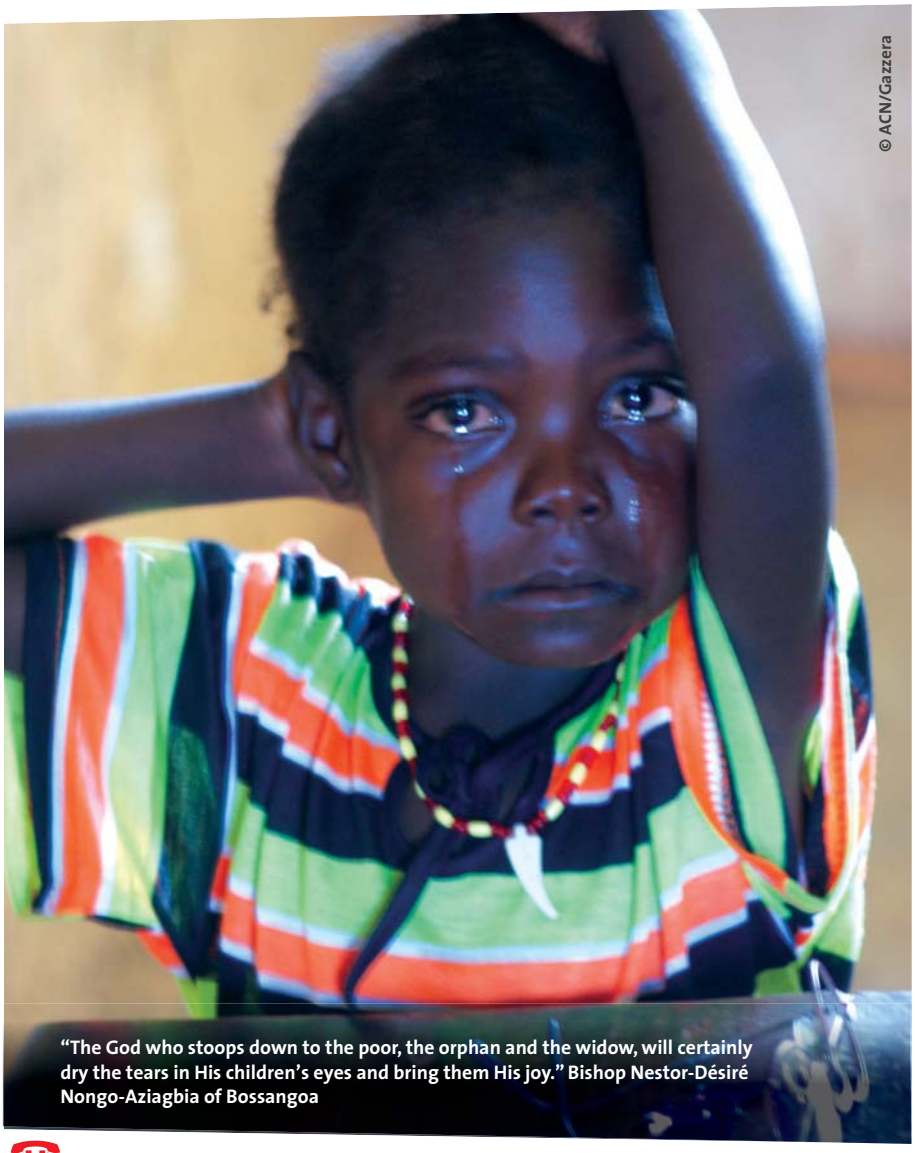
Food, shelter, medicine and clothing were provided by ACN for those fleeing their homes in December 2013, as they sought sanctuary with the Church following militia attacks.

The grant of £80,000, helping those driven from their villages, came as part of a package of more than £350,000 for projects in the country throughout 2013.

ACN's support for the displaced came in addition to our ongoing commitment to the formation of priests and Sisters, and pastoral activities in the country.

