



Security Council

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Situation in the Central African Republic

Report of the Secretary-General

I. Introduction

1. By its resolution [2387 \(2017\)](#), the Security Council extended the mandate of the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA) until 15 November 2018 and requested me to report on its implementation on 15 February 2018 and thereafter every four months. The present report is submitted pursuant to that resolution.

II. Political situation

2. In March 2018, the Central African Republic celebrated the two-year anniversary of the inauguration of the President, Faustin Archange Touadera, which had ended the country's transition and marked its return to constitutional order. The anniversary provided an opportunity for the country and its international partners to take stock of the significant achievements over recent years, as well as the numerous challenges remaining.

3. The Government has continued to make progress towards the restoration of State authority throughout the country, including in the deployment of all prefects and the majority of sub-prefects; the deployment of magistrates; improved provision of basic social services; and the revitalization of the defence and security sector, a key national priority. Progress remains slow and fragile, however, with threats of reversal in the face of continuing activity by armed groups, the weakness of State institutions outside Bangui, and scarce financial and human resources. Clashes between armed groups and tensions over economic interests continue to impede the ability of local authorities to effectively restore State services, especially security, judiciary and financial services, and to ensure the protection of civilians.

4. The security situation in Bangui and other parts of the country has deteriorated since April 2018, amid a resurgence of sectarian rhetoric and intercommunal strife, which has undermined popular trust in the State and in the national defence and security forces. Those developments have also further polarized national politics, characterized by increased efforts to undermine the President's authority and the credibility of MINUSCA, which has faced criticism due to challenges in rapidly restoring security in Bangui following its joint operation with the defence and security forces in the city in early April.



5. Despite heightened security concerns and the risk of unravelling of progress achieved over the past years, key State institutions have continued to function. The National Assembly held its first ordinary session for 2018 from 1 March to 31 May. The election of the new Executive Bureau of the Assembly resulted in the nomination of members from parliamentary groups aligned with the presidential majority of Mr. Touadera. From 17 to 19 March, the International Organization of la Francophonie convened a high-level retreat for officials of government and State institutions as part of efforts to improve collaboration among State institutions, particularly between the National Assembly and the Government.

Support for political dialogue and national reconciliation

6. The panel of facilitators for the African Initiative for Peace and Reconciliation in the Central African Republic conducted its second round of consultations with the 14 recognized armed groups from February to April, during which the panel received their demands and proposals. In May, Mr. Touadera established a committee of 15 advisers within his Cabinet to examine the demands put forward by armed groups and consolidate their grievances, both of which would serve as the basis for future dialogue between armed groups and the Government. Throughout the consultations, the panel expressed disappointment that violence against civilians continued unabated in a number of regions, even as armed groups claimed to be committed to dialogue. Although grievances seemed largely resolvable through political means, the panel noted that the commitment of some armed groups to peacefully addressing those issues remained questionable. The panel's urging that armed groups avoid destabilizing military activities and attacks on civilians has yet to reduce violence in several areas.

7. International support, particularly from the United Nations, for the efforts of the African Initiative and the Government remains strong and includes extensive political, technical and logistics assistance. On 11 April in Bangui, the Government hosted the first meeting of the International Support Group on the Central African Republic, co-chaired by the African Union, the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS) and the United Nations. My Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations, Jean-Pierre Lacroix, and the Commissioner for Peace and Security of the African Union, Smaïl Chergui, co-chaired the meeting, which was held during their joint visit to the country. The primary objective of the meeting was to promote coherent and sustained engagement in the ongoing stabilization and recovery efforts. The event concluded with a call for strengthened development partnerships and improved coordination among regional and international partners. Similar expressions of support were made at the high-level meeting of the Peacebuilding Commission on the Central African Republic and at the high-level meeting convened by the President of the General Assembly on peacebuilding and sustaining peace on 24 and 25 April, both of which Mr. Touadera attended in New York.

8. In order to reduce transhumance-related violence, improve regional trade and security collaboration and better manage the return of refugees, the Government took initial steps to reactivate joint bilateral commissions between the Central African Republic and Cameroon, Chad and the Sudan, as recommended at the ECCAS Summit in 2017 and further encouraged by the International Support Group during its meeting in Bangui in April. Those commissions formerly played an important role in limiting cross-border movements of arms and armed groups.

9. In March, my Special Representative for Central Africa and Head of the United Nations Office for Central Africa, François Louncény Fall, visited Bangui together with the Secretary-General of ECCAS, Ahmad Allam-Mi, to support the African Initiative and regional cooperation. They encouraged the panel to ensure greater regional engagement in support of ongoing stabilization and dialogue efforts and

called upon armed groups to cease hostilities immediately. During that visit and two subsequent missions in April and May, my Special Representative also consulted Mr. Touadera and key ministers in Bangui to galvanize regional cooperation between the Government of the Central African Republic and its neighbours.

10. Complementary to the dialogue efforts led by the African Initiative, MINUSCA supported government-led local peace and reconciliation initiatives. Such processes serve as frameworks for reducing violence, building trust between communities, facilitating the return of displaced persons and strengthening local capacity to resolve conflicts, as well as provide a platform for early warning. In areas where agreements were reached, implementation and monitoring mechanisms were established under the leadership of local authorities, with the involvement of women, youth and traditional leaders.

11. Agreements signed in Bangassou, Batangafo and Bria in the first quarter of the year, which involved armed groups, as well as civil society, have led to a sharp reduction in violence, greater freedom of movement for the population and the launch of local disarmament processes. The Bangassou peace and reconciliation process, jointly launched by Cardinal Dieudonné Nzapalainga and Imam Omar Kobine Layama, was followed by the handover of 1,456 weapons from local armed militias through a community violence reduction programme.

