



## Protection Analysis

### Nana Gribizi Prefecture: Kaga Bandoro – Ouandago Axis

August 2007

#### Report Highlights:

- Possible displacement to villages controlled by non-state actors due to fear of *coupeurs de route*
- Continued high incidence of rape
- Verbal threats from armed groups toward women in response to programming for survivors
- Slight increase in number of male survivors of sexual violence
- Demand for double payment of school fees from previously enrolled secondary school students
- Continued demand for “taxes” from IDPs moving to and from Kaga Bandoro town
- Armed actors “sensitizing” civilians to exit the bush and return to villages
- Request from non-state actor leadership for human rights training for new elements

#### I. Context

As foreseen in the July analysis, relations between the APRD and the FDPC deteriorated further in August, a situation that culminated in the overthrow of the Ouandago-based FDPC. In addition to this significant shift on context on the Ouandago axis, civilians remained uneasy as a result of FOMUC movements and the expected increase in *coupeurs de route* presence during the approaching dry season. Population movements between villages, fields and the bush were frequent, as in previous months, making access to services difficult and increasing the risk of exposure to injury, disease and physical or sexual violence.

In the very early part of the month, the APRD made attempts to expand its territory in both directions along the axis, both toward Ouandago and slightly closer to Kaga Bandoro town. In this same period a number of soldiers changed affiliation from the FDPC to the APRD. FDPC leadership sought to downplay the significance of these movements, but they were outwardly nervous and edgy. Among the civilian population, there was talk of a split based partly on ethnicity, with Central Africans aligning with the APRD and Chadians staying linked to the FDPC.

The APRD maneuvering in early August was not only a military expansion, but included meetings between village chiefs and the APRD commander. The commander said the civilian population expressly asked him to push the FDPC out of the area; civilians said they preferred the APRD due to the greater severity of the FDPC.<sup>1</sup>

On the morning of Aug. 16<sup>th</sup>, large numbers of heavily armed APRD elements were seen moving toward Ouandago. The APRD reportedly encircled the FDPC commander in the marketplace, and shot and killed him, after which a battle between the two groups ensued. A number of FDPC

<sup>1</sup> In the aftermath of the APRD attack on Ouandago, village chiefs from the area have been more open with the IRC about rights abuses under the FDPC. The chiefs said that the FDPC controlled food prices in the Ouandago market, and appropriated the majority of plastic sheeting distributed to civilians by UNICEF and the IRC. The chiefs said they did not share this information previously due to fear of repercussions from the FDPC.

elements were reportedly taken prisoner by the APRD, while others retreated toward Farazala, on the way to Kabo.<sup>2</sup> (Eight days after the battle in Ouandago, the APRD started a push on Farazala and later took the town. The few remaining FDPC elements retreated further toward Kabo.)

Two civilians were wounded during the mid-August fighting in Ouandago—one woman from the market, and one man who sought to hide in the bush and was allegedly shot by the FDPC. Both of the wounded were evacuated off the axis by the IRC the following day. The woman was treated in the Kaga Bandoro hospital; the man had serious injuries and was evacuated to Bangui for further treatment. Another woman suffered a gunshot injury during the fighting in and around Farazala on Aug. 24<sup>th</sup>; she was evacuated to Kabo by MSF.

The presence of FOMUC on the Kaga Bandoro – Ouandago axis has continued sporadically, for the most part with very short missions that sometimes do not even surpass the town limits. The tendency of FOMUC soldiers to stop at some point on the road, descend from their vehicles and fire their guns randomly into the bush persisted in August (see section on FOMUC patrols, below).

While there was no *coupeurs de route* presence reported on the Kaga Bandoro – Ouandago axis in August, an increase was noted on almost all of the axes north of Ouandago. This was linked largely to the reduced presence of the FDPC in the early part of the month (a majority of FDPC elements were called back to Ouandago due to the tensions with the APRD), and the absence of any other significant armed presence on several of these axes later in the month. The *coupeurs de route* presence is also seasonal, in that increases are typically seen during the dry season (see section on *coupeurs de route*, below).

Fear linked to *coupeurs de route* and FOMUC patrols continues to create anxiety and instability for the civilian population. Nonetheless, displaced civilians made tentative moves back toward their villages in many areas along the Kaga Bandoro – Ouandago axis during the month of August. This is, at least in part, a security measure due to the anticipated rise in *coupeurs de route*; but some civilians and village chiefs also express a wish to prepare for a phase of rebuilding when materials are again available during the dry season.

