

**Security Council**

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Letter dated 11 December 2017 from the Permanent Representatives of Sweden, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and Uruguay to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

Sweden and Uruguay, as Co-Chairs of the Informal Expert Group on Women and Peace and Security, and in close cooperation with the United Kingdom, hereby transmit a summary note of the meeting held on 2 November 2017 on the Central African Republic (see annex).

We would be grateful if the present letter and its annex could be circulated as a document of the Security Council.

(Signed) Olof **Skoog**
Ambassador

(Signed) Matthew **Rycroft**
Ambassador

(Signed) Elbio **Rosselli**
Ambassador



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Informal Expert Group on Women and Peace and Security: summary of the meeting on the Central African Republic, held on 2 November 2017

On 2 November, the Informal Expert Group on Women and Peace and Security convened a meeting on the situation in the Central African Republic, following a visit of the Secretary-General to the country and amid negotiations for the renewal of the United Nations peacekeeping mission. Members of the Security Council were briefed by the Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Deputy Head of the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA), Kenneth Gluck, accompanied by representatives of the Mission and the United Nations country team working on gender, human rights, and humanitarian affairs.

The Deputy Special Representative noted that the security situation had deteriorated severely since the previous meeting of the Informal Expert Group, with violence spreading to previously stable areas. A recent investigation by Human Rights Watch detailed how Séléka and anti-Balaka commanders had consistently condoned, ordered or committed sexual violence themselves between 2013 and 2017. Multiple gang rapes of women and girls by armed actors had also been documented in a comprehensive mapping of 620 major incidents of human rights violations from 2003 to 2015, undertaken by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. The United Nations monitoring, analysis, and reporting arrangements on conflict-related sexual violence, led by the senior women protection adviser of the Mission, had verified 176 cases of conflict-related sexual violence in the current year, despite the lack of access or services in much of the territory. Some 70 per cent of female inmates in the main prisons were being held on accusations of witchcraft. Many of them had been detained for months without trial, and many women and girls had been killed for the same reason, including by armed groups. The United Nations had presented a full report on the matter to the Ministry of Justice. In the current year, the Special Criminal Court and a rapid response unit of the police and the gendarmerie focusing on sexual violence had begun their work. The rapid response unit had already documented 71 cases of sexual violence and submitted 30 for prosecution, including 18 perpetrated by armed actors. However, it needed support to pay its salaries and operational costs. Several non-State actors in the Central African Republic had been listed in the annex to the annual report of the Secretary-General on conflict-related sexual violence: the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA); the ex-Séléka coalition; Révolution et justice; the Front démocratique du peuple centrafricain; and the anti-Balaka forces, including associated elements of the armed forces of the Central African Republic. The Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict had been engaged in the country for five years, on the basis of a joint communiqué signed with the Government in December 2012.

During his visit, the Secretary-General had met with victims of sexual exploitation and abuse and with women's organizations, and called on the Mission to engage regularly with women's groups and ensure their participation in the implementation of the Libreville road map. A gender parity law calling for a minimum 35 per cent of female representation in all decision-making bodies had been adopted at the end of the previous year but it had not been implemented. For example, of 73 sub-prefects, only 6 were women, and women accounted for only 10 per cent of

advisers in the Presidential Cabinet, 8.5 per cent of deputies in the parliament, and 15 per cent of Government ministers. While women demonstrated their contribution to local mediation and reconciliation efforts, such as in Bambari, they continued to be excluded from formal institutions and dialogues. Women were better represented in the Constitutional Court and the national elections authority, both led by women, and two of the international magistrates appointed to the Special Criminal Court were women. New efforts on gender-responsive security sector reform, including comprehensive training on women's access to justice and prevention of sexual exploitation, were yielding results, and 23 per cent of new recruits were women, which represented a major increase. Approximately only 20 per cent of beneficiaries of community violence reduction and pre-disarmament, demobilization and reintegration activities were women and girls. The Mission had made progress in preventing and responding to sexual exploitation and abuse, with a significant reduction in new allegations and a stronger support system for victims. However, it had not made progress on its own gender balance, as women made up merely 1.5 per cent of the military component, 6 per cent of the police, and 25 per cent of the civilian component. Apart from displacements, there were also many returns, and women returnees often had difficulties in accessing their land or property, typically taken over by other actors. Many of those gender-related trends had been highlighted in the United Nations conflict analysis in the current year, but there was a need for stronger data. The national action plan was up for review and renewal and the United Nations had received an important contribution from the United Nations Peacebuilding Fund to work on women and peace and security.

