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AFRICA/CENTRAL AFRICA - Rebels flee Birao; uncertainty about the humanitarian situation

Bangui (Agenzia Fides) - “Communications with the area of Birao are very difficult because the mobile and fixed telephone network is blown, but from the scant information we have received the city has been evacuated by the CPJP rebels” Fides was told by Bishop Firmin Gbagoua, Vicar General of the Diocese of Bambari, having jurisdiction over the prefecture of Vakaga (in the north-eastern Central African Republic), whose capital, Birao, was attacked by rebels of the “Convention des Patriotes pour la Justice et la Paix” (CPJP) (see Fides 29/11/2010).

“In recent days the army blocked all major roads leading to Birao. Then the city was bombed. The rebels suffered losses and several of the CPJP men were taken prisoner by the army. The rest of the rebel group fled. Many of the inhabitants of Birao are still in the forest, where they had fled to escape the bombing and fighting.” A spokesman for the CPJP confirmed that the rebels have fled the city.

According to press reports, the majority of military action against the CPJP rebels was conducted by the army of neighbouring Chad, formally intervening in Central African territory to chase a group of Chadian rebels. Chadian planes would have attacked the position of the CPJP in Birao.

Unlike some Central African rebel groups, the CPJP did not sign peace agreements with the government in Bangui. The leader of the CPJP, Charles Massi, a former Central African Minister, died in January 2010 under unclear circumstances while he was detained in a Central African Prison. Massi was arrested in Chad and then transferred to Central Africa. The rebels claim that they will not lay down their arms until light has been shed on the death of their leader. The area operated by the CPJP is located in the north-east of Central Africa, between Birao and Ndélé.

On 23 January 2011 the Central African presidential elections will be held. The candidates are the current President Francois Bozizé; his predecessor, Ange-Félix Patassé; the head of the People's Army for the Restoration of Democracy; Jean-Jacques Demafouth, President of the Central African Congress for the Renaissance; Justin Innocent Wilité; the economist Emile Gros Raymond Nakombo; and the President of the Movement for the Liberation of the Central African People, Martin Ziguelé. (LM) (Agenzia Fides 01/12/2010)

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