Meanwhile, for civilians the real impact of the APRD's expanded area of control remains to be seen. Village chiefs as well as civilians in areas previously under FDPC control have been vocal in their preference for the new force, but violence against women and violations of freedom of movement persist as key protection concerns.

## II. Key protection concerns in August

### ***Violence and instability related to coupeurs de route***

- Possible displacement to villages controlled by non-state actors due to fear of *coupeurs de route*

The temporary move of IDPs back to their villages in response to *coupeurs de route*, seen in late June and July, repeated in August as civilians expressed more concern about the coming dry season. In particular, in a village called Goudava, 22 kilometers north of Ouandago on the Takara axis, was targeted in what appeared to be a well-planned attack. Villagers said that a group of herders came to the village and set up makeshift homes, stayed for a week and familiarized themselves with the population and the village layout. The herders later moved on, only to return a few days later to attack the village, burn 29 homes and steal 24 heads of cattle. Villagers said the herders—or *coupeurs de route*—used this strategy to know what homes to target and where to find valuable goods or livestock.

<sup>2</sup> The ICRC was able to follow up on the issue of prisoners taken during this battle.

In reaction to the attack on Goudava, civilians from the Takara axis said they would consider a large-scale movement into the Ouandago area. An influx of new population in Ouandago would mean another wave of people setting up provisional shelters using whatever materials they find available in the short-term.

Meanwhile, in villages along the Kaga Bandoro – Ouandago axis, some IDPs have been cleaning the area of their old shelters and preparing to rebuild. This is more common between the villages of Patcho and Ouandago, where the APRD has put significant effort into “sensitizing” civilians to exit the bush. However, civilians say that it is also a response to fears of increased *coupeurs de route* in the fields as the dry season draws near and a perception of greater safety in villages patrolled by the APRD.

As noted in earlier months, the situation for IDPs remains unpredictable and tenuous; frequent shifts between the bush and the villages are likely to continue. This instability makes cultivation and harvest more difficult. At the same time, the heightened fear of *coupeurs de route* in late August kept some IDPs from other means of food collection such as hunting and fishing.

#### **Sexual violence**

- Continued high incidence of rape
- Verbal threats from armed actors toward women in response to programming for survivors

Sexual violence remains a primary protection concern in Nana Gribizi, with a total of 234 survivors reported in August. The large majority of cases involve women survivors, but there has been a small number of male survivors who have sought medical assistance as well.

Since the beginning of activities offering medical and psychosocial response for survivors, there has been some level of threat and intimidation from perpetrators and armed groups. This could be linked to fear of accusations and future legalistic actions, but seems to also be closely linked to commanders’ desire that humanitarian actors perceive the armed movements as legitimate providers of security.

In July, the APRD commander was heavily focused on investigating rumors that an unknown association or individual linked to the C.A.R. government was paying women to “register” as having been raped by non-state actors. The IRC carried out several conversations with the commander regarding this issue in August—explaining medical and psychosocial services available, emphasizing the importance of making services accessible, and encouraging the commander to support this by not engaging in threats or punitive actions.

While the intimidating rhetoric seems to have stopped at high levels within the APRD, there are still reports of threats made by armed actors, including a threat that rapes would be “redoubled” in response to survivors reporting and seeking treatment. Dialogue with armed actors on the topic of sexual violence was extremely difficult in August due to the rapid changes in context and problems of access related to security. The situation had calmed by the end of the month, and the IRC is making an ongoing effort to highlight the need for an unthreatening environment for survivors.

**Children and adolescents**

- Demand for double payment of school fees from previously enrolled secondary school students

Dominant issues for children and adolescents remain much the same as those outlined in the July analysis. The re-commencement of recreational activities and, eventually, formal education through the intervention of the IRC and UNICEF will, it is hoped, begin to provide some stability and positive outlet for this group.

For adolescents seeking to attend secondary school in Kaga Bandoro, a new concern arose in August. The Academic Inspection Center in Kaga Bandoro permitted students to enroll even in the absence of official identity papers (most of which were burned or lost during the original conflict and displacement); but students were also asked to pay enrollment fees of between 5,000 and 10,000 CFA, even if they were already registered and had paid this fee prior to the conflict. As a result, even with the prospect of finally being able to return to studies abandoned two years ago, secondary school students who were unable to pay were turned away.