12. Several local peace processes, including in Bangassou, Bria and Kaga Bandoro, provided for the voluntary and safe return of displaced persons to their homes and neighbourhoods as a key national reconciliation priority. In Bria, such efforts are being enhanced by public outreach through community radio and joint operations between MINUSCA and national defence and security forces to arrest the leaders of criminal groups involved in attacks against the internally displaced population.

13. MINUSCA has also supported the Government in its efforts to promote reconciliation through the media. Following the joint operation in the third district of Bangui on 8 April, ex-Séléka groups threatened to retaliate against Christian communities in areas under their control, escalating intercommunal tensions. MINUSCA immediately intervened to counter incendiary rhetoric, dispel rumours and reassure vulnerable communities through radio messaging and public meetings. The High Council for Communication issued a statement in May condemning hate speech and warning those responsible of legal consequences.

14. Women's participation in the formal national dialogue processes at the national level has been limited. MINUSCA continues to advocate and support women's participation in the African Initiative. Women and youth remain a vibrant force and are key mediators at the community level, assuming leadership roles in mediation and reconciliation efforts, including in Bambari, Bangassou, Batangafo, Bocaranga and Bria.

III. Security situation

15. Notwithstanding some progress in the political process, the security situation continues to be marred by armed confrontations and violence against civilians in several areas of the country, as well as attacks against humanitarian personnel and peacekeepers. Sectarian rhetoric and the exploitation of religious differences have contributed to an increase in intercommunal violence, as well as manipulated popular hostility towards MINUSCA and other international actors. Armed groups such as the Front populaire pour la renaissance de la Centrafrique (FPRC) have tried to exploit sectarian tensions by threatening renewed military offensives against Bangui, despite committing to dialogue.

16. In Bangui, since April, the security situation has been marked by renewed violence, driven by the activities of criminal gangs and intercommunal tensions. Gangs involved in extortion rackets and illegal taxation frequently destabilized the third district of Bangui and threatened the safety and well-being of local residents. Despite mediation efforts, tensions escalated in the third district's predominantly Muslim neighbourhood of PK5, as criminal group leaders adopted increasingly aggressive postures, including attacking MINUSCA patrols, which prompted the community to call upon the Government and MINUSCA to intervene.

17. On 8 April, MINUSCA and the Central African defence and security forces launched a joint operation in the PK5 neighbourhood to arrest and disarm criminal group members. During the operation, MINUSCA seized weapons, ammunition and narcotics. Seven individuals were arrested, although the criminal group leaders escaped. Live fire was exchanged, resulting in 11 peacekeepers injured and 2 individuals killed and 45 injured. In subsequent days, ongoing violent clashes in PK5 and surrounding neighbourhoods resulted in more casualties. On 10 April, a MINUSCA patrol sent to stop fighting on the edge of PK5 came under attack by heavily armed criminal groups. The ensuing exchange of fire left one peacekeeper dead and eight injured. At least 30 individuals, many of them thought to have participated in the attack against MINUSCA, were killed and more than 190 others injured. On 11 April, a group of approximately 200 people demonstrated outside MINUSCA headquarters, carrying the bodies of 16 individuals allegedly killed in the clashes.

18. Several weeks of volatility in the capital culminated on 1 May in a deadly attack on a Catholic church by elements of one of the PK5 armed criminal groups, in retaliation for the arrest of one of its members by internal security forces. The attack resulted in the killing of a prominent peace activist cleric, Abbé Albert Toungoumale Baba, and nine other civilians who were in the church. Retaliatory violence against Muslims surged and included the destruction of several mosques, the killing of at least three civilians from the Muslim community and the looting of Muslim-owned shops and homes. In support of national security forces, MINUSCA dispatched patrols to secure the city. Total casualties were estimated at 22 deaths and 185 wounded that day.

19. FPRC, claiming that the joint operation in Bangui on 8 April was an attack against Muslims, sought to capitalize on the unrest in Bangui to mobilize other ex-Séléka factions. FPRC and the Union pour la paix en Centrafrique (UPC) staged demonstrations against MINUSCA in Bambari, Bria, Kaga Bandoro and Ndélé. On 14 April, the FPRC leader Abdoulaye Hissène travelled from Ndélé to Kaga Bandoro with a group of his fighters, threatening military movement towards Bangui and attempting to reunite the Séléka coalition, which was disbanded in 2014, although other armed groups have refused to ally with FPRC.

20. MINUSCA reinforced its positions south of Kaga Bandoro to prevent armed group movement towards the capital. It also conducted air strikes against FPRC vehicles seeking to bypass MINUSCA checkpoints. In this context, the national authorities, in coordination with MINUSCA, deployed a detachment of 100 elements of the Central African Armed Forces trained by the European Union Military Training Mission in the Central African Republic in Ndomete and Sibut.

21. Civil society groups and several political, religious and community leaders condemned the FPRC threats and the ongoing criminal violence in Bangui. Mr. Touadera declared three days of national mourning after the violence on 1 May and condemned the attacks on all religious institutions. The National Assembly also called for resolute action from national authorities to improve security and arrest criminal groups.

