

Security Council open videoconference on the Central African Republic

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Under-Secretary-General for Peace Operations

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Mr. President,
Distinguished members of the Council,

1. It is my pleasure to present the report of the Secretary-General on the situation in the Central African Republic. I am glad to be joined by Ms. Sylvie Baïpo-Temon, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Central African Republic, Commissioner Ismail Chergui of the African Union, and Mr. Koen Vervaeke of the European Union.
2. At the outset, I strongly condemn the ambush of a joint MINUSCA and National defense forces [FACA] patrol yesterday in Nana-Mambéré prefecture by alleged *Retour, Réclamation et Réhabilitation (3R)* armed group. This cowardly attack resulted in the death of two national soldiers and seven injured. I express my heartfelt condolences to the families of the killed, the Governments and people of the Central African Republic. I wish a prompt recovery to the wounded. I encourage national authority to continue taking the necessary measures to apprehend and bring to justice the perpetrators of such unacceptable attacks. I wish also to reiterate my solidarity with the people and Government of the Central African Republic, whose challenges have been compounded by the pandemic that has affected us all.

Mr. President,

3. The political situation remains fragile, dominated by the preparations for the presidential and legislative elections scheduled for December 2020. Political parties are forming coalitions, increasing public statements, announcing candidacies for the presidential elections and challenging legal frameworks for the elections. However, as the report before

you observes, political tensions were amplified by an attempt by a group of parliamentarians from the presidential majority to extend the tenures of the President and the National Assembly in the event that the elections cannot be held within constitutional timelines due to “unforeseen circumstances”. The proposal was rejected by the Constitutional Court on 5 June, which has helped to de-escalate political tension.

4. To encourage political dialogue and support an environment conducive to peaceful, free and inclusive elections, the Special Representative, Mr. Mankeur Ndiaye, continued to work closely with partners, including the G5+ in Bangui. As part of these efforts, there were several joint engagements with the Government, the presidential majority, opposition parties and civil society organizations, which are helping to ease tensions among stakeholders. However, it is important that national actors increase their efforts to engage directly in an effort to find constructive and consensual solutions to these political and other issues, and refrain from any destabilization activity. In this context there is a need for this Council and the broad international community to be vigilant and remain engaged as we approach these crucial elections in December 2020.

5. In that regard, important progress has been made with respect to the electoral preparations, including the launch today of the voter registration process. MINUSCA continues to support the electoral preparations as mandated by this Council. However, the issue of the participation of refugees is still not yet resolved; securing their franchise is essential for the full inclusivity of the electoral process, and therefore for the credibility of the electoral outcomes. The Government has engaged consultations with neighboring countries to advance that process, with support from ECCAS. There is also progress regarding the funding for the elections, with the generous contributions of partners, including the European Union and the United States. However, the UNDP Basket Fund [of \$41.8 million] still faces a funding gap of \$10.5 million, which does not account for the costs of conducting elections in neighboring countries to accommodate Central African citizens who are refugees. I would encourage partners to provide technical and financial support for the elections, as well as electoral observers, as they are essential for the further consolidation of democratic order in the Central African Republic.

Mr. President,

6. The security situation remains volatile, due to continued threats posed primarily by armed groups and militias against civilians, humanitarian workers, state authority and peacekeepers. Some the armed groups – including signatories of the Agreement - have acknowledged the Secretary General’s appeal for a global ceasefire, while at the same time using violence for expansionist aims.

7. In the northeast, violent clashes between rival factions of the FPRC [Front Populaire pour la Renaissance de la Centrafrique] that began in April have exacerbated communal tensions in the region and led to mass displacement of population. To protect civilians and mitigate serious criminal activities by armed groups and militias, MINUSCA reinforced its forces in the area and launched military operations in May in Ndélé, and in the Sibut-Grimari-Kouango triangle in the Ouaka and Kemo Prefectures. These ongoing operations, as well as arrests, have helped to stabilize the situation. We will continue combine our approach to protection of civilians, with the support to the rule of law and the fight against impunity.

