



AFRICA/CENTRAL AFRICA – Are the Anti Balaka really a "Christian militia"?

Bangui (Agenzia Fides) - The clashes between former Seleka rebels and anti Balaka militia (anti machete in mandja language) that are ravaging the Central African Republic are often described as "interfaith", being that the Seleka are Muslims and the anti Balaka Christians. The reality is more complex, because not all members of Seleka are Muslims and above all the majority of the anti Balaka militia are not Christians. These militias existed before the seizure of power of the coalition Seleka in March 2013. According to a survey published by the newspaper Ouest France, which interviewed a member of the anti Balaka, self-defense groups were created in the north of the Country at the instigation of former President Bozizé (overthrown in March 2013) to protect the people from bandits raging in the region.

"Before the anti Balaka fought street bandits because the police and the army were incapable of fighting them", explains Fr. Jean Marius Toussaint Zoumalde, a Capuchin of the convent in Saint-Laurent in Bouar (north-west). According to the Capuchin most of the members of these militias "are animists, not Christians. Their marabouts give them amulets (gri -gris) to protect them from bullets. They are young people who for years have protected their villages and their territories".

The anti Balaka are present in all communities whether they are animists, Christians or Muslims. But most of them are animists.

In recent months, the self-defense militias were joined by supporters of ousted President Bozizé and former soldiers in the Central African armed forces who had fled before the advancing of Seleka. Among the various components of the anti Balaka, however, tensions arose. In particular young militiamen blame the former military of abandoning them to the mercy of the rebels in all these months. (L.M.) (Agenzia Fides 27/01/2014)