

Draft Speech for the UPR Pre-session

Good morning ambassadors and esteemed members of the Council. I represent the *Coordination des Organisations Musulmanes de Centrafrique* (COMUC), a coalition of more than sixty civil society actors representing hundreds of thousands of Central African Muslims. I have traveled from Bangui, the capital of the CAR to share with you the reality of the situation in my country.

The latest cycle of violence has created a degradation of living conditions in CAR. Armed groups continue to perpetrate grave human rights violations throughout the country. Over 1.2 million people remain displaced. More than two-thirds of children are unable to attend school. Access to healthcare remains abysmal, particularly outside the confines of Bangui. More than half of CAR's estimated 6.1 million people find themselves in dire need of humanitarian assistance. In short, the human rights situation in CAR is dire.

Much of this suffering is shared by all Central Africans. Yet even amidst these tremendous hardships, Muslims continue to be singled out for discriminatory treatment. In fact, I am here to report that religious discrimination has increased since CAR's last UPR cycle in 2018.

My presentation today is based primarily on findings from interviews and fieldwork conducted by COMUC over the past two years. We found that religious discrimination against Muslims takes many forms.

Perhaps the most pressing issue relates to the right to access identity documents. Muslim Central Africans reported numerous obstacles when applying for the *Carte nationale d'identité* (CNI), which is the main form of government ID. Interviewees reported that civil servants imposed illegal and discriminatory requirements, such as being asked to provide their father's birth certificate in addition to their own even though no such requirement exists in our laws. Muslims are also subjected to discriminatory and humiliating questioning, forced to pay bribes representing significant amounts, and falsely accused of being foreigners.

These obstacles can prevent Muslims from acquiring the ID documents necessary to access basic services. Many Muslim children cannot register for school because they are unable to procure a birth certificate. It is often dangerous to move around the country outside of Bangui, and any Central African who lacks a CNI faces an additional risk of harassment, arbitrary detention, and other discriminatory treatment when passing government checkpoints.

In this context, the recent constitutional referendum should raise alarm bells among the international community. Central Africans were not involved during the process and were not able to examine, understand, and debate the changes. Certain provisions of the new constitution present an important risk to lead to further violations of human rights, especially for the Muslim population. In particular, they risk making it even more difficult for Muslims to access identity documents and assume high civil and military functions.

Another issue we found in our research relates to accessing public services. Interviewees told us that anti-Muslim discrimination often prevents them from accessing education and healthcare. Interviewees reported numerous instances of administrators and teachers threatening and

insulting Muslim schoolchildren. In several cases, administrators withheld diplomas from Muslim pupils for months or even years, sometimes demanding the student pay a fee to receive a certificate that should be entirely free.

Interviewees likewise reported being forced to pay bribes to access medical treatment, even during emergencies. Female interviewees reported that the discriminatory abuse they faced was often so severe that pregnant Muslims sometimes feel they cannot safely visit a hospital or access any state-funded medical care during childbirth.

Finally, our research indicates that Muslims are disproportionately targeted for arbitrary detention, torture, enforced disappearance, and extrajudicial killing. Alarming, MINUSCA and OHCHR reported an increase in the profiling of Muslims—who are often falsely accused of being members of or accomplices to armed groups—since the government imposed a state of emergency in January 2021. Our research corroborates this conclusion. Many interviewees perceived that they and others had been targeted for detention because of their Muslim or Peuhl identities.

Muslims belong in CAR. Our families have lived here for generations, contributing to the social, cultural, political and economic life of the country. Yet some treat us as “foreigners” and attempt to deny us our most fundamental rights. The rampant discrimination must be addressed before CAR can begin to heal from its long ordeal.

COMUC calls on countries to urge the Government of CAR to take steps to end religious discrimination. The Government should:

1. Ensure equal access to national identity cards (CNIs).
2. Improve the quality of public services such as health and education through adequate budgetary allocations.
3. Investigate and prosecute all instances of extrajudicial killings, arbitrary detentions, and torture of Muslims in line with international human rights standards.

We dream of a more inclusive Central African Republic.