

## **BANGUI 'La Coquette'**

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Bangui, 24<sup>th</sup> April 2009

A luminous sign stands up the hill and welcomes visitors to Bangui ('la Coquette' - the sign says-), the capital of the Central African Republic (CAR).

The country can be proud of having been home to one of humanity's earliest civilisations, relatively sophisticated even before ancient Egypt's time.

Unfortunately, things have changed dramatically since then and CAR is currently ranked 178 out of 179 countries in the 2008 UNDP Human Development Index.

*Et me voila!* After a long trip from Rome via Paris, I just arrived to Bangui on Thursday 24th April at 5h00 am. I flew in with Air France, the only recommended airline to get into the country, which flies just once a week to and from Bangui. If your plan is to get sick in CAR, you better check the flight schedule and buy your air ticket before things get too serious! As a colleague told me: 'the best medicine...is the plane...'

At the airport things went relatively smoothly apart from the fact that the airport authorities kept my UN Laissez-Passer and told me that I would get it back in a couple of days...My WFP colleagues warned me about it and I just took it as a 'normal' procedure...

Erik, a WFP driver, brought me to my hotel through the only real road that crosses the city: the Avenue of Independence. At 5h30 in the morning Bangui had already woken up and we saw local vendors selling green bananas, succulent mangos and warm bread in the streets. I was immediately submerged in Bangui's natural beauty and amazed by the contrasts of its colours: the green of the exuberant vegetation and the red of the paths that cross the city. Many young men -I didn't see any women- were running before the heat was too intense, a very common exercise that starts in the Bangui streets around 4h00 a.m. Not sure I want to try this local habit!

An austere but clean room was waiting for me at the 'Centre d'Accueil Missionnaire' (my hotel) and, protected below a hanging mosquito net, I allowed myself a couple of hours sleep before starting work.

My one week-mission with my colleagues from WFP FITTEST, Michael Dirksen and Ekue Ayih, will give me the chance to see with my own eyes and spread the word on why efficient communications are a matter of survival in this devastated country where the precarious security situation is a constant threat.

*Marina*