Report on the trip to the Central African Republic from October 1 to October 20, 2021

Mathias Monzebe

On October 1, 2021, I flew to the Central African Republic to further our joint association work and to visit my family. Due to the Corona Pandemic, I was not able to complete my visit last year as usual.

With members of our partner association we bought eight beds with mattresses in Bangui on 03.10., which we took to the infirmary in Bagandou. On 06 October the meetings with so many people began that I cannot mention them all. Especially important to me were the meetings with the women's groups that have already been working with our support for a long time. These are currently three groups in Bagandou and one group in Bangui, the capital of the country.

The women's groups in Bagandou and in Bangui

An important event was the handing over ceremony of material for the schools, the youth center and the hospital on 07 October. About 200 people were present, including the Deputy Mayor, the Chief of Police of the Prefecture and the Police Commissioner of Bagandou.

With great joy, the beds with mattresses, school supplies and footballs equipment were received. My speech was enthusiastically received. Especially important to the people is our fountain construction project, which will make their lives easier in the future.

Handover ceremony in Bagandou on 07 October 2021

I had interesting conversations with young people in our youth center. They told me how they use the center. But they also talked about their problems and about their future. They wish to stay in their homeland. But in order to do so, it must be ensured that they find a job that will provide a living for them and their future families. At this point, I realized how great the difficulties are. Our activities give them a bit of hope.

The conversations with the employees of the hospital were similar. They work under very complicated conditions. The head of the ward, a nurse, is the only one who receives a fixed salary. All the others are paid by the municipality, which equals about 27.50€ at the end of the month. In addition, there are working conditions that can hardly be described. The fountain that is to be built will bring significant progress for the hospital. The work of these people diserve great respect from me. I realized that our

work can only be a drop in the bucket. Nevertheless, it is important because it gives people hope.

Teachers, the representatives of the Municipality and the Hospital Staff

It was moving to talk to the so-called parent-teachers. These are the teachers whose salaries are paid by our association. They spoke of the joy they feel in being able to work in their profession. These teachers are aware of the value of their work. They teach children who otherwise would not have access to education. In doing so, they deal with problems that are almost impossible to describe. They fight to ensure that girls have the same opportunities as boys. They talk to parents about the fact that the children's work at home must not restrict their school attendance. The children enjoy coming to school and are eager to learn. I was pleased to see the progress, which is also due to the work of our association.

In Bangui, the capital, there is a university with about 12,000 students, although the university only has a capacity for about 900 students. As a result, each student can attend the university only once a week. The university also works on Sundays. There are no computers there. One of the professors uses his private computer in class. The students have to pay for a beamer, which the university has to borrow. Therefore, the joy was great when we handed over a beamer and two laptops to the university. Actually, this was not planned at all. But when I heard about the conditions at the university, I changed my plan. The laptops and the beamer were actually intended for our youth center in Bagandou.

Handing over ceremony of two computers and a beamer to the University of Bangui on October 14, 2021

It is well known that in every country the national cultural heritage is preserved, appreciated and promoted. In a conversation with two dedicated cultural representatives, I learned that the national cultural heritage of the ethnic groups of the Central African Republic is at risk. Old traditions, such as dances and typical instruments, are despised by religious representatives and presented as primitive. It will take great efforts to make everyone aware of the great value of this culture. I have great respect for the work of the people who are working to preserve these great national treasures.

It is important to mention the interest of the media in our work. Central African Television conducted a 30-minute interview with me, which was broadcast twice on the evening of October 12. The handover ceremony at the university was recorded by Radio Centrafrique and later broadcast. In addition, the national radio station conducted a 42-minute interview with me that was broadcast the following Saturday. I was and am amazed, but also proud, that our work receives this appreciation. At the same time, it is clear that this work is something special in the Central African Republic. There are far too few initiatives from abroad, but also too few initiatives within the country.

Interviews on national television and radio in the Central African Republic

I became aware of the scope of our work when I was given the opportunity to speak with the President of the Parliament, Mr. Simplice Mathieu Sarandji. He was amazed and delighted at the same time that our small association is doing such work and giving people courage and hope. We talked about problems of the country and about its future. We agreed that the country needs peace, that people of all ethnicities and religions must participate in building the country. The President of the Parliament suggested that we have a discussion with the Prime Minister. This is what happened, on October 19. I met the Prime Minister Mr. Henri-Marie Dondra. He received me very warmly. Here, too, I told him about our work. The conversation also focused on relations between Germany and the Central African Republic. Direct diplomatic relations would facilitate and promote our work. For the future, the Prime Minister wished us success for our work.

On the left, President of the Parliament, Mr. Mathieu Simplice Sarandji and on the right, Prime Minister Mr. Henri-Marie Dondra.

This visit to my home country has touched me emotionally. It is important that we continue our work and, if possible, expand and strengthen it. The country needs educated young people who have a future in their homeland. I will try to do everything I can for this. I know that many people in Germany want to show their solidarity with African countries. Our association could not exist without this solidarity. Therefore, we as an association are especially grateful that the **„IRFF Deutschland e.V.“** and the **„Women´s**

Federation for World Peace Deutschland“ promote and support our work. Their appeals for donations are successful and form a basis for our work. It was the NGO **„La Esperanza“** that enabled us to build the elementary school in Bagandou in the year 2018. With the help of the **„North-South Bridges Foundation (Stiftung Nord-Süd-Brücken),“** we were able to build the youth center in Bagandou. It is encouraging to have so many friends and supporters for our work.

Thank you, thank you, thank you!

Mathias Monzebe & Sigrun Botembe