8. In the northwest, the *Retour, Réclamation et Réhabilitation (3R)* armed group continues to expand and challenge state authority. While claiming the protection of its community against attacks by anti-balaka, the expansion of 3R contributed to the deterioration of the security situation in that region. In response, MINUSCA is conducting two military operations to protect civilians, combined with criminal investigations, in order to mitigate the threat posed by 3R and to prevent its further expansion.

9. While MINUSCA maintains its robust posture, it is also engaging with national and local stakeholders to facilitate dialogue, reconciliation and social cohesion and advance the implementation of the Political Agreement for Peace and Reconciliation, in close coordination with the Guarantors and other Facilitators of the Agreement.

Mr. President,

10. Implementation of the Political Agreement has become more challenging in the present

context, though I welcome the important progress that has been made, particularly by the Government. The adoption of political reform legislation as required by the Political Agreement, the meetings of the follow-up and monitoring mechanisms, the ad-hoc high-level engagements between signatories, and the deployment of the special mixed security units in the west are encouraging signs of progress.

11. However, I am deeply concerned by continued violations of the Agreement mainly by some signatories. Our main concern at the moment are the tensions between the Government and the leader of 3R, who announced that his armed group would suspend participation in the follow-up and monitoring mechanisms of the Political Agreement and has adopted an aggressive response that does not align with his commitments.

12. In order to preserve the viability of the Political Agreement, MINUSCA is working closely with the Guarantors and other partners, and engaging with the parties, to encourage and facilitate dialogue, while maintaining a robust posture to protect civilians and mitigate threats posed by armed groups and militias.

13. Our partnership with the African Union, the Economic Community of the Central African States, ECCAS, the European Union and other international partners remains crucial, particularly at this delicate juncture for the peace process and in the electoral context. We have adapted our strategic engagement, taking into account the new context of working during a global pandemic. Two weeks ago, we held a joint UN-AU-ECCAS-EU high-level videoconference with President Touadéra, to encourage and support efforts to advance the political process. We will continue to jointly engage other stakeholders to advance peace and stability.

Mr. President,

14. The continued armed clashes and the COVID-19 pandemic are further exacerbating the humanitarian situation and making more challenging the work of the humanitarian community in the Central African Republic. Some 2.6 million of people of CAR are still in need of humanitarian assistance and protection. This is more than more than half of the

population. I appeal on donors' generosity to continue supporting the 2020 Humanitarian Response Plan to help addressing the critical humanitarian needs in CAR. Furthermore, the partial closure of the borders with Cameroon and the Democratic Republic of the Congo contributed to an increase in prices for imported goods, including basic food items. This situation could lead to negative socio-economic impacts, affecting the most vulnerable population.

Mr. President,

15. While the COVID-19 pandemic is impacting our operations, MINUSCA continues to ensure business continuity with a view to performing its mandate, while taking a series of mitigation measures to protect United Nations personnel and preventing the spread of the virus. For example, our uniformed personnel adapted their patrols and operations to ensure that civilians are protected. The Mission's contingency plan includes an integrated framework to ensure a consistent and coordinated response across the UN system in the Central African Republic, taking into account the fluid nature of the situation. The Mission is also strictly complying with the Government's response plan, while supporting national efforts to mitigate the risks of the pandemic. This includes information awareness, delivery of sanitary equipment and building the capacity of state authorities, and civil society. Ensuring the effective participation of women in COVID-response efforts is crucial.

16. I wish to conclude by underscoring the need for continued support to the Central African Republic at this sensitive and complex juncture. The pandemic is exacerbating existing vulnerabilities. Despite great strides in the implementation of the Political Agreement, it remains fragile and the upcoming elections will be a major test for all of us. We must therefore redouble our collective efforts in support of peace and stability in the Central African Republic, including by making full use of our respective leverage. The continued active engagement and support of this Council is still needed, as it remains essential to mitigate the risk of a strategic reversal of the hard-won gains made since MINUSCA's deployment.

17. I would like to conclude by commending the leadership of the Special Representative, Mr. Mankeur Ndiaye, and express my admiration for the commitment and dedication demonstrated by the women and men serving with MINUSCA, who continue to advance the mandate provided by this Council in a very challenging context. I also wish to pay tribute to MINUSCA personnel who lost their lives while serving the cause of peace in the Central African Republic.

18. I thank you for your attention.