22. The Mission responded to the evolving security challenges with an integrated approach combining dialogue and negotiation, military and police pressure, and programmatic interventions to reduce youth involvement in armed violence.
23. In Mambéré-Kadéï and Nana-Mambéré prefectures, a small group of armed Fulani known as “Siriri” established a presence and engaged in cattle theft and illegal taxation. On 22 April, the group attacked a MINUSCA patrol in Mambéré-Kadéï, which resulted in five Siriri combatants killed, including the leader of the group.
24. In Ouham-Pendé prefecture, the situation has improved since my previous report. Joint operations between MINUSCA and the national armed forces successfully decreased the number of attacks on civilians and clashes between armed groups in most parts of the prefecture. The operations forced the Mouvement national pour la libération de la Centrafrique (MNL) to retreat to the far north-west of the prefecture along the border with Chad. MNL fighters, however, continued to attack civilians and loot villages in that area, hampering the return of displaced persons.
25. In Ouham prefecture, the security situation continues to be marred by competition between the Révolution et justice and the Mouvement patriotique pour la Centrafrique (MPC) armed groups for control over transit and transhumance corridors around Markounda. MINUSCA-facilitated mediation efforts between the groups produced a ceasefire agreement and commitment to removing checkpoints, which allowed the return of many persons displaced by the recent violence. Other armed groups continued to operate in the area. In February and March, unidentified armed elements ambushed MINUSCA, robbed humanitarian staff and killed civilians along the Boguila-Markounda axis, including six national education experts near Markounda.
26. Security in the centre of the country continued to suffer as a result of fierce competition between UPC and anti-balaka associated militias vying for control over natural resources and trade routes along the Alindao-Dimbi axis and around Ippy. Civilians repeatedly sought refuge near MINUSCA bases in the area following clashes. On 3 April, presumed anti-balaka associated fighters attacked the temporary MINUSCA base in Tagbara, killing 1 peacekeeper and injuring 12. In mid-May, the security situation significantly deteriorated in Bambari, following several rumours of the killing of Muslims. In retaliation, armed individuals from Muslim neighbourhoods, backed by some UPC fighters, attacked the police and gendarmerie stations and fired on a joint patrol of internal security forces and a MINUSCA formed police unit, killing one national police officer and injuring two others. That situation led to the displacement of over 1,000 civilians. The premises of several international non-governmental organizations were looted. Since then, regular incidents have been reported, including confrontations among anti-balaka elements, armed individuals from Muslim neighbourhoods and UPC fighters, as well as attacks against the population, MINUSCA troops and the gendarmerie and police stations by those same actors.
27. In Bria, the arrest of anti-balaka leader “Ramazani” on 16 March initially triggered demonstrations and attacks against leaders in the internally displaced persons camp and beneficiaries of a community violence reduction programme. Subsequently, there was a significant reduction in violence in Bria.
28. In the south-east, the situation continues to be marred by criminal activities and attacks against civilians driven by a cycle of attacks and reprisals between UPC and anti-balaka associated militias.
29. Attacks by the Lord’s Resistance Army continued mainly in the Haute-Kotto and Mbomou prefectures: 12 attacks allegedly occurred during the reporting period, resulting in 38 abductions.

30. The volatile security situation and the non-existent road infrastructure in the south-east continue to pose challenges for troop mobility and capacity to project force, as well as for MINUSCA capacity to protect its convoys. Anti-balaka associated local militias continued to harass MINUSCA logistics convoys along the Alindao-Bangassou axis, the main supply line in the south-east of the country. Those actions caused considerable delays in resupplying peacekeepers deployed in the area and forced the Mission to resort to expensive air supply for urgent materials. In February, anti-balaka fighters ambushed MINUSCA on two occasions along the Alindao-Dimbi axis, injuring five peacekeepers. On 17 May, a MINUSCA logistics convoy was ambushed on the same axis by suspected anti-balaka elements, which resulted in the death of one peacekeeper and injury to eight, while approximately 40 anti-balaka elements were killed.

31. The first months of 2018 saw frequent armed confrontations in Bangassou between local anti-balaka associated militias and internally displaced persons who had sought refuge at the Catholic mission since May 2017. In March, armed fighters frequently blocked humanitarian access to the Catholic mission, robbed humanitarian staff and regularly fired on MINUSCA, injuring two peacekeepers. Reinforced MINUSCA patrols in Bangassou and the protection of the internally displaced persons site, supported by the work of the local mediation committee and large-scale community violence reduction programming, have led to a significant drop in violence since April. On 9 April, a delegation of religious leaders from Bangui led by Cardinal Dieudonné Nzapalainga and Imam Omar Kobine Layama negotiated a preliminary agreement, with the participation of local militias, civil society and local authorities.

Operationalization of internal security forces and national armed forces

32. In February, the Ministers of Defence and the Interior adopted a joint five-year concept for the immediate and long-term deployment of the defence and internal security forces, with support from MINUSCA, in coordination with the European Union Military Training Mission. The Government presented logistical, equipment and financial requirements for the joint concept to donors in a special session of the International Support Group on 12 April. On 15 May, I sent a letter (S/2018/463) to the President of the Security Council providing recommendations on the type of support that MINUSCA could provide for the progressive redeployment of the national armed forces units trained or certified by the European Union Mission and accompanying internal security forces.

33. As part of the pilot project on disarmament, demobilization and reintegration, on 11 May training was completed for 232 demobilized members of armed groups who were integrated into the national armed forces.

Safety and security of United Nations personnel

34. Security remains a serious challenge for United Nations personnel in the Central African Republic. During the reporting period, 218 security incidents were recorded, including 57 attacks and ambushes targeting United Nations personnel, premises, equipment and convoys attributed to armed groups and criminal gangs. Those incidents resulted in the deaths of four peacekeepers, in Tagbara (Sector Centre, April), Bangui (Sector Bangui, April), Alindao (Sector Centre, May) and Dilapoko (Sector West, June). Four additional peacekeepers died during the reporting period, two in road traffic accidents and two others owing to illness. Furthermore, 18 cases of death threats and harassment of United Nations personnel were reported and attributed to armed and criminal groups, as well as two separate incidents when United Nations personnel were detained, in one case by internal security forces and the second by an armed group. Unknown assailants killed one United Nations

consultant close to Markounda. A total of 82 cases of injured personnel (26 in ambush, 23 in hostile attacks by armed groups and 33 in road traffic accidents) occurred. Thirty demonstrations against the United Nations were held in Bangui and other parts of the country during the period under review. MINUSCA continued to implement the action plan to improve the security of peacekeepers, following the report by Lieutenant General (retired) Carlos Alberto dos Santos Cruz, by projecting a robust posture against threats and improving its capacity to prevent attacks and respond to threats.

