

PROCMURA *Newsletter*

ISSUE NO: 001/2014

The General Adviser's Reflection (contd...)

POLITICISATION OF RELIGION AND RELIGIONISATION OF POLITICS: A CHALLENGE FOR PEACE IN AFRICA (Part One).

The situation in the Central African Republic (CAR) where the Anti-Balaka ("anti-machete" or "anti-sword" in the local Sango language) militia who are largely non-Muslim and therefore labelled Christian are attacking Séléka ("Coalition" in Sango) Rebels labelled Muslim and the actual Muslim communities has caught the world's attention.

PROCMURA has been inundated with phone calls and emails seeking to understand whether what is happening in the CAR is a religious war. Some ask bluntly: "Is it a Christian war against Muslims?" We have, from the PROCMURA's perspective, always tried to explain that the situation in that country is as a result of the politicisation of religion and the religionisation of politics.

As an organisation dedicated to Christian constructive engagement with Muslims for peace and peaceful co-existence, it was always clear to us that when the Séléka Rebels leader Michel Djotodia (a Muslim by religion) recruited mercenaries from Chad and Sudan (who by religion were also Muslims), to fight alongside with him, the conflict was going to assume a religious label.

True to this, François Bozizé, the former president (himself a Christian) of the CAR in his determination to ward off the rebel attack played the religious card when he made it clear to the majority Christian population that Muslim forces were coming to take over the country.

In its modest attempt to stop religion being misused in the conflict, PROCMURA in January 2013, rallied Christian and Muslim religious leaders of the French-speaking countries of Central and West Africa to issue an appeal to the two factions (government and rebels) to make peace so as to prevent mayhem in the country. Read the Maroua message of peace in the Central African Republic on this link <http://procmura-prica.org/en/p=1916>

When the appeal was not heeded to, and Michel Djotodia took power by force of arms the perception of some none Muslims (especially Christians) was that the Muslims had taken over the country. On the other hand some of the Muslims perception was that it was now their time to rule the country. As these sentiments were openly being expressed, Christian and Muslim religious leaders who were deeply concerned about the polarisation of society along religious lines invited PROCMURA to intervene.

The General Adviser of PROCMURA went to the country and met with Christian and Muslim religious leaders as well as political leaders of the then new government, and laid bare to them the consequences ahead if they failed to unite and reconcile the country. Read the Bangui Briefing on <http://procmura-prica.org/en/?p=2278> and Bangui Report on <http://procmura-prica.org/en/?p=2213>.

These attempts by PROCMURA did not yield the desired results. Religion had been politicised and politics had been religionised, thus creating the mayhem we had tried to prevent.

The situation in the Central African Republic has important lessons for African political and religious leaders and may be political and religious leaders elsewhere. The lessons are simple and straight forward. Do not ever try to politicise religion or religionise politics. If you do, the consequences will be far reaching. Distant and recent history provides such lessons for the present and for posterity.

Johnson A. Mbillah
General Adviser