



**Bureau du Coordonnateur Résident et Humanitaire  
Bangui - République Centrafricaine**

**RE: 'Inside France's secret war' (by Johann Hari, *The Independent*, 5 October 2007)**

I read Johann Hari's article 'Inside France's secret war' [5 October 2007] in *The Independent* with great interest. It is admirable of Mr Hari to report on the Central African Republic, given that the country is consistently overlooked in the English-language press despite its links to the conflict in Sudan. I contacted *The Independent* shortly after the article's original publication with my comments, but with no response from the editors one month later, I have decided to publish them as an open letter.

Mr Hari's characterization of CAR was often unbalanced. While the purpose of this letter is not to comment on his inflammatory remarks about France's alleged role in the region, I would like to express my views on the important progress that CAR has made over the last years. Last month's article painted an almost unflinchingly negative portrait while offering little context to support its assertions.

Mr Hari is correct to take seriously the accusations of human rights violations at the hands of government forces, and such allegations deserve rigorous inquiry. But it is also important to bear in mind recent progress on related issues in CAR, including on-going projects in security and justice sector reform, as well as the government's willingness to make these reforms a pillar of its development strategy. This willingness was particularly evident when CAR presented its development strategy to donors in Brussels on 26 October, with Human Rights Watch attending the meeting as an observer.

Characterizing President Bozizé as a 'strongman' may be appropriate for the 2003 coup d'état that brought him to power, but it lends little credence to the 2005 elections, organized by the United Nations and deemed free and fair. Mr Hari goes on to deride the legitimacy of these elections altogether without offering evidence.

CAR unquestionably faces serious problems and it is easy to dismiss the country and its government altogether. Doing so, however, rejects real, if slow, political and economic progress in a region where both have only recently got off the ground. Indeed I would have been delighted to discuss these issues with Mr Hari at any time during his visit.

Mr Hari should be commended for drawing attention to such a chronically ignored place, although his unbalanced coverage serves neither this country nor *The Independent's* readership.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "T Lanzer". The signature is stylized and written in a cursive-like font.

Toby Lanzer  
Resident Coordinator  
United Nations, Central African Republic