Council members were interested in the risks and implications for women and girls of the redeployment of the national armed forces, greater detail about the difficulties in collecting relevant data on gender issues, the involvement by the United Nations of women and girls in community violence reduction and pre-disarmament, demobilization and reintegration activities, and the possibilities of benefiting from the work of women's organizations in local mediation in countrywide initiatives on early warning and prevention, formal dialogues and implementation of the Libreville road map. Member States asked about the capacity of the Mission to address women's extreme political marginalization and widespread sexual violence, noting that, while the budget of the Mission had been reduced by 1 per cent over the previous year, the gender advisory unit had lost 4 out of its 12 positions, or one third of its capacity. The gender thematic group, the gender-based violence subcluster and the protection working group were identified as coordination forums for the work of the United Nations on those issues.

UN-Women, as the secretariat of the Informal Expert Group, and the head of the Team of Experts on the Rule of Law and Sexual Violence in Conflict, highlighted some of the recommendations shared with Council experts. They included:

(a) To maintain the references to gender equality and women's protection and empowerment in resolution 2301, which are still relevant. In addition, the Council should consider adding more explicit instructions. Those new elements could include stronger language and specificity about the processes and entities that require further attention and expertise on gender equality issues or women's representation, from the implementation and monitoring of the Libreville road map and the National Recovery and Peacebuilding Plan, to disarmament, demobilization and reintegration and community violence reduction programmes or institutions like the Special Criminal Court and the upcoming Truth, Justice, Reparation and Reconciliation Commission;

(b) To call on the Mission and troop- and police-contributing countries to address the very low representation of women in the military, police and civilian components of the Mission, and request information and updates on measures taken

to improve the Mission's gender balance, the United Nations gender-responsive conflict analysis, and the much commented upon reduction of gender capacity;

(c) To call on the United Nations to engage women's organizations more regularly and systematically, including for data-gathering, early warning and conflict analysis, and for the implementation of the Mission's protection of civilians strategy. With more resources, they could set up local structures led by women in all 16 prefectures, addressing the local dimensions of the conflict;

(d) To advocate that women and girls account for a minimum of 35 per cent of beneficiaries in pre-disarmament, demobilization and reintegration and community violence reduction efforts, as they are often left alone without a livelihood and with child dependents, and find themselves at a disadvantage vis-à-vis ex-combatants and community leaders in terms of access to such programmes;

(e) To call on the African Union to ensure that women are involved in the implementation of the Libreville roadmap, from political dialogues and national forums to the formal mechanisms and committees already set up for this purpose;

(f) Respond to the information on sexual violence provided by the Panel of Experts of the Central African Republic sanctions Committee. For example, their midterm report presents an annex with 62 reported cases of rape from January to June, broken down by prefecture, and explicitly names an anti-Balaka leader and his elements for kidnapping 10 Muslim girls of between 11 and 13 years of age in a specific town and on a specific date in the current year. The sanctions Committee should act accordingly based on this information, which is collected at great risk;

(g) Call on the United Nations and Member States to support the capacity of the Central African Armed Forces, internal security forces, the Special Criminal Court and the rapid response unit to prevent and respond to sexual violence. This includes the need for a formal cooperation mechanism between the latter two. The rapid response unit has been identified as the only functioning rule of law institution in the country, and the international community must support its consolidation and the extension of its reach beyond Bangui. The Team of Experts will deploy an expert to the Special Criminal Court to assist in the formulation of a prosecutorial strategy that addresses cases of conflict-related sexual violence and ensures their prioritization.

The Co-Chairs committed themselves to follow up on those recommendations, particularly in the context of the Mission's mandate renewal negotiations.