Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
God's work. Our hands.

December 19, 2013

The Honorable John Kerry
Secretary of State
U.S. Department of State
Washington, DC 20520

Dear Mr. Secretary,

Our church, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, is very concerned about the grave state of human insecurity in the Central African Republic. A senior official of the Economic Community of Central African States has said the current circumstances of the Central African Republic (C.A.R.) constitute "a failed State headed by a fragile transitional Government". Abject poverty, clan-based disputes, a series of coups d'état, resultant lawlessness and a sharp escalation of the number of killings, rapes and other human rights abuses have led to a state of extreme human insecurity in the C.A.R. Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs Robert Jackson last month described the situation as "pre-genocidal". Our faith motivates us to manifest that love through care for the neighbor. Therefore, we ask you to continue and intensify the current U.S. response to the needs of the people in the C.A.R.

Rev. André Golike of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in the Central African Republic, (ELC-CAR), recently reported that while his church has sustained the loss of many lives and property over the past decade due to banditry and attacks by various groups, there has been a sharp increase in these incidents in the past year and especially in last six months. The situation has become so dire that many people have fled their villages and are living in the bush because of armed gangs running rampant throughout the country. According to the World Food Programme, more than a million people are at risk of going hungry.

President Golike and the leading Catholic and Muslim leaders in the C.A.R. are working tirelessly to respond to the basic needs of the people and are also urging their respective religious communities, which have been peacefully living side by side for many years, not to resort to violence and join armed groups who wish to exploit religious and other differences for their own purposes.

Believing that all persons are created in the image of God and that God's love for all people has been expressed in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, we will continue to raise awareness of the situation among our members and continue to assist those in need through the ELC-CAR and The Lutheran World Federation.

We applaud steps already taken by the U.S. government, as part of an urgent response by the international community. The help extended to the people of the C.A.R., by the other nations of Africa and the United Nations is a necessary part of ensuring an end to the violence. By providing urgent humanitarian assistance to those in need, especially vulnerable groups, inside the C.A.R. as well as to refugees in neighboring countries, there is at least some hope that the rule of law can be restored.

Mr. Secretary, we urge you and our elected officials to continue the aid measures in the C.A.R., support the efforts of religious leaders to prevent violence and promote peace and harmony among their communities and restore order. We are especially grateful for the visit this week of U.S. Ambassador to the U.N. Samantha Power to the C.A.R.

Recently, the United Nations Security Council authorized an augmentation of the number of African peacekeeping forces which, with the help of additional troops from France, are taking action toward stabilizing the country. Given the pervasive anarchy in the C.A.R., increasing the number of peacekeepers is an imperative.

In the longer term, we support calls from religious leaders in the C.A.R. for the organization of credible free and democratic elections, including the creation of an independent electoral commission with adequate resources, and provision for independent foreign observers. Also, we endorse their call for an end to impunity in the C.A.R.

Mr. Secretary, please know that we appreciate and commend the efforts of you and your colleagues to address the crisis in the C.A.R. with sustained humanitarian, peace-making and diplomatic measures.

Sincerely,

The Rev. Elizabeth Eaton
Presiding Bishop

The Rev. Mark Narum, Bishop
Western North Dakota Synod

The Rev. William Rindy, Bishop
Eastern North Dakota Synod

The Rev. Michael Rinehart, Bishop
Texas-Louisiana Gulf Coast Synod

cc: H.E. Samantha Power, U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations
The Honorable Christopher H. Smith, chair, House Subcommittee on Africa, Global Health, Global Human Rights, and International Organizations Subcommittee
The Honorable Karen Bass, ranking member, House Subcommittee on Africa, Global Health, Global Human Rights, and International Organizations Subcommittee
The Honorable Chris Coons, chair, Senate Subcommittee on African Affairs
The Honorable Jeff Flake, ranking member, Senate Subcommittee on African Affairs
Mr. Robert Jackson, Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs