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Integrated Stabilization Mission in
the Central African Republic

Human Rights Abuses and breaches of International Humanitarian Law committed during clashes between the anti-Balaka and the ex-Séléka factions (FPRC/RPRC/UPC)

Human Rights Division



Bria – Haute- Kotto Prefecture
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I. Executive summary

This report presents the results of investigations undertaken by the Human Rights Division (HRD) of the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA) into violations and abuses of international human rights law and international humanitarian law committed by armed groups in the town of Bria and its surroundings (Haute-Kotto prefecture), between 5 August and 17 September 2018. The armed groups involved in these events were the coalition of ex-Séléka groups including the *Front populaire pour la renaissance de la Centrafrique* (FPRC), the *Rassemblement populaire pour le renouveau de la Centrafrique* (RPRC), the *Unité pour la paix en Centrafrique* (UPC) and militias associated with the anti-Balaka. United Nations Security Council resolution 2387 of 15 November 2017 mandates MINUSCA to “monitor, help investigate and report publicly to the Security Council on violations of international humanitarian law and on violations and abuses of human rights committed throughout CAR”.

In particular, MINUSCA documented a range of abuses against civilians, including killings, injuries, abductions, destruction or appropriation/pillaging of property, restrictions on freedom of movement, and displacement due to violence in the context of clashes between FPRC, RPRC, UPC and anti-Balaka militias. The quest for control of the Bria, Bangassou, Bambari and Alindao axes in order to benefit from illicit taxation of commercial traffic has been a source of violent clashes between the anti-Balaka and ex-Seleka factions since the first quarter of 2017.

Based on its investigation, MINUSCA found that as many as 31 civilians (including at least 12 women and two children) were killed and at least five injured during attacks along the Bria-Irabanda axis and in Bria town and its vicinity during the period under review. Allegations received by MINUSCA of civilians killed in the bush while fleeing suggest that the number of casualties could be much higher. According to local sources, the clashes forcibly displaced approximately 32,000 civilians, and resulted in the destruction of houses and other property. Moreover, an armed group pillaged and burnt down a health centre and occupied a school. MINUSCA has continued its investigations into allegations of human rights abuses and humanitarian law violations committed in August and September 2018.

These gross human rights abuses and violations of international humanitarian law documented by MINUSCA indicate the failure of armed groups to uphold commitments undertaken in numerous cessation of hostilities agreements, most recently under the Rome Agreement of 20 June 2017, signed by FPRC, RPRC, UPC and Anti-Balaka representatives. Some of these acts may amount to war crimes. Furthermore, the heavily militarized setting of Bria town has hindered community efforts for peace and social cohesion as the conflict has gradually taken on an ethnic dimension since the ex-Seleka’s general assembly of October 2016.

The weak State presence in Bria and other areas of the Haute-Kotto prefecture poses a significant challenge to prevent and respond to grave abuses and violations, including through criminal investigations and prosecutions, and to ensure the protection of civilians. Through physical protection measures, the facilitation of local peace processes, and targeted arrests in Bria as per its mandate, MINUSCA has contributed to deter a further escalation of violence against civilians. Nonetheless, more efforts are needed by all parties to increase respect for international human rights law and international humanitarian law in Bria and the Haute-Kotto prefecture in general.

II. Context

1. The overall security situation in the Haute-Kotto prefecture has been volatile since October 2016, with sporadic fighting between anti-Balaka and ex-Séléka groups (FPRC, RPRC and UPC) over control of territory and illicit economic activities such as taxes levied on commercial vehicles. The situation in the prefecture and in the town of Bria in particular has been characterized by a heavy presence of armed groups, which itself prevents the deployment or maintenance of State institutions notably the national defense and security forces. In that context, the Armed groups active in the region are known for having perpetrated gross human rights abuses with impunity.
2. Four armed groups are present in the Haute-Kotto prefecture, namely FPRC, RPRC, UPC and anti-Balaka associated militias. FPRC is predominantly present in the town of Bria and surrounding localities and is also active along the Ira-Banda axis. FPRC fighters in the prefecture are largely of Rounga, Sara, Youlou or Arab ethnicity. RPRC is mostly present in the Bornou District of Bria town, which is predominantly inhabited by Muslims from the Goula ethnic group, as well as in Ouadda, Aigbando, Yalinga, and north and east of Bria. UPC is mostly comprised of members of the Fulani (Peuhls) ethnic group and based in the Gobolo neighbourhood of Bria town and in Ippy. It is less involved in military activities in the prefecture and, in 2017, it signed a reconciliation agreement with the Goula ethnic group. Anti-Balaka associated militias are present in the PK3 camp for Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs), the adjacent Amameu neighbourhood, and in the Camp Pecheur neighbourhood (Bornou District). They are predominantly from the Banda ethnic group. Part of these anti-Balaka groups fled from Bornou District following clashes with the ex-Séléka groups (FPRC, RPRC and UPC) on 25 August 2018. The majority of the population in the Haute-Kotto prefecture is from the Banda ethnic group.
3. The situation in Bria deteriorated severely in mid-2016 due to an influx of armed fighters bringing heavy weaponry in preparation of the general assembly of ex-Séléka groups (FPRC, RPRC and UPC). Anti-Balaka associated militias became active in the Haute-Kotto prefecture in late 2016. In February 2017, internal conflicts within FPRC led to the splinter of FPRC and RPRC. Under the leadership of Abdoulaye Hissene, FPRC then incorporated the majority Arab units into FPRC/AH. Since then, recurrent clashes involving anti-Balaka and FPRC, and lately RPRC, have occurred in Bria town, particularly between June and September 2017, and extended to surrounding axes in August and September 2018, even though local agreements reduced levels of violence in Bria town in late 2017 and early 2018.
4. Civilians have borne the brunt of the fighting, often caught in cross-fire or targeted in retaliatory attacks based on ethnic or religious affiliation. Armed conflict between the armed groups has also triggered mass displacements as thousands of civilians have been forced to flee the affected areas. According to local sources, an estimated 45,000 civilians were displaced between May 2017 and August 2018 due to attacks by armed groups in Haute Kotto prefecture, and entire neighbourhoods in Bria have been looted and destroyed. Moreover, the presence of armed anti-Balaka elements in and around IDP camps threatens the security and livelihoods of IDPs. FPRC, RPRC, UPC, and the anti-Balaka elements extort and illegally tax IDPs and other civilians who seek to access their fields in areas surrounding Bria. The armed groups also continuously attack and intimidate civilians on the different axes surrounding Bria, most often pillaging their goods and/or personal property. The heavily militarized setting of Bria town has hindered community efforts for peace and social cohesion as the conflict has gradually taken on an ethnic dimension since the ex-Seleka general assembly of October 2016.

III. Methodology

5. During its investigations, MINUSCA HRD visited various areas, including Bria town, the axis Bria-Irabanda, the axis Bria-Ouadda, and the three IDP camps in Bria to gather information from victims, witnesses, armed group leaders, health care workers and local authorities. It conducted 45 on-site visits, and interviewed 56 people (30 men, and 26 women). Security and accessibility constraints, exacerbated by poor road conditions, prevented HRD from reaching all affected areas, namely Matabissi, Tamangora and Yakada villages.
6. MINUSCA HRD used two or more different and distinct sources to verify an allegation. It triangulated information with additional sources and reports from other components of MINUSCA, United Nations agencies and humanitarian organizations. Where HRD was not in a position to have more than one source or was not satisfied with the quality of the information, the incident is referred to as an allegation, unverified or uncorroborated information.
7. Throughout the investigations and the reporting period, HRD took care to protect vulnerable sources from any possible repercussions for providing information, including by taking into account the *do no harm* principle, meeting in safe locations, and assessing the environment for potential risks against any source.
8. While the report examines the period between 5 August and 17 September, the investigations focused on clashes between the anti-Balaka and FPRC on the Bria-Irabanda axis that took place on 5 August, clashes between the anti-Balaka and ex-Séléka groups (FPRC, RPRC and UPC) in Bria's Bornou District that took place on 25 August, and the abduction and subsequent killing of nine IDPs (7 women and two men) in Bria town on 6 and 7 September. The decision to focus on these attacks was based mainly on the high number of victims of the clashes among the armed groups and because these attacks were emblematic of the prevailing human rights and security situation in Bria and other parts of Haute-Kotto prefecture.
9. MINUSCA HRD is guided by the applicable norms of international humanitarian law. HRD defines civilians as persons who are not members of the armed forces or of organized armed groups. In some cases, HRD could not conclusively establish or verify the civilian status of some victims.

IV. Applicable legal framework

10. The legal framework applicable in the Central African Republic, described in previous MINUSCA public reports, remains valid.¹ MINUSCA considers that the nature and intensity of the armed violence, its protracted nature, and the level of organization of the different ex-Séléka groups (FPRC, RPRC and UPC) and anti-Balaka factions, attest to the existence of a non-international armed conflict in the country. More specifically, MINUSCA considers that available information points to the existence of a non-international armed conflict in the prefecture of Haute-Kotto during the period covered by this report.
11. In terms of level of organization, MINUSCA has observed that FPRC, UPC and RPRC all have military structures, command hierarchies and internal disciplinary systems. They have established headquarters and other bases, possess the capacity to carry out military operations with defined strategies, and have asserted control over certain territories. They have logistical capacities and the ability to recruit and to access weapons

¹ *Violations and Abuses of International Human Rights and Humanitarian Law Committed in Bangui, Central African Republic, between 26 September and 20 October 2015* (available at https://minusca.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/bangui_report_final_english.pdf) and *Violations and Abuses of Human Rights and Violations of International Humanitarian Law by the FPRC Coalition and UPC in Haute-Kotto and Ouaka between 21 November 2016 and 21 February 2017* (available at https://minusca.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/fprc_upc_bria_bakala_report_16oct2017_copy.pdf).

The Central African Republic has ratified five international human rights instruments and the two optional protocols related to the Convention on the Rights of the Child. See http://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/TreatyBodyExternal/Treaty.aspx?CountryID=5&Lang=EN. It is also a State party to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights, the Convention Governing the Specific Aspects of Refugee Problems in Africa, and the African Union Convention for the Protection and Assistance of Internally Displaced Persons in Africa.

and military equipment. While generally less organized, structured, equipped and disciplined than the above-mentioned ex-Séléka groups, anti-Balaka groups exert significant control in some large towns and have carried out well coordinated attacks and ambushes against civilians and MINUSCA in the Haute-Kotto, Basse-Kotto and Mbomou prefectures.

12. All parties to a non-international armed conflict are bound by the relevant rules of treaty and customary law applicable to non-international armed conflicts, including Article 3 common to the four Geneva Conventions of 1949² which establishes the minimum standards that parties, including State and non-State actors, shall respect in a non-international armed conflict.
13. The International Court of Justice has affirmed that international human rights law applies not only in times of peace, but also during war, when international humanitarian law and international human rights law afford protection in a complementary and mutually reinforcing manner.³ International human rights law applies primarily to State actors. However, it is increasingly understood that certain non-State actors have obligations to respect human rights when their conduct affects the human rights of the individuals under their control.⁴
14. Pursuant to article 8(c) and (e) of the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, in a non-international armed conflict, serious violations of Common Article 3 of the Geneva Conventions may constitute war crimes, for which perpetrators may be held individually responsible.⁵ This comprises the following acts committed against persons taking no active part in the hostilities, including *hors de combat* fighters:⁶ murder, torture or inhumane treatment, or wilfully depriving a protected person of the rights to fair and regular trial. In addition, article 8(e) of the Rome Statute lists a range of other war crimes, including: intentional attacks against civilians not taking part in hostilities; against personnel, installations, material, units or vehicles involved in humanitarian assistance or peacekeeping missions; or against protected buildings (hospitals, schools, religious institutions); as well as acts of sexual violence and pillaging.⁷
15. Pursuant to article 7 of the Rome Statute, certain acts committed in the context of widespread or systematic attacks directed against a civilian population amount to crimes against humanity, and notably include: murder, extermination; deportation or forcible transfer; imprisonment or other severe deprivation of liberty; torture; rape, sexual slavery or other grave sexual violence; persecution against an identifiable group on specific grounds; enforced disappearances. The Central African Republic is a signatory to the Rome statute and ratified the Protocol for the prevention and the punishment of the crime of genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity and all forms of discriminations⁸, which implies responsibility to protect through preventive

² The Central African Republic is a party to the four Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949 and their Additional Protocols I and II of 1977. The conflict in the Central African Republic has featured the involvement of nomadic Fulani cattle herders as perpetrators as well as victims. In some cases, HRD was able to confirm that members of the Fulani community had acted together with, or with the support of, ex-Séléka armed groups, including in carrying out attacks on civilians, or sharing uniforms and weapons.

³ See for example *Legality of the Threat or Use of Nuclear Weapons, Advisory Opinion*, ICJ Reports 1996, p. 226; *Legal Consequences of the Construction of a Wall in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, Advisory Opinion*, ICJ Reports 2004, p. 136; *Armed Activities on the Territory of the Congo (Democratic Republic of the Congo v. Uganda)*, Judgment, ICJ Reports 2005, p. 168. For a detailed discussion about the applicability of human rights law in times of armed conflict see *International Legal Protection of Human Rights in Armed Conflict*, OHCHR Publication HR/PUB/11/01 (2011).

⁴ See United Nations Secretary-General, *Report of the Secretary-General's Panel of Experts on Accountability in Sri Lanka*, 31 March 2011, para. 188. Also see *Report of the International Commission of Inquiry to investigate all Alleged Violations of International Human Rights Law in the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya* (UN document A/HRC/17/44), 1 June 2011, para. 72; *Report of the International Commission of Inquiry on the Situation of Human Rights in the Syrian Arab Republic* (UN document A/HRC/19/69, para. 106) and United Nations Mission in the Republic of South Sudan, *Conflict in South Sudan: A Human Rights Report*, 8 May 2014, para. 18.

⁵ MINUSCA has publicly warned armed groups that their actions might constitute serious crimes for which they might be held accountable. See for example the MINUSCA press release of 5 March 2017 stressing that “[a]ny attack targeting the civilian population, UN and humanitarian personnel is a war crime that can be prosecuted in accordance with Central African law and international law” at www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=56293 (French original at <http://minusca.unmissions.org/le-fprc-sera-responsable-de-tout-acte-contre-les-casques-bleus-et-les-acteurs-humanitaires>).

⁶ Jean-Marie Henckaerts and Louise Doswald-Beck for the International Committee of the Red Cross, *Customary International Humanitarian Law: Volume 1: Rules* (Cambridge University Press 2005), rule 47: “A person *hors de combat* is: (a) anyone who is in the power of an adverse party; (b) anyone who is defenseless because of unconsciousness, shipwreck, wounds or sickness; or (c) anyone who clearly expresses an intention to surrender.” According to Rule 47 and Common Article 3 of the Geneva Conventions, it is prohibited to attack persons who are recognized as *hors de combat*.

⁷ Abridged, non-exhaustive list.

⁸ Adopted on 29 November 2006 by the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region and domesticated through the establishment of a National Committee on the Prevention of Genocide;

measures and adequate responses to international crimes. The country has established a Special Criminal Court⁹ to investigate, prosecute and try serious violations of human rights and serious violations of international humanitarian law, in particular the crime of genocide, crimes against humanity, and war crimes committed in the Central African Republic since 1 January 2003. The Government has also referred the situation in its territory since 1 July 2002 to the International Criminal Court.

V. Armed clashes between the anti-Balaka and ex-Séléka factions and related attacks on civilians in Bria and surrounding areas in August and September 2018

16. On 5 August, FPRC launched consecutive attacks on villages along the Bria-Irabanda axis¹⁰ with the aim of dislodging the anti-Balaka associated militias led by “*General*” Thierry-Francois Plenga alias “Bokassa”, who had a stronghold in Kolaga village¹¹ (PK10). FPRC sought to control the axis to benefit from illicit taxation of commercial traffic between Bria, Bangassou, Bambari and Alindao. The quest for control of this axis has been a source of violent clashes between the anti-Balaka and FPRC since June 2018. According to humanitarian sources, clashes and attacks along the Bria - Irabanda axis had been occurring since at least 20 June 2018, causing many civilian casualties, destruction of property and the burning of entire villages.
17. On 25 August, anti-Balaka militias clashed with FPRC and RPRC in the Bornou district of Bria. The latter was reportedly supported by UPC and François Dekamako’s anti-Balaka militia¹². These clashes resulted in the targeted killing and injury of civilians¹³ in Bria and its vicinity, particularly in the Bornou District. Some civilians were also caught in crossfire and killed. During the clashes, fighters pillaged civilian property and forced thousands of people to flee their homes. Following these clashes, the anti-Balaka led a series of ambushes on the Bria-Ippy axis, on 5 and 6 September, that resulted in the killing of one FPRC fighter and the wounding of three others.
18. On 6 September 2018, 12 civilians¹⁴ from the PK3 IDP camp (nine women, two men and a girl) were abducted by presumed FPRC fighters, which may have been a retaliation for the aforementioned ambushes. According to witnesses, the perpetrators released two women and the girl. The latter was reportedly ordered to inform the anti-Balaka in the PK3 IDP camp that FPRC needed to meet with them as a precondition for releasing the remaining abductees. The anti-Balaka declined to respond to the demands for a meeting. Between 6 and 7 September, the local population discovered the dead bodies of the seven women and the two men, less than one kilometre from the PK3 IDP Camp.
19. On 17 September, eight armed ex-Séléka fighters (six from FPRC, one from RPRC and one from UPC¹⁵ coming from a checkpoint in Ngounga village (PK19, on the Ouadda axis) attacked Tamangora village (PK15, on the Ouadda axis). According to witnesses, the perpetrators shot at civilians in the village, particularly targeting men. A 15-year-old boy was killed in the attacks while the other civilians fled into the nearby forest. The attackers reportedly burnt down an undetermined number of houses. According to the same witnesses, the ex-Séléka fighters also attacked Yakada village,¹⁶ where they shot and killed three men,¹⁷ and set fire to a house, killing one woman who was unable to escape. Reportedly, a total of 25 houses were burnt during this attack. According to witnesses and local authorities, including the Prefect of Haute Kotto, the attacks on

⁹ See “Loi organique no 15.003 du 03 juin 2015, portant creation, organization et fonctionnement de la Cour Penale Speciale »

¹⁰ All the villages – at least eight - located between Bria and along a t45 kilometres on the Irabanda axis were destroyed.

¹¹ Located approximately 10 kilometres from Bria.

¹² François Dekamako is an anti-Balaka rival of Theophile who is now associated with FPRC.

¹³ Some civilians were targeted and others caught in crossfire.

¹⁴ These were Christians of Banda ethnicity and living in the PK3 IDP camp.

¹⁵ HRD interviewed five civilians (three men and two women) who witnessed the incident and were able to identify the perpetrators.

¹⁶ Located in a forest area at PK7 of Dambatro, which is approximately seven kilometres from Bria.

¹⁷ A man was slaughtered with a knife, another was shot dead, while another had his throat cut off.

Tamangora and Yakada were a reprisal for the killing of a Rounga businessman on the Ouadda axis by unidentified armed men some days earlier.

VI. Abuses of international human rights law and violations international humanitarian law

A. Deliberate attacks and killings of civilians

20. MINUSCA gathered further accounts and information suggesting that between 5 August and 17 September 2018, at least 31 civilians, including at least 12 women and two children, were killed in Bria town and along the Bria-Irabanda axis, notably in the above-mentioned attacks. MINUSCA investigations into these killings indicate that FPRC has the primary responsibility for directing the attacks, which also involved RPRC, UPC and anti-Balaka fighters.
21. During the attacks of 5 August on villages along the Bria-Irabanda axis, FPRC reportedly killed at least five civilians. Due to security constraints, MINUSCA was unable to carry out immediate site visits in these villages. However, it received from victims and witnesses displaced by the violence accounts attesting to these killings. These sources also reported that FPRC killed an undetermined number of civilians fleeing these attacks.
22. On 25 August, during clashes between anti-Balaka and ex-Séléka fighters in the Bornou District of Bria, at least 12 civilians were killed - six men, including one with a disability, five women, and a minor. According to accounts collected by MINUSCA from victims and witnesses, these killings were attributable to the coalition of ex-Séléka groups (FPRC, RPRC, and UPC) and Dekamako's anti-Balaka militia. On the same day, FPRC fighters operating in Bria's Lasmi neighbourhood allegedly killed a national humanitarian worker to settle a family dispute, reportedly taking advantage of the Bornou District clashes to commit this abuse.
23. On 6 September, in an area near the PK3 IDP camp in Bria, FPRC fighters abducted and later killed seven women and two men, reportedly in retaliation for the killing of an FPRC fighter by the anti-Balaka on the Ippy axis. These killings triggered demonstrations by IDPs in front of the MINUSCA camp on 7 September. During the demonstrations, the bodies of seven of the victims were deposited in front of MINUSCA's main gates, and two hand grenades were thrown into the MINUSCA base, although they did not cause any casualties. In meetings with MINUSCA, the FPRC leadership denied responsibility for the killings. As at October 2018, MINUSCA was pursuing investigations into this incident to identify the perpetrators and their motives.
24. MINUSCA notes that the killings occurred five days after a gathering in Khartoum convened by the Governments of Sudan and the Russian Federation, during which anti-Balaka Mokom, FPRC, UPC and MPC representatives signed a declaration of reconciliation.
25. On 17 September, eight armed ex-Séléka fighters (six from FPRC, one from RPRC, and one from UPC)¹⁸ shot at civilians in Tamangora village (PK15, on the Ouadda axis), targeting men. A 15-year-old boy was killed in the attacks, while the other civilians fled into the nearby forest. According witnesses, the ex-Séléka fighters also attacked Yakada village,¹⁹ where they shot and killed three men²⁰ and set fire to a house, killing a woman who was unable to escape.

¹⁸ HRD interviewed five civilians (three men and two women) who witnessed the incident and were able to identify the perpetrators.

¹⁹ Located in a forest area at PK7 of Dambatro, which is approximately seven kilometres from Bria.

²⁰ A man was slaughtered with a knife, another was shot dead, while another had his throat cut off.

B. The right to physical and mental integrity

26. A woman reported to MINUSCA that FPRC had killed her husband during the attack, on 5 August, on their plot of land located in the village of Nyodou, 5 kilometres from Kolaga, on the Irabanda axis. During the attack, the woman and her two children were injured. MINUSCA Force transported her and her children to Bria's Regional Hospital for treatment.
27. On 3 September, MINUSCA interviewed patients at the Bria Regional Hospital and was able to confirm that at least two civilians were injured during the Bornou District clashes of 25 August: a 72-year old blind woman and a man with psychosocial disability, both stabbed with a knife. At that time, the hospital authorities informed MINUSCA that 22 injured people were being treated, 11 of whom had been admitted on 25 August. The others were admitted during the week that followed the incident. The hospital authorities believed that only two (the blind woman and the disabled man) among the 22 injured people were civilians and that 20 others were members of the armed groups.²¹ MINUSCA evacuated six of the 22 wounded to Bangui for further medical care due to the severity of their injuries.
28. Since 2017, MINUSCA has been receiving received regular allegations by civilians stating they are being threatened, intimidated and injured by armed anti-Balaka elements in the PK3 IDP camp. From 5 August to 9 September, MINUSCA documented 44 such cases that affected two children, 11 men and 11 women.

C. Attacks and destruction, pillaging and appropriation of infrastructure, civilian property and other protected objects

29. Digital imagery of the Bria-Irabanda axis taken by MINUSCA Force on 8 August reveals extensive destruction of houses and entire villages between PK8 and PK45. The images also show armed fighters near burning houses. In a mission to Kolaga village, on 20 August, MINUSCA interviewed witnesses who reported that the village had been attacked on 5 August by approximately 500 heavily armed FPRC fighters. MINUSCA observed that 36 houses were completely burnt down. It also recorded the pillaging and torching of the Kolaga Health Post, allegedly by FPRC.
30. On 17 September, eight armed ex-Séléka fighters (six FPRC, one RPRC and one UPC)²² reportedly burnt down an undetermined number of houses.
31. During its visit to Kolaga, MINUSCA observed the occupation of the school by approximately 100 anti-Balaka fighters associated with "General" Thierry-François Plenga alias "*Bokassa*". The fighters were armed with AK47 rifles and artisanal weapons. Anti-Balaka fighters had destroyed bridges on the axis to block access by FPRC, which hampered the timely delivery of humanitarian assistance and prevented the MINUSCA Force from conducting rapid patrols to the area.
32. MINUSCA received numerous reports on the pillaging and vandalizing of private property in Bornou District following the clashes of 25 August. According to numerous accounts by victims and witnesses, fighters pillaged houses abandoned by Christians living near anti-Balaka bases. On 11 September, MINUSCA visited Ndoma and Assana, two of the most affected neighbourhoods in Bornou District, and confirmed the pillaging and vandalizing of numerous houses.²³

D. Forced displacement of civilians

²¹ HRD was not in the position to confirm whom among the 22 wounded were civilians. Witnesses alleged that some of the wounded were ex-Séléka members.

²² HRD interviewed five civilians (three men and two women) who witnessed the incident and were able to identify the perpetrators.

²³ HRD was not able to confirm the number of houses affected as the security situation remained tense and RPRC elements who controlled the two neighborhoods threatened the team.

33. The attacks and widespread destruction on the Bria-Irabanda and Bria-Ouadda axes, and the fear of new clashes between armed groups among the population resulted in the forced displacement of thousands of civilians who fled to Bria town. According to United Nations sources, the clashes forcibly displaced approximately 32,000 IDPs to the town of Bria from the beginning of August to the end of September 2018, thus bringing to 93,987 the total number of IDPs in Bria at the end of September.
34. Clashes between rival armed groups, namely the FPRC coalition and the anti-Balaka, hampered humanitarian workers' access on the Bria-Irabanda and Bria-Ouadda axes. The risks of renewed fighting, temporary restrictions of movement of civilians imposed by the armed groups in the immediate aftermath of clashes, the destruction of bridges, and the presence of armed men constituted threats to the security of the civilian population and humanitarian workers. Local sources recorded eight acts of violence against humanitarian workers or assets in August and September in Bria and the surrounding axes. Consequently, some international non-governmental organizations (INGOs) had to temporarily suspend their operations during that period despite the significant and continuous increase in the number of IDPs arriving in Bria from the villages subjected to attacks. The PK3 IDP camp, which was hosting 55,480 people as of 15 October 2018, is saturated and an expansion of the site is needed. Armed anti-Balaka elements continue to circulate within the site, increasing the exposure of residents to threats, intimidation and attacks.

VII. Measures taken by MINUSCA to address human rights concerns arising from the August and September incidents in the Haute-Kotto prefecture

35. In the aftermath of the attacks perpetrated in August on the Bria-Irabanda axis and in the town of Bria, MINUSCA increased its physical protection measures, including by establishing two new Temporary Operating Bases, one in Bornou district, at CEBI church, and one at Pende bridge, on the Irabanda axis. MINUSCA increased the frequency of patrols on the affected axes. It also enhanced its military posture and advocated with the FPRC, RPRC and anti-Balaka leadership in the area to persuade them to respect human rights in their zones of operation. MINUSCA also urged the commanders of the armed groups to investigate, arrest and handover the perpetrators of human rights abuses to the national authorities through MINUSCA.
36. MINUSCA also provided temporary shelters to 44 IDPs and relocated an undetermined number to less vulnerable locations.
37. In line with its mandate, MINUSCA continued to conduct arrests of some of the main perpetrators of human rights abuses in the region of Bria through resort to Urgent Temporary Measures. Between August and September 2018, it thus arrested five individuals involved in violent activities. Through dedicated investigations based on victims' statements, MINUSCA established profiles of perpetrators responsible for many of the abuses and violations detailed in this report.
38. MINUSCA also actively supported local peace and reconciliation efforts involving local authorities, community leaders and armed groups to remove illicit checkpoints from Bria and surrounding areas, reduce the presence of armed group, accelerate the restoration and extension of State authority in Bria, and facilitate the return of IDPs.
39. Through community violence reduction (CVR) programmes, MINUSCA also helped disassociate youth from armed and criminal groups and contributed to preventing future recruitment, especially in the PK3 IDP camp. CVR programmes included vocational training, ongoing coaching, and the provision of reinsertion kits to help beneficiaries, including ex-fighters and youth at risk of being recruited into local militias, to start up small

businesses and community projects. Between February and June 2018, approximately 1,000 beneficiaries, including 443 women, participated in CVR programmes in Bria.

VIII. Observations

40. In August and September 2018, clashes between ex-Séléka groups (FPRC, RPRC and UPC) and anti-Balaka associated militias exposed civilians to targeted attacks. These incidents led to the killing of at least 31 civilians and the displacement of at least 32,000 people, and caused considerable damage to civilian property. The perpetration of these abuses and violations by armed groups participating in the African Union-led African Peace Initiative raises grave concerns over their commitment to the national peace process.
41. MINUSCA observed that the ex-Séléka (FPRC, RPRC and UPC) and the anti-Balaka attacks across different locations were conducted indiscriminately. Moreover, the scale and scope of the attacks, particularly by FPRC, indicate that civilians were deliberately targeted, either individually or collectively, as inhabitants of a village, based on their ethnicity. The ex-Séléka (FPRC, RPRC and UPC) attacks also deliberately targeted property and infrastructure indispensable to civilian livelihood, including houses, a hospital and bridges, which led to the forcible displacement of entire communities and has been obstructing the delivery of humanitarian assistance.
42. The heavy presence of armed groups in Haute-Kotto in the area of Bria, competition among armed groups over the control of territory and illicit revenues, compounded by reprisal attacks on communities, is symptomatic of the conflict in the Central African Republic.
43. The lack of State presence in the Haute-Kotto prefecture complicates efforts to protect civilians, to conduct investigations into the many allegations abuses and violations of human rights and international humanitarian law, and to provide humanitarian assistance. The redeployment of the internal security forces in Haute-Kotto will greatly contribute to the protection of civilians and judicial personnel to ensure credible and impartial investigations and trials and to build the credibility of these institutions among victims and communities.

IX. Recommendations

To the Government of the Central African Republic

- With the support of MINUSCA, continue redeploying and enhancing the capacities of State authorities in Bria and the Haute-Kotto prefecture in general, in particular the national military armed forces, the internal security forces and the judicial system ;
- Deploy criminal investigation missions in and around Bria, especially to Matabissi, Tamangora and Yakada villages in support of future prosecutions; and
- Seek agreements with armed groups, in compliance with human rights standards, for the rapid demobilization and disarmament of their elements and to ensure respect for the full restoration of State authority in the framework of the process led by the African Initiative for Peace and Reconciliation, with the support of MINUSCA.

To the armed groups:

- Respect their obligations under international humanitarian law and human rights law;
- Immediately cease indiscriminate attacks as well as attacks directed at civilians or civilians objects, and all actions negatively impacting the enjoyment of civil, political, social, economic and cultural rights, including obstacles to the free circulation of goods and people;

- Participate in local level dialogue efforts led by local authorities and community leaders to reach agreements to guarantee respect for international humanitarian law, the protection of civilians, the safe and unhindered delivery of humanitarian assistance, and the safe and free exercise of civilian livelihood activities;
- Fully cooperate with national and international investigations related to grave human rights violations and abuses committed in and around Bria; and
- Fully cooperate with the efforts under the African Initiative-led process towards a definitive end to the activities of armed groups, their rapid demobilization and disarmament, and respect for the restoration of State authority.

To the International Community:

- Continue to demand that all parties to the conflict fully respect international human rights law and international humanitarian law and United Nations Security Council Resolutions on the Central African Republic;
- Continue to encourage and support the Government of the Central African Republic in its efforts to end impunity by all actors, by investigating past and recently documented violations and abuses of human rights and violations of humanitarian law with the aim of bringing perpetrators to justice;
- Provide financial and technical support to ensure the sustainable operationalization of the judiciary in general, and the Special Criminal Court in particular, including a programme for the protection of victims and witnesses, and technical assistance to the justice system in general; and
- Continue to support the African Initiative-led process for a sustainable resolution of the armed conflict in the Central African Republic; and encourage interim and implementable agreements to de-escalate violence in conflict zones prior to the conclusion of a final, comprehensive agreement.

***** **END** *****