IV. Humanitarian situation

35. The Central African Republic remains on the brink of a humanitarian crisis. Throughout the reporting period, clashes between armed groups and attacks on civilians increased humanitarian needs, and several new areas of acute crisis emerged. Since December 2017, the overall number of displaced people has reached unprecedented levels. As at 10 June, 670,000 people remained internally displaced and another 583,000 were refugees in neighbouring countries, an increase in the past year of 70 per cent and 35 per cent, respectively. This amounted to one in every four Central Africans displaced. Areas that saw new or compounding humanitarian needs include Alindao, Amada-Gaza, Markounda, Seko and Tagbara. A total of 973 Central Africans have been assisted in their voluntary repatriation, mainly from Cameroon and the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

36. Acts of violence against humanitarian actors continued to increase, making the Central African Republic one of the deadliest humanitarian contexts in the world and curtailing the effective delivery of assistance. In priority areas such as Kabo and Markounda, aid workers withdrew owing to insecurity. Elsewhere, such as in Bangassou, Batangafo, Kaga Bandoro, Rafai and Zemio, aid organizations that reduced their footprint in 2017 owing to violent attacks were unable to resume full operational capacity. In some areas, the fragmentation of armed groups undermined efforts to negotiate humanitarian access.

37. The outbreak of violence in Bangui resulted in the displacement of an estimated 10,000 people within the city. Hundreds of houses were looted in various neighbourhoods following population displacement, resulting in decreased access to already scarce resources, such as drinking water. Parents are reluctant to send their children to school owing to fear of further violent attacks.

38. Humanitarian underfunding remained a serious and urgent issue. As at 1 June, the 2018 Humanitarian Response Plan was funded at less than 16 per cent, leaving a deficit of some \$434 million in the response to the needs of 1.9 million people. Lack of funding, along with persistent insecurity, has left some areas without a humanitarian presence or sufficient capacity, as actors are limited to monitoring and providing assistance remotely. From 18 to 22 February, my Deputy Emergency Relief Coordinator visited the country to observe how insecurity and violence were affecting the population.

V. Protection of civilians

39. Civilians continued to be the primary target and victims of the ongoing violence. The Mission adopted a new protection of civilians strategy in April and has been implementing many recommendations contained in the report of the independent investigation by Brigadier General (retired) Fernand Marcel Amoussou to ensure greater investment in preventive strategies to protect civilians and more proactive and integrated responses to emerging threats. As part of the strategy, priority attention has been placed on areas of highest risk of threat to civilians.

40. Where robust action has been taken, such as in Bangui, Berberati, Bria and Paoua, risks to the protection of civilians have been identified in advance and mitigating measures taken to ensure a multidimensional response that would address those risks and prevent violence. MINUSCA established new early warning mechanisms to enable a more rapid response so as to better prevent threats to civilians. The expanded recruitment and training of community liaison assistants operating throughout the country, who serve as critical links between MINUSCA and communities in remote areas, contributed to improving the situational awareness of peacekeepers and resulted in strengthened responses and information flows on threats to civilians. However, the Mission's limited capacities and the significant multiplication of hotspots throughout the country have made it increasingly difficult for the Mission to simultaneously respond to all emerging threats.

41. The extension of State authority remains a key factor in protecting civilians from physical harm sustainably over the long term. The Mission provided training on the protection of civilians to 140 national armed forces troops deployed alongside MINUSCA forces, as well as to the newly deployed prefects. In addition, MINUSCA completed 15 explosive ordnance disposal operations to remove explosive hazards, protecting more than 2,500 civilians and ensuring their safe access to education, as well as to economic and social activities.

VI. Extension of State authority and the rule of law

Extension of State authority

42. Since my previous report, some progress has been reported in the extension of State authority. Several ministries, supported by MINUSCA and the United Nations country team, led a mapping to verify the presence and functionality of civil servants with the aim of providing a comprehensive needs analysis for the restoration of State authority and designing deployment schemes that would prioritize the provision of basic social services. The mapping revealed that over 50 per cent of the civil servants deployed before the 2013 crisis have been redeployed. Following the mapping, an interministerial coordination committee was established to provide a framework for mutual coordination, joint decision-making and monitoring on the restoration of State authority at the strategic level.

43. MINUSCA, jointly with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), continued to rehabilitate and equip premises for local authorities and magistrates deployed throughout the country. Their sustainable deployment faced significant challenges as personnel encountered security risks and poor working and living conditions outside Bangui.

Justice and the rule of law

44. During the Bangui criminal court session, 12 of the 32 registered cases were tried, with the support of MINUSCA, UNDP and the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women, resulting in a sharp increase in the number of cases tried in connection with the crimes committed during the crisis. Judicial authorities, with support from MINUSCA, are also implementing the reforms needed to address the procedural and technical irregularities observed during those trials.

45. The Government has continued to make significant progress towards the operationalization of the Special Criminal Court. Following the appointment on 20 February of 20 judicial police officers and their subsequent training, the National Assembly adopted the rules of procedure and evidence of the Court, which will enable the swift start of the investigations. In a parallel development, on 22 May, the Mission

and UNDP officially handed over to the Government the strategy for the protection of victims and witnesses which will underpin the establishment of a victim and witness protection programme for the Court and other national jurisdictions.

46. The Mission continued to use its urgent temporary measures, apprehending 91 individuals suspected of committing various crimes, including murder, rape, kidnapping, armed robbery, torture and looting, during the reporting period. Among them were two individuals suspected in the murder in December 2017 of a Mauritanian peacekeeper in Bria. In addition, on 15 May, “Pino-Pino”, a local anti-balaka leader suspected of involvement in attacks against civilians and peacekeepers in May 2017, was arrested by the Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo in Yakoma, Democratic Republic of the Congo, along with over 30 fighters. MINUSCA is working with the Central African authorities to ensure their swift extradition to Bangui.

47. During the reporting period, several prison security incidents occurred, including a large mutiny on 10 April. National civilian and military personnel at Ngaragba prison and its annex at Camp de Roux managed those multiple prison incidents effectively, with the support of the Mission’s enhanced mentoring and 24-hour staff presence. In addition to significant overcrowding, resulting in deteriorating infrastructure in Ngaragba and Camp de Roux, the women’s prison in Bimbo continues to lack adequate capacity, resources and oversight to ensure safe, secure and humane conditions of imprisonment.

Disarmament, demobilization, reintegration and repatriation

48. Building on the experience of the pilot project on disarmament, demobilization and reintegration, the Government, with support from MINUSCA, continued to negotiate bilateral agreements with leaders of armed groups that demonstrated willingness and commitment to fully disarm and demobilize. Since February, several anti-balaka factions in Bouar, as well as the Belanga and Sayo factions of Révolution et justice and Retour, réclamation et réhabilitation, have expressed their willingness to disarm. The Government is actively making arrangements to start the disarmament process with those groups.

49. MINUSCA continues to implement community violence reduction programmes to support the effective implementation of local peace agreements and foster coordination among actors engaged in recovery- and stabilization-related programmes. Those community violence reduction programmes have involved the voluntary disarmament of large numbers of youth involved in gang, militia and armed group activity. In consultation with the United Nations country team, MINUSCA is developing a framework for community violence reduction programming that will allow for an expansion of national and international efforts and an increase in programme volume.

Security sector reform

50. The Government continued to demonstrate strong commitment to implementing the national strategy for security sector reform. It set several milestones critical to the effective redeployment of professional, ethnically representative and regionally balanced national defence and internal security forces. MINUSCA assisted the Ministers of Defence and Justice in disseminating the Military Justice Code, issued in February. A presidential decree of 6 March 2018 authorized the retirement of 829 armed forces personnel, which should pave the way for a new inclusive recruitment campaign and the integration of former combatants from armed groups.

51. In March, the second batch of 500 police and gendarmerie recruits to be deployed in formed units throughout the country started training at the police and gendarmerie schools in Bangui.

52. MINUSCA completed the construction of a weapons and ammunition storage facility in Bouar for the national armed forces.

VII. Human rights and the fight against impunity

53. During the reporting period, MINUSCA documented 1,062 incidents of human rights abuses, violations of international human rights law or violations of international humanitarian law, compared with 1,283 incidents for the previous reporting period. Those incidents affected 1,978 victims, comprising 1,122 men, 252 women, 414 children (297 boys, 97 girls and 20 unknown minors) and 190 unidentified victims. The most frequently documented offences related to killings, destruction of civilian property, cruel and inhumane treatment, conflict-related sexual violence, arbitrary detention, deprivation of liberty, abduction, recruitment of children, attacks against schools and denial of humanitarian access. However, the decrease in the number of documented cases and victims does not represent the reality on the ground, given the increased insecurity in the country, which prevented MINUSCA from undertaking monitoring activities.

54. The violations were committed mainly by ex-Séléka splinter factions (336 documented acts), other organized armed groups and militia, particularly the criminal group called “Force” in the PK5 neighbourhood of Bangui (138 acts), and the anti-balaka associated militias (151 acts). Internal security forces were responsible for 437 violations, including 401 cases of arbitrary detention.

55. MINUSCA, jointly with UNDP, verified 3,254 active personnel in the police and gendarmerie and provided recommendations to the Government, for examination by a verification committee. MINUSCA supported the Government in drafting executive orders to vet 150 national corrections officers. Under the human rights due diligence policy on United Nations support to non-United Nations security forces, MINUSCA conducted 24 risk assessments and verified 707 members of the internal security forces, which led to the exclusion of two individuals from receiving United Nations support.

Transitional justice

56. The Government took a significant step towards the operationalization of the planned truth, justice, reparations and reconciliation commission by appointing 25 members of the steering committee to propose draft legislation defining the mandate of the commission. MINUSCA is represented on the steering committee and will seek to ensure that the approaches of national authorities to transitional justice contribute to the peaceful end of armed conflict and remain in line with relevant United Nations standards.

Conflict-related sexual violence

57. MINUSCA documented 39 incidents of conflict-related sexual violence affecting 61 victims (43 women, 17 girls and 1 boy), compared with 86 during the previous period. The violations committed were rape (31), forced marriage (4), attempted rape (3) and sexual assault (1). The perpetrators include armed Fulani elements (13), as well as elements from UPC (20), MPC (6), anti-balaka (4), MNLC (2), the FPRC/MPC coalition (3), Retour, réclamation et réhabilitation (3), unspecified ex-Séléka groups (3), internal security forces (3) and the FPRC

Abdoulaye Hissène faction (1). Accountability for cases related to such violence remains a major challenge, owing to serious capacity and infrastructure limitations. MINUSCA is working closely with the Government through its Joint Rapid Response and Prevention Unit for Sexual Violence against Women and Children to address a number of sexual and gender-based violence cases, including conflict-related sexual violence cases documented by the Mission. In addition, to strengthen national coordination and capacities for the protection of survivors and witnesses, MINUSCA is coordinating the establishment of a national and multifunctional network for the protection of victims.

Children and armed conflict

58. The country task force engaged MPC leaders in Kaga Bandoro and representatives from UPC and FPRC in Bangui and Ndélé, respectively, where all three factions reiterated their commitment to implementing demobilization action plans for children. UPC in Mboki and anti-balaka groups in Kaga Bandoro presented two lists of 48 children in total, reportedly associated with both groups. FPRC in Bria submitted a list of 173 children, while ex-Séléka groups in Kaga Bandoro presented a list of 16 children. Preparations are under way to verify and separate those associated with the said groups.

VIII. Socioeconomic situation

59. The gross domestic product (GDP) growth rate forecast for 2018 held steady at 5 per cent, compared with an increase of 4 per cent in 2017. The 2018 national budget targeted a domestic revenue-to-GDP ratio of 9.6 per cent, a primary spending-to-GDP ratio of 9.7 per cent and domestically financed capital expenditure at 1.3 per cent of GDP. Social spending was anticipated to reach 1.1 per cent as a share of GDP. Insecurity remained the main impediment to steady economic growth, particularly affecting the management of natural resources.

Implementation of the National Recovery and Peacebuilding Plan and the Mutual Engagement Framework

60. The process of implementing the National Recovery and Peacebuilding Plan remains slow, with a delivery rate of 18 per cent. The United Nations developed a strategy, agreed to by partners, to address multiple challenges and accelerate the disbursement of funds. On the occasion of the two-year anniversary of the inauguration of Mr. Touadera, the Government and international partners launched 21 projects targeting basic social services, amounting to \$161 million.

IX. Mission capacities

A. Military

61. Following the deployment to MINUSCA in May of an infantry battalion from Rwanda with 400 soldiers, as at 1 June, MINUSCA had deployed 11,014 military personnel (3.28 per cent of whom were women), representing 94.54 per cent of the total authorized strength of 11,650 soldiers. It comprised 10 infantry battalions, a special forces company, a quick-reaction force company, a reserve battalion and several enabling units, including a military police company, four engineering companies, a heavy transport company, three level II hospitals, a signal company and three helicopter units, including a combat helicopter unit. A fifth engineering company of 128 soldiers from Pakistan will increase MINUSCA strength to 11,142

military personnel around 25 June, while 600 soldiers from Nepal will be deployed starting in June until September, at which point the MINUSCA force will be at 95.6 per cent of its total authorized strength. The fielding of Orbiter 2/3 drones and new Phantom 4 drones strengthened MINUSCA surveillance and reconnaissance capabilities, providing needed early warning capability, as well as improved situational awareness.

B. Police

62. As at 1 June, MINUSCA had deployed 2,030 police personnel, 98 per cent of the authorized strength of 2,080. A total of 376 individual police officers, including 54 women, were deployed, representing 94 per cent of the authorized strength of 400. Ten formed police units and two protection support units comprising 1,654 officers, including 111 women, were deployed, representing 98 per cent of the authorized strength of 1,680. Outside Bangui, 110 individual police officers were deployed in 12 sites, while four formed police units were in Bambari, Bouar, Bria and Kaga Bandoro. In April, formed police units were temporarily deployed to Bangassou: 70 personnel from Bangui for three months and 54 additional officers from Bambari for one month.

C. Civilian personnel

63. As at 1 June, MINUSCA had deployed 1,398 civilian personnel, representing 80 per cent of a total of 1,747 authorized positions. This includes 609 international staff, 520 national staff and 232 United Nations Volunteers. Women constituted 25 per cent of civilian personnel overall, with 22 per cent in positions at the P-5 level or above. The recruitment and retention of women personnel continue to be a priority.

D. Status-of-forces agreement

64. Under the leadership of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, a number of outstanding issues pertaining to the status-of-forces agreement were resolved, including an unjustified request by the Société centrafricaine de télécommunications for rent payment for a site allocated to MINUSCA by the Government and the extension of the Bossangoa airport. On 7 March, the Mission received a report from the Director General of Customs alleging two cases of abuse by Ecolog, a contractor that MINUSCA employs for life-support services, of the privileges and immunities of the Mission, leading customs authorities to refuse to process tax exemption documents and block MINUSCA from importing essential food items for its personnel. The import documents were processed on 31 March, following numerous démarches by MINUSCA. One of the two incidents alleged by the Director General of Customs is being investigated by the Office of Internal Oversight Services, and material facts concerning the second case remain to be provided by the national authorities.

E. Efforts to optimize performance

65. The Mission continued its efforts to improve performance across all components, including through the mechanism of a joint operational planning team, which defines strategic priorities for each field office, including measuring progress on key Mission objectives in line with its mandate. The team oversees and coordinates operational coordination teams at the field level, which in turn develop detailed plans and specific operations to achieve the strategic priorities set by the joint team for their respective field offices. Such efforts helped the Mission to improve its overall

operational coordination and information sharing, integrating the growing range of information collection systems used by the Mission.

66. MINUSCA created a joint task force with relevant components to coordinate and monitor progress in implementing recommendations in the report of the independent investigation by Brigadier General (retired) Amoussou to improve the Mission's response to the protection of civilians, as well as the action plan to reduce peacekeeper fatalities following the report by Lieutenant General (retired) dos Santos Cruz, in close collaboration with United Nations Headquarters.

67. Five new allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse against MINUSCA forces were recorded, compared with two allegations during the previous reporting period. The allegations are pending investigation by the relevant troop-contributing countries and the United Nations.

68. MINUSCA continued to take all measures necessary to ensure its full compliance with my zero-tolerance policy. The Mission also implemented strict non-fraternization policies and undertook targeted and frequent training for United Nations personnel, awareness-raising activities for the host population, joint patrols and risk assessment visits.

69. MINUSCA and the Inter-Agency Standing Committee Task Team on Accountability to Affected Populations and Prevention of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse work with local authorities and civil society organizations to receive complaints and allegations. MINUSCA trained and equipped over 170 new members of community-based complaints mechanisms in eight high-risk locations. The sensitization of Mission personnel to the new standard operating procedures on reporting and handling misconduct, including sexual exploitation and abuse, has improved existing internal reporting mechanisms and increased effectiveness in recording and responding to misconduct. MINUSCA, in collaboration with the United Nations Children's Fund and the United Nations Population Fund, referred, for appropriate assistance, five victims, three of whom were victims of newly reported allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse.

X. Observations

70. I welcome the progress made so far in the political process under the leadership of Mr. Touadera with the conclusion of the second round of consultations of the African Initiative for Peace and Reconciliation. I am seriously concerned, however, that the first half of 2018 has seen repeated surges of violence targeting civilians, humanitarian workers and peacekeepers, which have resulted in an unacceptable number of deaths, injury and displacement. Innocent lives are being callously lost and the country's progress towards stability and economic recovery impeded.

71. I am appalled that, five years since the start of the crisis in the Central African Republic, intercommunal violence continues to take a heavy toll on civilians around the country. The revenge character of the killings, coupled with the systemic burning and destruction of religious symbols such as mosques and churches, is profoundly troubling. Equally troubling are the fierce resource-driven competition among armed groups, criminal violence and the manipulation of religious and ethnic identity for political or opportunistic gains, which is fuelling the violence. The upsurge in violence in Bangui is particularly concerning, as is the increasingly threatening posture of some armed groups towards the capital, fuelling rumours and insecurity. This must stop now, so that there is a prospect for meaningful dialogue and political progress. I strongly condemn any violence and call for swift investigations and an end to impunity. I would also recall that attacks against United Nations peacekeepers may

constitute a war crime and urge the Central African Republic authorities to investigate them and swiftly bring those responsible to justice. I welcome the efforts by the Government and local communities, including in Bangui, to further enhance security measures, curb criminality and support reconciliation mechanisms to better prevent threats against civilians and the stability of the capital.

72. I further call upon the Government, political and religious leaders and civil society organizations to take coordinated public action to counter this dangerous trend and prevent incitement to violence, including on religious and ethnic grounds. I would further recall that individuals and entities who incite intercommunal violence or provide support for acts that undermine the peace, stability or security of the Central African Republic could be sanctioned by the Security Council and face judicial proceedings. I welcome the recent statement issued by the High Council for Communication to condemn hate speech and stigmatization, including its most recent decisions holding those responsible accountable. However, more needs to be done to mobilize State judicial and security institutions to undertake concrete measures to implement the High Council's decisions.

73. I am nevertheless still optimistic about the path to peace for Central Africans and see opportunities to continue making incremental progress. I commend the role played by the panel of facilitators of the African Initiative in promoting dialogue and addressing the root causes of the enduring instability and armed violence in the Central African Republic. I call upon all armed groups to cease unconditionally all hostilities and to refrain from making any threat to resort to military means. This is incompatible with their commitment to peaceful dialogue and should not be accepted. I encourage the panel and the Government to examine the legitimate grievances communicated by the armed groups collectively, as well as to ensure that an inclusive dialogue with all segments of society delivers peace dividends. This will help to ensure national ownership and the buy-in of all the stakeholders, which is critical to the sustainability of any process. MINUSCA will continue to support the work of the panel and to promote local agreements with national civilian and security authorities to create a more conducive environment for dialogue with the armed groups and facilitate a more rapid path to their disarmament and integration. Such local agreements between armed groups and non-military incentives to leave the path of violence, through the Government's disarmament, demobilization and reintegration programme and community violence reduction programmes, remain essential. MINUSCA will continue to offer its support. These efforts are particularly important to reducing the recruitment of youth into armed groups or local militias, a major source of instability.

74. I also urge the panel to link its dialogue with armed groups to measures to ensure more consistent and coherent support for stabilization in the Central African Republic from States in the region. The reactivation of the three bilateral joint commissions between the Central African Republic and Cameroon, Chad and the Sudan is an essential step in the right direction. I call upon all Governments to seize this opportunity resolutely. The revival of the commissions, dormant since before the crisis, could potentially play a stronger role in reducing transhumance-related violence, controlling the movement of armed groups, addressing the illicit proliferation of small arms and light weapons and transnational crime, spurring mutually beneficial economic exchange and facilitating the voluntary return of refugees. I call upon the leaders of the region to rally around an agenda for peace, which will help to stabilize the Central African Republic, while addressing common cross-border threats and enhancing stability in the region as a whole.

75. This will not be possible if Central Africans themselves do not rekindle their resolve to live together in peace in a secular State, proud of their rich history and diversity as a multi-ethnic and multireligious society in the heart of Africa. Genuine

efforts to promote national reconciliation and social cohesion are vital. I welcome Mr. Touadera's leadership role and his decision to establish a steering committee to draft the legal framework for the establishment of a future truth, justice, reparations and reconciliation commission. This will help to ensure that the need for accountability for past crimes and the restoration of durable peace is met. I encourage the Government to start working on the definition of a coherent multidimensional and victim-centred national transitional justice strategy, one based on wide consultation with the meaningful participation of civil society and key stakeholders, in particular victims, and linked to the peace process.

