CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC: RE-OPENING THE BRIDGE OF DEATH

In the midst of violent conflict in Central African Republic, youths from opposing sides come together for the future of the country’s children.

VIDEO

BARBED WIRE – PEOPLE RUNNING IN FEAR CROSSING THE BRIDGE

LUDOVIC BIENVENU, (in French)
“During the crisis, you risked being killed whenever you crossed. They were decapitating people and playing football with the heads…. (11”)

LUDOVIC BIENVENU, ON CAM

…During the crisis, this bridge became the bridge of death” (4”)

AUDIO

CONFLICT FOOTAGE

NARRATION
The Central African Republic – a country wracked, during decades, with religious conflict … innocent civilians, as in all wars, caught in the crossfire. (13”)

When sectarian violence pitting Moslems against Christians again erupted in 2012, thousands were killed and many more fled their homes moving to the relative safety zones defined by their religion. (13”)

CLOSED DOWN SCHOOLS
Due to the violence, more than half the schools closed – including Yakite School, one of the few schools in the capital Bangui, where once Christian and Moslem children studied together. The only access route to the school from the two communities, was over the now-disputed Yakite Bridge. (19”)

Ludovic Bienvenu, a Christian local youth leader, explains how the bridge between the two communities became a frontline between warring factions. (9”)

“So during the crisis, this bridge was considered to be a blood-red bridge. Nobody could cross. Even the government and the security forces - no one would cross that bridge.” (18”)

And especially not children! (2”)

Local self-defence groups formed to try to protect passage over the bridge for their own communities. Ibrahim Abdel Rahman, a Moslem, was in one on them. (10”)
IBRAHIM ABDEL RAHMAN, (In French)

“When we started, Yakite Bridge was already deserted. You didn’t see little girls or little boys – you didn’t see anyone. There was just us, the youth. At that time we didn’t have weapons. We defended ourselves with machetes. We only defended. “ (21”)

NARRATION

Meanwhile, the school stayed shut. (2.5”)

In 2014, a United Nations peacekeeping mission had arrived. (5”)

And in October, 2016, local leaders joined forces with United Nations peacekeepers, to encourage the militia groups to disarm and for the bridge to re-open…… Ludovic took part, meeting Ibrahim face to face. (18”)

PASTOR JEAN-PIERRE GAUTIER, (in French)

"Dialogue is very important. In our conversations, we said that we had had enough of the violence, enough of the crimes and the killings. It is now a question of moving towards peace. It was in this sense that we were motivated on both sides to forgive, to overcome a number of things and to give our hand for the reopening of the Yakite school. (30”)
LUDOVIC BIENVENU, (in French)

“With my peers, we decided to develop action for the reopening of the schools.....
Our children will be our next generation of tomorrow. It's up to us to prepare their way.”
(20”)

IBRAHIM ABDEL RAHMAN, (in French)

“We decided with our young peers on the other side, to inform the children and especially their parents, that they could go back to school.”
(11”)

FATOU KEITA, (in French)

“The role of the project “Youth at Risk” is to show the public that, in fact, these disadvantaged youth, these youth that are set apart are in reality key players in the process of rebuilding the national government, which is the mandate of the Central African government ”. (21”)

LUDOVIC BIENVENU, (in French)

“I am not qualified to negotiate with someone who carries a gun, so we developed a strategy to spread the message of peace from one assailant to another, little by little, by word of mouth. “ (20”)
In January 2017, Yakite School reopened its doors. For the first time in many years, Moslem and Christian children were, once again, side by side. (12’)

It was a collective initiative. We had to find a solution. We couldn’t live like this forever. I talked about it with my colleagues and my friends. We decided to stop everything. There is a moment for barbarism and a moment for peace as well. “ (21”)

Step by step, young people from both sides took initiatives. And we slowly managed to liberate this bridge until people could cross again. Before, the bridge was nothing special for us, but since the crisis, we want to make it a symbol, a bridge for peace. “ (21”)