



3 February 2014 – Given that the CAR hostilities have been characterized as a conflict between Muslims and Christians, it might seem odd that an archbishop and an imam join forces – but two men have brushed away such notions and now make an impressive double act.

The Central African Republic's (CAR) two most prominent religious leaders arrived in London this week to raise awareness of the catastrophic events in their country and to rally support for a more active international engagement in the crisis.

The two men, Archbishop Dieudonne Nzapalainga and Imam Omar Kabine Layama, are old friends. Since the crisis began in December 2012, they have been working together to create an inter-faith “platform”, with the help of a protestant pastor who was unable to join them on their current trip.

“Their reasons for fighting [are] not religious,” Nzapalainga said at a meeting organized by Chatham House, referring to the anti-balaka militia forces. “They are not fighting for the cross or the church or the bible.”

The anti-balaka are fighting against members of the officially disbanded, though still active, Seleka, a mainly Muslim rebel group that overthrew president Francois Bozizé in March 2013. Scores were killed when clashes between the groups erupted in the capital, Bangui, on 5 December 2013.

Explaining why the anti-balaka came to target their Muslim neighbours, the archbishop said that when the Seleka started their rebellion in the northeast in late 2012, they recruited mercenaries from Sudan and Chad. These men did not speak French or Sango, CAR's national languages, only Arabic, so they relied on local Arabic-speaking communities for support and they shared their booty with them. These local Muslims came to be seen as complicit in what the Seleka fighters were doing.

Imam Layama agreed, and emphasized that at the root of the conflict was greed for CAR's natural resources. "Our riches have attracted greed. Politicians use this wealth to get into power, so there are lots of mercenaries in the country, occupying the mining areas. And because there is no state, smuggling is going on with complete impunity. If security is not restored, the country will be stripped bare." Politics, he added, was also part of the toxic mix.

Now, the archbishop and the imam are trying to bring the [divided communities](#) back together. They are appealing for funds to create inter-faith schools, where young people will grow up together, inter-faith hospitals that will treat everyone regardless of their origins, and a radio station that will preach peace, with a transmitter that can broadcast to whole country, not just the areas around Bangui.

For Nzapalainga, the only satisfactory solution is a UN force. "We don't want this just to be seen as an African problem," he said. "In view of the scale of destruction, we want every country to help. We are part of the family of nations, so when something this serious is going on in our country, other people, too, need to stand up and say no to this kind of barbarity."

Layama agreed: "The Central African Republic is huge, and our borders with Chad, Sudan and the [Democratic Republic of] Congo are completely porous. The CAR is a powder keg, and only the UN can cope with the [scale](#) of the conflict. They would have to deal with the drug smuggling, and the [arms](#) smuggling that's going on. That's the only way we are going to get a lasting solution."

Source: [IRIN News](#)

*UNRIC's library backgrounder on CAR:* <http://www.unric.org/en/unric-library/28899>