76. There can be no peace without justice and no justice if impunity prevails. Ending impunity in the Central African Republic for grave crimes and human rights violations against civilians, as well as attacks against humanitarian workers and peacekeepers, is essential to reversing the cycle of violence. I am encouraged by the arrest of some of the alleged perpetrators of these attacks and call upon the national authorities to continue to build their capacities to detain, swiftly investigate, prosecute and try these individuals in cooperation with MINUSCA. I particularly welcome the cooperation of the national authorities with MINUSCA in the investigation and prosecution of those who allegedly targeted and killed peacekeepers. To this end, I commend the cooperation between the Central African Republic and the Democratic Republic of the Congo in pursuing justice through the extradition of such individuals who had fled into the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Likewise, progress in the establishment and operationalization of national judicial institutions, the Special Criminal Court and a national human rights commission are critical steps in the right direction. I welcome the adoption by the National Assembly of the rules of procedure and evidence of the Court and look forward to the start of the investigations by the Court. Adequate resources will be required to ensure the sustainability of these important institutions.

77. I remain deeply troubled by the humanitarian situation. Funding shortfalls and insecurity hamper the delivery of aid, leaving many people without assistance. The recurrent violence in many parts of the country continues to drive people from their homes and livelihoods. The denial of the right of return for many refugees and internally displaced persons is emblematic of continued intercommunal tensions, obstructing progress and threatening the country's future. I call for greater international support for humanitarian efforts in the country, along with stronger and more effective measures to hold accountable those who attack humanitarian workers. I am confident that the enhanced presence of the State, and relative stability in many areas, together with a robust response to intercommunal violence and its incitement, will enable an accelerated safe and dignified return of those driven from their homes.

78. The persistent weakness of State authority, the flourishing of violence and the continued activity of armed groups are deeply linked, with violence seriously challenging the country's newly established democratic institutions. The presence of the State plays an important role in maintaining stability and establishing a more protective environment. Helping the country to emerge from cycles of chronic violence requires a long-term and multidisciplinary approach, as outlined in the country's National Recovery and Peacebuilding Plan and the Mutual Engagement Framework, which offer a clear pathway towards sustainable peace and stability. Renewed commitment to the rapid and effective implementation of the nationally owned strategy is paramount, and I am encouraged that Mr. Touadera has relaunched numerous development projects in line with the National Recovery and Peacebuilding Plan and urge the Government to accelerate their implementation. I call upon the international community to continue to support the Government's efforts to reinforce local administration throughout the country, emphasizing measures that will accelerate the provision of basic services and the deployment of judicial systems. This

will require measures to address growing fiscal pressures and budgetary shortfalls. Advancing fiscal reforms and creating a conducive business environment to promote the private sector and job creation, and to offer viable alternatives to crime and violence to the population, will remain vital. This progress towards economic recovery will ultimately be critical to maintaining faith in State institutions and ensuring a rapid exit from the humanitarian crisis. Stronger synergies between the Government and its partners will be required, as is close collaboration among the United Nations, the African Union, the European Union and States in the region. Our unity of purpose and shared vision in support of efforts to restore State authority must be underpinned by an inclusive dialogue process for a peaceful settlement of conflict and national reconciliation under the overall framework of the African Initiative.

79. I commend the efforts of the Central African authorities to prepare for the progressive redeployment of armed forces trained by the European Union Military Training Mission, as well as accompanying internal security forces. If undertaken properly, such redeployment could enable the Government to progressively assume its sovereign responsibilities and lay the groundwork for the gradual exit of MINUSCA. The recommendations on support for these forces, contained in my letter to the President of the Security Council (S/2018/463), could facilitate this aim.

80. I reiterate that MINUSCA alone cannot and should not carry the burden for this support. This is a responsibility, first and foremost, of national authorities, with the collective support of the international community. I therefore call upon national authorities to deliver progressively and in a timely manner on their commitments in the national security sector and national defence plans. I particularly urge the authorities to rapidly take steps to build armed, internal security forces that are regionally and ethnically diverse, through inclusive recruitment and the integration of former members of armed groups. The forces will also have to receive appropriate and reliable budgetary support and to uphold the principles of accountability and the rule of law so as to establish trust and develop the confidence of local communities. MINUSCA will continue to apply the human rights due diligence policy to ensure oversight of and accountability for the conduct of the national security forces. This initiative requires cohesive international support, and I welcome the continued engagement of the European Union and bilateral donors. I also encourage Member States to provide greater financial, technical and material support for the immediate and long-term deployment of the national security forces, in addition to their assistance to overall security sector reform. It will be critical that international assistance remain well coordinated, coherent, transparent and sustained to succeed.

81. I strongly condemn the unacceptable manipulation of public sentiment against the Mission for short-term, narrow-minded political or resource gains, which also encourages attacks against peacekeepers. I am convinced that the situation in the Central African Republic would have been far worse without MINUSCA; the loss of lives, attacks against civilians and displacement would have been far greater if MINUSCA had not been present. There have been reversals in the pursuit of peace and stability, but the country continues to move forward, and MINUSCA will continue its efforts to improve in the context of my Action for Peacekeeping initiative. I welcome the Mission's laudable efforts to optimize its performance and improve accountability, including for sexual exploitation and abuse. MINUSCA has started addressing gaps and implementing recommendations to further improve the protection of civilians and the security of peacekeepers. The upcoming independent strategic review of MINUSCA will be an opportunity to further examine the Mission.

82. I am grateful to my Special Representative, Parfait Onanga-Anyanga, for his dedication and leadership. I deeply appreciate the devotion to the cause of peace of the personnel of MINUSCA, the United Nations country team and the troop- and police-contributing countries, particularly in a highly challenging environment. I am

also grateful to my Special Representative for Central Africa and Head of the United Nations Office for Central Africa, François Louncény Fall, for his role in the subregion in support of the Central African Republic. I thank the African Union, ECCAS, the European Union, the World Bank and bilateral and international partners, including the International Support Group and non-governmental organizations, for their continued efforts to work with the Government and all Central Africans towards a peaceful and stable Central African Republic.