We cannot give specific details about our emergency aid, as bishops in the country requested that we do not publicise where it is going, because ex-members of Séléka have targeted priests and religious communities that they know have received assistance from abroad.

But the Church is grateful for your support. Bishop Edouard Mathos of Bambari told ACN: **"Please be assured of our prayers for all the benefactors, who do not cease to show their concern for us – and above all in these moments of grave trials, through which the depth of our faith is also tested."**



© ACN/Gazzera

"The God who stoops down to the poor, the orphan and the widow, will certainly dry the tears in His children's eyes and bring them His joy." Bishop Nestor-Désiré Nongo-Aziagbia of Bossangoa



"Suddenly th
people at th

Pope Francis compared the Church to a "field hospital". In the Central African Republic this is a reality, as thousands have sought shelter in the mission stations and monasteries.

The Carmelite monastery in the capital Bangui has become a refugee camp. Usually the monastery is a place of silence: now the cries of hundreds of children can be heard day and night.

Fr Federico Trinchero, the 35-year-old Carmelite Prior, told ACN how more than two thousand people sought sanctuary there at the end of 2013.

"On Friday morning we had celebrated Holy Mass for the many people who had been killed in the recent days. Just as I was preparing breakfast I was called to the gate.

Any kind gift you give will support these and other similar project



ACN was told that Séléka killed their father just a few days before we visited – now their mother has to care for seven small children on her own. Many families like this are seeking sanctuary with the Church.

ere were two thousand e door"

Standing there were masses of people who had fled to us. We took them in with open arms."

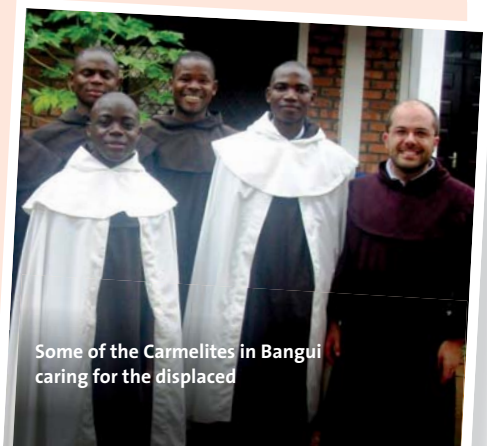
"I counted the people discreetly so that no-one would think we wouldn't be able to find room for them. But it was clear to us that we could provide for the people, at the most, for one more day. We weren't able to leave the monastery to buy food since it was too dangerous out there."

Fortunately Yousuf, a Muslim friend of the monastery who runs a nearby chicken farm, brought them the eggs he was unable to sell at market that morning, as well as rice, a sack of sugar and a vat of oil. They made pancakes for the smallest children – they found themselves caring for 800 children under twelve.

Fr Federico continued, "We celebrated morning Mass outside [the following day] so as not to awaken the 350 children sleeping in the chapel. Two of them were even lying under the altar."

The Carmelites continue to pray the Liturgy of the Hours, the daily round of prayer to God. As the Fathers sang the words of the psalm: **"He will defend the afflicted among the people and save the children of the needy"**, the cries of the little children blended into their singing.

Please keep all the Central African Republic's displaced children in your prayers. ●



Some of the Carmelites in Bangui caring for the displaced



Several militia units, including Jihadist ones, merged in 2012 forming Séléka

Contrary to media reports…

In December 2013, anti-balaka militia men were believed to be responsible for a savage "revenge attack" on the Peul ethnic group in Boali, about 60 miles (95 km) from the capital Bangui.

Members of predominantly Muslim Peul had been accused of aiding several Séléka assaults on Christian and Animist homes. The BBC and other news sources described anti-balaka as a "Christian militia" and spoke of "sectarian violence".

But a statement from the Bishops' Conference in January 2014 rejected this assessment: "We do not accept the generalisations which present the anti-balaka as a Christian militia… we reiterate that not all the anti-balaka are Christians and that not all the Christians are anti-balaka. It is the same thing with the ex-Séléka and the Muslims.

"The inaccurate language which equates the anti-balaka with a Christian militia has to be corrected. This generalisation, propagated by the national and international media, leads people to attribute a sectarian character to a crisis that is above all political and military."

While the majority of those seeking help from Church-led programmes are Christians, people of other faiths are benefiting too. One Carmelite missionary described how Muslims forced to flee their homes have also received Church aid. The priest said: **"We have no issues with Muslims, nor Peuls. Our doors are open to anyone in need."** ●

www.acnuk.org/centralafricanrepublic



After a Séléka attack, brick houses lie ruined and abandoned, and straw buildings have become little more than charred earth

Suffering in the name of Christ

Bishop Aguirre – who spent decades working in the country as a missionary – tends to his flock

I found only chaos. The people were fleeing as best they could. Whole families fled to the Congo [just over the border].

This is what Bishop Juan-José Aguirre of Bangassou told Aid to the Church in Need when he gave a first-hand description of an attack in his diocese, in the south-east of the Central African Republic.

People were executed [by militia members] after summary trials; there were rapes, robbery and the systematic looting of the mission stations. These are proper acts of war…

About 400 houses were set fire to and nine people killed. At least 50% of the goods of the diocese were stolen. They took our vehicles. Now we have to go on foot. I go everywhere on foot with my rucksack. The children's clinic, the internet centre, the pharmacy and the garage were set on fire...

At least three churches were looted and even profaned. First they tried to attack the priests and the Sisters, and these had to flee. Then they went into the chapels and stacked the pews up to set fire to them. They then broke open the tabernacle and took the consecrated hosts… Catholic churches and Protestant chapels made of straw were also set on fire. There is a violent hostility towards the Catholic Church.

We try to work, speak and pray – and we also try to laugh so that our faith remains firm, with the example of Calvary and following the example of the Apostles. We see how they [Apostles] preach, smile and are satisfied with such courage and how they regard it as an honour to have suffered such blows in the name of Christ.

All Across Africa

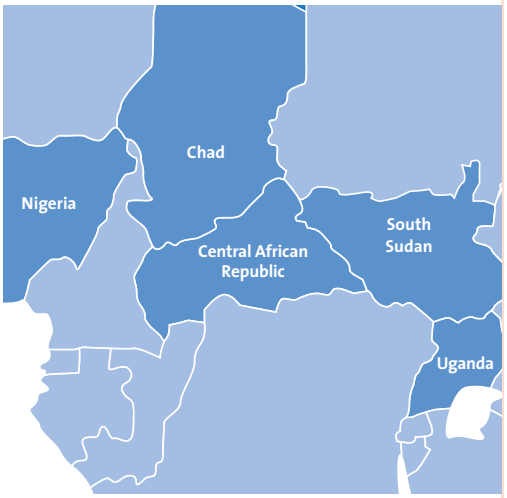
Throughout the continent ACN is helping wherever the Church is suffering.

As conflict rages in **South Sudan** between government and rebel forces, ACN is providing security fences for Catholic compounds, such as Wulu mission station, to keep churches and chapels safe.

At St Augustine's Seminary, **Nigeria**, the charity is helping its 327 seminarians complete their studies for the priesthood. The young men are committed to following their vocation – even though Islamist extremists set fire to the monastery next door and tried to overrun the seminary itself.

In **Chad**, villages become inaccessible in the rainy season, leaving the faithful without pastoral care for months. But thanks to your generosity, ACN helped the Lazarist Fathers buy an off-road vehicle, allowing all-year-round pastoral care.

And after the devastation of **Uganda's** civil war, 11 Sisters of the Missionary Institute of Mary, Mother of the Church, started working in places where there are no doctors or nurses. Your love meant ACN could provide £12,000 to repair their decaying hospital – and these are just a few of the hundreds of projects being supported across Africa.



Aid to the Church in Need Malta
39B, Mdina Road, Attard ATD 9038
Malta Tel:21487818
Facebook: Aid to the Church in Need Malta

Aid to the Church in Need Malta