**Violations of freedom of movement and freedom to choose residence**

- Continued demand for “taxes” from IDPs moving to and from Kaga Bandoro town
- Armed actors “sensitizing” civilians to exit the bush and return to villages
- Request from non-state actor leadership for human rights training for new elements

As highlighted in previous months, armed groups exact a “tax” from civilians as well as commercial vehicles traveling on the Kaga Bandoro – Ouandago axis. Civilians generally accept and hand over the “tax”—which can come in the form of money or food, or a promise of cigarettes, sugar and salt procured in the town—since they are afraid of punishment if they attempt refusal. This puts a palpable limit on movements for IDPs who do not have the means to pay.

In August, after taking control of Ouandago, the APRD commander initially held that it is his right to demand “taxes” from civilians and commercial vehicles, since his soldiers are responsible for guaranteeing security and clearing the area of *coupeurs de route*. The “tax” situation seemed more formalized for a short period, but this tactic then changed in the final days of the month.

The APRD commander held a meeting with village chiefs and civilians in Ouandago at the end of the month, during which he spoke about his force’s responsibility to “protect” the civilian population and to work toward “peace and development.” The commander also stated explicitly that APRD elements are *not* to claim any form of payment or “tax” on the roads. Any civilian asked for a payment, he said, should report directly to the commander so that punitive action can be taken. How this discussion does or does not impact freedom of movement remains to be seen in coming weeks. The APRD clearly wishes to build confidence among the population in previously FDPC-held territory, and has sought to publicly justify its move to push the FDPC out of the area. At the same time, it is worth noting that APRD captains and officers tell IRC that they are now more aware of the rights of civilians and know that they should not violate these rights.

Of related concern, were reports in August that as civilians harvest their fields, they are regularly approached by armed elements who “ask” for food. This is not described as blatantly violent or even threatening, but the fact that men with arms make the request has obvious implications. As in the case of the “tax,” refusing to provide food is not a consideration.

Freedom of choice of residence was also a concern in August, as the APRD continued to “sensitize” IDPs to leave the bush and return to their villages. This practice—a simple verbal campaign promising civilians that they will be safe and should reconstruct the villages—was most evident in the zones newly occupied by the APRD; but “sensitization” was also carried out in

Zando and areas closer to Kaga Bandoro, where the majority of civilians still choose to sleep in the bush.

Non-state actor leadership considers the “sensitization” part of its duty, to secure the villages, facilitate humanitarian access and bring about a return to normalcy. In the second half of August, however, soldiers along the axis were present in higher numbers; they do not always operate under the control of the same captains, opening up the potential for abuses of power. This seemed particularly true on the stretch of the axis between Kpokpo and Zando, perhaps because the attention of APRD leadership was focused on Ouandago and its surroundings. There was one positive sign at the end of the month, when an APRD captain who has participated in IRC Rule of Law activities specifically requested training for elements that are new to Nana Gribizi and are “too harsh” on civilians.

Following the seizure of Ouandago by APRD, many Muslim residents of Ouandago left the town and moved to Kabo. The chief of the predominantly Muslim village – Ouandago 4 – remains in Ouandago, but most villagers are not. The movement from Ouandago was motivated by fear of retribution: the FDPC was perceived to be more “Chadian,” while the APRD was more “Central African;” and the FDPC commanders were known to be familiar with the Muslim elders in Ouandago. Among other consequences, this displacement may prevent residents of Ouandago 4 from receiving NFI distributions for which they are registered.

***FOMUC patrols on the Kaga Bandoro – Ouandago axis***

- Indiscriminate fire during FOMUC patrols on the axis

During the first half of August, the Chadian-led FOMUC contingent conducted several patrols on Kaga Bandoro – Ouandago axis. FOMUC’s coordination of its movements had been inconsistent: not agreeing to see NGO or International Organization representatives who sought to plan movements with the FOMUC commander; telling NGO actors not to move on the axis because of planned FOMUC patrols, though no patrols took place; telling NGO actors that they were cleared to travel on the axis, then sending a patrol on the axis anyway. When patrols took place, FOMUC continued the practice of dismounting from vehicles and firing randomly into the bush. This pattern causes anxiety and resentment among civilians, who are wary of the sound of vehicles and remain in a state of constant readiness to flee into the bush if necessary. The FOMUC patrols, though heavily manned and armed, continued the practice of leading the patrol with a white pickup flying the yellow CEMAC flag. During one patrol in August, this caused a great deal of confusion among non-state actors, who have come to associate civilian vehicles flying flags with NGOs, and who identify the yellow flag with the IRC. The non-state soldiers believed that this was a FOMUC tactic to “trick” the them into complacency. In mid-August the FOMUC command passed from Chadian to Gabonese forces. The Gabonese forces have so far followed a more limited strategy than their predecessors, making more frequent patrols, but keeping their movements within a close radius of Kaga Bandoro town.