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Report of the Secretary-General

I. Introduction

1. By its resolution [2448 \(2018\)](#), the Security Council extended the mandate of the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA) until 15 November 2019 and requested me to report on its implementation on a quarterly basis. The present report is submitted pursuant to that resolution.

II. Political situation

Peace process

2. During the reporting period, important progress was made in the peace process under the auspices of the African Initiative for Peace and Reconciliation. Following the high-level event on the Central African Republic held in New York in September 2018, considerable efforts were undertaken by stakeholders at various levels to revitalize the political process, in particular the holding of direct talks between the Government and armed groups. Meanwhile, there was growing frustration among Central Africans with the repeated delays in convening the direct dialogue, with the grave security incidents in recent months blamed for the delays.

3. The Government of the Central African Republic intensified its preparations for direct dialogue with the armed groups, with support from the panel of facilitators of the African Initiative for Peace and Reconciliation. The President, Faustin Archange Touadera, continued outreach efforts to Central African stakeholders, including political parties and civil society, to strengthen national ownership and popular support for the peace process. Opposition political parties and civil society organizations issued a joint memorandum on 12 November calling for the prompt launch of the African Initiative and the inclusion of political parties and civil society organizations in the process. My Special Representative for the Central African Republic and Head of MINUSCA intensified his engagement within the panel as a member and with regional and international partners.

4. At the forty-seventh meeting of the United Nations Standing Advisory Committee on Security Questions in Central Africa, held in N'Djamena from 6 to 8 December, Member States from the region agreed on the imperative of reviving the African Initiative for Peace and Reconciliation, including through more strategic

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regional consultations, emphasizing in the final communiqué the need to launch the direct dialogue as soon as possible. Several neighbouring countries expressed their readiness to re-establish bilateral mixed commissions with the Central African Republic. On 14 December, the National Assembly issued a declaration supporting the African Initiative and recommending the launch of a dialogue with armed groups in Brazzaville and Khartoum without delay.

5. After months of consultation on the venue for the direct talks, the Commissioner for Peace and Security of the African Union, my Under-Secretary General for Peace Operations and senior officials, including ministers, from Angola, Cameroon, Chad, the Congo, Gabon and the Sudan, as well as the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS), visited the Central African Republic together from 8 to 11 January to revive the peace process and ensure sustained regional and international commitment to a political solution to the crisis. The delegation met a wide range of actors, including President Touadera, government officials, the diplomatic community and civil society. On 10 January, all stakeholders agreed to convene a direct dialogue between the Government and armed groups in Khartoum on 24 January under the auspices of the African Union and supported by the United Nations. Following that high-level visit, President Touadera again engaged with political parties and civil society representatives, inviting them to participate in the government delegation to the Khartoum talks in an observer capacity. The regional consensus to launch the talks in Khartoum and hold any final signing ceremony in Bangui provided new hope for progress towards an agreement.

6. From 24 January to 6 February, a delegation of the Government of the Central African Republic, led by the State Minister and President Touadera's Chief of Staff, Firmin Ngrebada, and the representatives and leaders of 14 armed groups held direct talks in Khartoum. The talks, which were facilitated by the African Union and supported by the United Nations, also saw the participation of representatives from political parties, religious institutions and civil society, including women. Following intensive negotiations, the parties reached consensus on 2 February on all major issues on the agenda, including on justice and reconciliation, a more transparent and inclusive governance system and transitional security arrangements. On 5 February, the Political Agreement for Peace and Reconciliation in the Central African Republic was initialled by the parties in Khartoum during a closing ceremony hosted by the President of the Sudan, Omer Al-Bashir, in the presence of President Touadera, as well as the diplomatic corps and officials from countries of the region, the African Union and the United Nations. The Agreement was formally signed in Bangui on 6 February.

7. Of note, the parties agreed to establish a follow-up mechanism as a means to oversee the effective implementation of the Political Agreement. On the highly sensitive issue of justice, the parties set up a commission comprising the signatory parties tasked with reviewing all issues pertaining to conflict-related issues of justice. The commission will submit its recommendations to the Commission on Truth, Justice, Reparation and Reconciliation, the National Assembly and the follow-up mechanism. The parties also agreed on the creation of mixed brigades, comprising former armed group members and national defence forces, mandated to protect the borders of the country and transhumance activities, among other tasks. Established as a temporary security measure, the mixed brigades should be operational for a maximum period of 24 months. At the political level, President Touadera agreed to accommodate additional representatives of former armed groups in the national administration, including in the Government. Two important documents were also negotiated and annexed to the Agreement, namely, detailed transitional security arrangements and an implementation plan of the Agreement.

Political developments

8. Domestic political developments were marked by tensions between the executive and legislative branches of the Government. On 26 October, the National Assembly voted to remove its President, Abdou Karim Meckassoua, with the two-thirds majority required under article 70 of the constitution. His dismissal did not have a significant impact on national stability or security, notwithstanding his being the highest-ranking Muslim in an official position. Within the three-day time frame established under the constitution, the Assembly elected Laurent Ngon-Baba, a representative from the coalition loyal to President Touadera and a Muslim, as the new President of the Assembly.

9. On 29 October, during a debate in the National Assembly on the selection of its new President, former anti-balaka commander and parliamentarian Alfred “Rambo” Yekatom shot a firearm during the proceedings and was subsequently arrested. On 11 November, the International Criminal Court issued an arrest warrant against him for alleged war crimes and crimes against humanity committed between December 2013 and August 2014. Yekatom surrendered to the Court on 17 November. On 12 December, French authorities arrested former anti-balaka coordinator Patrice-Edouard Ngaissona in Paris on the basis of an arrest warrant issued by the Court for alleged war crimes and crimes against humanity. He was transferred to the Court in The Hague on 23 January. In reaction to those arrests, on 14 December, the Maxim Mokom faction of the anti-balaka issued a communiqué in which it announced its withdrawal from the African Initiative for Peace and Reconciliation, the Government and the national disarmament, demobilization, repatriation and reintegration process. In protest against the arrest of Ngaissona, anti-balaka members in Bossangoa threatened to carry out reprisal attacks against MINUSCA, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and civilians. Notwithstanding those threats, Mokom and representatives of Ngaissona participated in the Khartoum talks. The Assembly also continued to pass key legislation throughout the second ordinary session of 2018, including the national budget for 2019, notwithstanding tensions surrounding the dismissal of Meckassoua.

10. Political competition in preparation for the elections has already begun. In the second week of November, following three months of countrywide preparatory consultations, the new political coalition in support of President Touadera, the Mouvement coeurs unis, held its founding general assembly in Bangui. In addition to President Touadera, several high-ranking members of national institutions participated in the general assembly, including the newly elected President of the National Assembly, the President of the Constitutional Court and ministers and members of the Assembly. The Government and the national election authority continued preparations for the elections slated for 2020–2021, with the support of the good offices and technical expertise of MINUSCA. In December, the Government officially submitted the draft electoral code to the Assembly for adoption.

11. In December, the Mouvement coeurs unis played a prominent role alongside President Touadera in organizing large-scale public ceremonies throughout the country to commemorate National Day. Several opposition parties, as well as the Catholic Church, boycotted the festivities in protest against the perceived inadequate response by the Government to recent attacks by armed groups against displaced populations in the towns of Alindao and Batangafo.

Local dialogue and reconciliation

12. Closely linked to the peace process led by the African Initiative for Peace and Reconciliation, the Government, with MINUSCA support, continued to lead local peace and dialogue processes to advance reconciliation between communities, reduce violence, improve social cohesion and build support for the deployment of State institutions. In Bangassou, the follow-up committee created by the local peace agreement has been conducting joint awareness-raising activities to prepare for the safe and voluntary return of Muslims who were forced to flee their neighbourhood in May 2017. The prefect, with MINUSCA support, launched a dialogue and reconciliation initiative between the nearby villages of Gambo and Pombolo, which has witnessed recurring cycles of intercommunal violence since 2017.

13. In many areas, however, armed groups strongly resisted local dialogue processes, resulting in a resumption of violence. In Bambari, local dialogue intended to build collaborative relations between the local police and gendarmerie and the Muslim community was obstructed when the Union pour la paix en Centrafrique kidnapped youth leaders participating in the dialogue and launched violent attacks against Central African armed forces and MINUSCA. A local ceasefire agreement in Batangafo, which had maintained relative calm for several months, deteriorated when the local follow-up mechanisms were unable to cope with violent robberies and assassinations by anti-balaka associated militias, the Mouvement patriotique pour la Centrafrique and the Front populaire pour la renaissance de la Centrafrique, which began with the onset of the dry season. In Bouar, the Government and community leaders celebrated the one-year anniversary of the 15 December 2017 peace agreement that reduced violence and restored freedom of movement. The progress made, however, has been recently threatened by renewed military movements by the armed group, Retour, réclamations, réhabilitation, one of the agreement's signatories.

14. On 16 November, the Ministry of Humanitarian Action and National Reconciliation and MINUSCA signed a partnership framework setting out activities to foster peace and sustainable development in the country. This includes the provision of technical expertise and financial resources for the establishment and operationalization of local peace and reconciliation committees.

15. To help to rebuild relations between communities following violence in November, MINUSCA deployed surge teams to Alindao and Batangafo in December, which remain there, to relaunch intercommunal dialogue with the aim of de-escalating tensions and creating stronger mechanisms for conflict prevention.

III. Security situation

16. Violent clashes between armed groups and exactions committed by criminal militias continued to fuel intercommunal tensions and remain the primary source of insecurity and threats against civilians, especially women and children and humanitarians, mostly with impunity. Armed groups and their factions continued to hold sway in vast parts of the territory, establishing parallel administrations, notwithstanding their stated commitment to the peace process.

17. The reporting period coincided with the resumption of the dry season in the country, allowing for an expansion of transhumance movements, commercial trucking and trafficking in extracted resources. As in previous years, the period was also marked by a corresponding increase in violent clashes and attacks on civilians. The movement of natural resources continued to fuel violent competition between armed groups for access to and control of strategic sites such as mines, markets and key roadways. Notwithstanding the increase in incidents in the final months of 2018, the

overall number of civilian deaths in 2018 linked to the conflict was significantly lower (697), compared with the same period in 2017, when it had reached 1,571.

18. The most serious incidents occurred in the centre and east of the country, where retaliatory attacks between the Union pour la paix en Centrafrique and anti-balaka associated militias persisted along the Alindao-Bambari and Ippy-Bambari axes. Following the killing of two Muslim civilians on 14 and 15 November, as well as numerous previous attacks on the Muslim population by suspected anti-balaka in 2017 and 2018, Union fighters and Muslim civilians attacked a camp for internally displaced persons, located next to the Catholic Church, in Alindao on 15 November, claiming that the camp was a safe haven for anti-balaka elements. The assailants burned down the church during a violent, prolonged attack, which claimed the lives of at least 70 individuals, including 2 priests.

19. In Batangafo, at the end of October, Mouvement patriotique pour la Centrafrique and Front populaire pour la renaissance de la Centrafrique fighters, along with armed young Muslim men, launched a violent attack on a camp for internally displaced persons, targeting civilians and burning much of the camp to the ground, in revenge for the wounding of three Muslim civilians the day before. Eleven persons were killed and 37 wounded in the attack, which also targeted the local church. Anti-balaka fighters have frequently used such camps as a hiding place from which they attack Muslim civilians or traders. Mouvement, Front and Union leaders have repeatedly threatened to attack the camps in Alindao and Ippy to forcibly evict the anti-balaka fighters residing in them.

20. The Union pour la paix en Centrafrique continued to conduct destabilizing activities in Bambari, including by establishing barricades aimed at impeding the movement of MINUSCA patrols, and threatening to attack recently established police and gendarmerie posts. The Union also continued to use violence to prevent cooperation between the Muslim community and the national internal security forces. In November, the Union kidnapped several community leaders in Bambari to prevent their dialogue with the local authorities and to prevent Muslim young people from competing in the recruitment drive for the Central African armed forces.

21. On 10 January, coinciding with the announcement by the Government that peace talks would commence on 24 January in Khartoum, the Union pour la paix en Centrafrique launched an attack on a Central African armed forces position in PK0 and against a MINUSCA patrol in Bambari, with the aim of preventing the commemoration of International Agriculture Day in Bambari, in which President Touadera was expected to participate. The violence prompted MINUSCA to launch a robust operation on January 10 against the Union, with a view to protecting civilians and restoring security in and around Bambari. MINUSCA extended its operation to Bokolobo, where the Union leader, Ali Darassa, has his base. Two national police officers were killed in the initial Union attack. As a result of the clashes in the days that followed, several civilians were wounded and more than 40 Union fighters were killed. Over the course of the operation, which is ongoing, MINUSCA seized and dismantled all Union bases in Bambari and in Bokolobo.

22. On 31 December, the Front populaire pour la renaissance de la Centrafrique advanced to take the mining town of Bakouma in the sparsely populated area of Mbomou prefecture, causing some 18,000 local residents to flee the area. The Front looted most of the houses in the town and stole a vehicle belonging to humanitarian agencies. Although the Front had threatened to continue the offensive towards Bangassou, it withdrew from Bakouma on 16 January 2019. During the Front's occupation of Bakouma, 32 people, including 5 women, were killed, many homes, a hospital and a school were looted and 30 houses in Fatama village were burned down. Violent clashes between the Union pour la paix en Centrafrique and anti-balaka

associated militias and attacks on civilians also occurred along the Djema-Zemio and Djema-Dembia axes. On 20 October, MINUSCA documented a massacre of several Fulani families, including 5 women and 12 children, north of Zemio. Union and Front fighters also opened fire on a funeral procession in Ippy on 25 January, killing 10 civilians and wounding 17.

23. Compared with prior reporting periods, the number of security incidents in Bangui and the west of the country remained steady, notwithstanding expansion efforts by Retour, réclamations, réhabilitation and related incidents in north-west Ouham-Pendé prefecture. In October, Retour, réclamations, réhabilitation sought to formalize alliances with other armed groups active in the region, including anti-balaka, the Sayo and Belanga factions of Revolution et Justice and the Front démocratique pour la paix en Centrafrique, to form a new coalition: the Rassemblement centrafricain pour la paix. Notwithstanding their increasing attempts to control and tax transhumance and mines, the coalition reaffirmed, in its initial declaration, its commitment to the African Initiative for Peace and Reconciliation and the disarmament, demobilization, repatriation and reintegration process. In November, Retour, réclamations, réhabilitation moved into the south-west, along the Cameroonian border, where the Siriri armed group is active, disarmed Siriri fighters and forcibly integrated them into Retour, réclamations, réhabilitation ranks. In the north-west, owing to the joint presence of the Central African armed forces and MINUSCA troops, Retour, réclamations, réhabilitation unsuccessfully attempted to establish a foothold in Ngaoundaye ahead of the transhumance season.

24. In the PK5 neighbourhood of Bangui, isolated security incidents occurred after a prominent leader of a criminal gang, Mohammed Appo, was killed following an altercation with a shop owner, which stemmed from the unsuccessful attempt by Appo to enforce a “ville morte”. The increased presence of internal security forces and MINUSCA forces within and around PK5 was instrumental in managing the destabilizing impact of his death and subsequent rumours of the death of criminal gang leader “Force” and effectively averted a deterioration in the security situation in Bangui.

IV. Humanitarian situation

25. Civilians, in particular women and children, continue to suffer from the consequences of conflict and are increasingly exposed to protection risks and acute humanitarian needs. More than 1,000 protection-related incidents were recorded on average every month. Attacks against civilians and civilian infrastructure continued unabated.

26. During the reporting period, the number of people in need of assistance and protection increased from 2.5 million to 2.9 million, representing a 16 per cent increase, compared with the same period in 2017. Of those people in need, more than half are children and 1.6 million are in acute need. One child in three suffers from severe malnutrition, and 13 per cent of the population is at level 4 of food insecurity in a country where agriculture should be able to feed the entire population. One in two people does not have access to safe drinking water.

27. There are record levels of displacement. More than one in four Central Africans has fled his or her home. As at 15 January 2019, more than 648,000 people were internally displaced throughout the country and more than 575,000 refugees were registered in neighbouring countries. Meanwhile, more than 249,000 internally displaced persons have returned since 2017, primarily in the Mbomou, Nana Grébizi, Ouham-Pendé and Ouaka prefectures. Some 25,000 refugees have returned (either spontaneously or facilitated) since 2017.

28. Humanitarian actors continue to work and deliver basic services in an increasingly dangerous environment. In 2018, 6 humanitarian workers were killed and 23 injured, while a total of 396 security incidents against humanitarian actors were recorded (more than 1 incident per day on average), compared with 301 in 2017. This led to the suspension in operations of nearly 20 per cent of all humanitarian organizations (25 organizations of 137 present) in the country. Notwithstanding the challenging environment, MINUSCA continued to facilitate the delivery of humanitarian assistance as one of its priority tasks, and humanitarian actors delivered aid to nearly 1 million people in 2018.

29. The 2019 Humanitarian Response Plan launched on 7 January requires \$430.7 million to respond to the needs of 1.7 million people. It is currently 3 per cent funded.

V. Protection of civilians

30. The protection of civilians from violence and exactions remains a central priority for MINUSCA. The Mission continued to provide physical protection, ensure a protective environment and facilitate dialogue in accordance with its new mandate and its protection of civilians strategy, the latter of which was adopted in April 2018. Physical protection from imminent threat of violence remained the most visible and sought-after form of assistance by communities. In line with the new mandate and the focus on prevention, dialogue and local peace processes continue to be an important prevention tool, although their sustainability is hampered by the limited presence of State institutions in most areas outside Bangui.

31. MINUSCA military operations have reduced threats by armed groups in several areas, including in Ouham-Pendé prefecture, where Operation Mbaranga reduced armed group activities and enabled the return of displaced civilians to their villages, and Operation Bekpa II, which dislodged the Union pour la paix en Centrafrique from Bambari.

32. MINUSCA also strengthened its early warning system with the recruitment of an additional 26 community liaison assistants. A total of 78 community liaison assistants now work closely with uniformed and civilian personnel throughout the country to improve the Mission's situational awareness, understanding of emerging threats and prevention efforts. In areas of particularly high risk to civilians, such as Alindao and Batangafo, the community liaison assistants were joined by civilian surge teams tasked with promoting intercommunal dialogue and establishing local ceasefires and conflict prevention mechanisms.

33. MINUSCA strengthened internal coordination with the establishment of a coordination platform between the Bangui coordination cell and the joint task force in Bangui to ensure an integrated approach to respond to protection of civilian concerns in Bangui.

34. MINUSCA is expanding the training of uniformed personnel on approaches to the protection of civilians. A training of trainers was held for officers who will replicate the training for their relevant contingents. The Mission has also reinforced the capacity of the Central African armed forces by conducting predeployment training sessions using an integrated protection of civilians training module developed by the Mission.

VI. Extension of State authority and the rule of law

Extension of State authority

35. Notwithstanding progress achieved in the redeployment of prefects, subprefects, armed forces and internal security forces, the projection of State authority outside Bangui remains minimal and with only limited impact. Government performance is hampered by weak capacity, underresourced State institutions and the legacy of decades of poor governance, poverty, inequality in the distribution of resources, low levels of education and limited public services, underlining the continuous need not only to strengthen the State presence outside Bangui, but also to develop the capacities of the central Government.

36. MINUSCA and the United Nations country team continued to support the Government in implementing the national strategy for the restoration of State authority. The Mission and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) supported the Ministry of Territorial Administration, Decentralization and Local Development in conducting verifications to map the presence of civil servants in prefectures throughout the country and to collect data to highlight the gaps for review by the Prime Minister, as Chair of the coordination and monitoring committee for the implementation of the strategy.

37. The absence of banks outside the capital and resulting difficulties in the payment of salaries remain an important obstacle to the deployment of local administration. MINUSCA, UNDP and the World Bank continue to work with the Government to review banking institutions' proposals and to advocate with telecommunication companies to offer Internet banking solutions to address this challenge.

Operationalization of national armed and internal security forces

38. As at 15 January 2019, 1,358 of the 7,087 soldiers of the Central African armed forces were deployed outside Bangui. A total of 896 members of the Central African armed forces, trained by the European Union Training Mission and Russian military experts, have been deployed in seven locations working alongside MINUSCA. An additional 248 soldiers are currently being trained by Russian military experts. The Mission enhanced its planning and technical assistance to those units in the seven locations, including through joint planning and tactical cooperation. It also enhanced its limited logistical support to the armed forces, including in the form of casualty evacuation and fuel supply in more remote locations. The field collaboration between Central African armed forces and MINUSCA continues to be critical in improving the protection of civilians and reducing the threat of armed groups and criminal activity.

39. The Government continued to make progress in monitoring and following up on misconduct committed by defence and internal security forces as part of broader efforts, supported by MINUSCA, to improve accountability, discipline and respect for human rights within these institutions. Numerous individual cases of misconduct were observed in Bambari, Obo and Paoua during the reporting period, including cases of physical assaults against civilians and among elements of the Central African armed forces. The Military General Inspector and the Military Prosecutor's Office, with MINUSCA support, are conducting investigations into these cases.

40. During the reporting period, 97 gendarmerie and 106 police officers were deployed to the regions, mainly to the west of the country, bringing the total number of national internal security forces currently deployed outside Bangui to 1,100 (729 gendarmes and 371 police).

Security sector reform

41. On 19 December, the National Assembly adopted a military appropriation bill for the period 2019–2023, forecasting \$374 million in expenditure to implement the garrison army concept, as laid out in the national defence plan. In line with the latter, which is aimed at building a 9,800-strong army by 2023, on 5 November, the Government launched the first nationwide campaign for the recruitment of 1,023 new soldiers throughout all 16 prefectures, using objective selection criteria. MINUSCA continued to provide technical and logistical support to the authorities to ensure inclusive recruitment through the application of quotas for recruits from all the prefectures and for women (15 per cent).

42. MINUSCA continued to coordinate the provision of technical assistance and training by international partners. On 20 November, 300 soldiers of the third and fifth infantry battalions completed a two-month refresher training in advanced infantry skills delivered by Russian instructors. On 6 December, the European Union Training Mission concluded the training of 330 soldiers of the amphibian battalion. MINUSCA convened periodic meetings of the International Coordination Group on the Central African defence and internal security forces to better coordinate the provision of support to the defence and internal security forces, with the participation of China, France, the Russian Federation and the United States of America, as well as the African Union, ECCAS and the European Union.

43. On 19 December, 248 gendarmerie and 250 police officers, recruited with MINUSCA support, concluded their training, including specialized modules, to prepare for future deployment in crowd control units. Their deployment remains limited owing to a lack of logistics, infrastructure and equipment.

44. MINUSCA, through the Mine Action Service, continued to support weapons and ammunition management by assisting the national defence and internal security forces in infrastructure planning. The Mission also delivered specialized training on the management of ammunition and weapons storage facilities, weapons marking and self-sustained ammunition disposal to selected members of the national defence forces.

Justice and the rule of law

45. The capacity and functioning of national judicial and penitentiary structures outside Bangui remained limited, with 15 of 27 first instance and appellate courts beginning to be operational, including 13 outside Bangui. The Bangui Court of Appeal, with MINUSCA support, heard 16 cases during its second criminal session of 2018, from 19 November to 20 December, 6 of which were related to the conflict, resulting in the conviction of three ex-Séléka and four anti-balaka defendants.

46. MINUSCA continued to provide technical support to judicial authorities investigating different cases relating to the crisis and violations of human rights. The Special Criminal Court marked a milestone with its inaugural session on 22 October, signalling the start of investigations, followed by the publication of the Court's prosecution strategy on 4 December. The Mission continued to use its urgent temporary measures, apprehending 54 individuals suspected of committing various crimes, including murder, kidnapping, armed robbery, torture and looting and the illegal detention of weapons, during the reporting period.

47. On 9 January, the Government endorsed a national strategy on the demilitarization of the penitentiary system, alongside prisoner health and social reintegration policies, developed with the support of MINUSCA. The recruitment of 150 new civilian prison officer was completed on 22 November and is pending the approval of the Government to begin training. MINUSCA continued enhanced mentoring and training on prison security, resulting in the resolution of at least four

significant security incidents, including an attempted escape and riot. MINUSCA also delivered training to the first national prison intervention team, which will deploy alongside the MINUSCA corrections team for on-the-job training.

Disarmament, demobilization, repatriation and reintegration

48. On 17 December, the Government launched the national disarmament, demobilization, repatriation and reintegration programme in the western part of the country, starting in Paoua, with MINUSCA support. Disarmament and demobilization operations in Bozoum and Paoua were completed on 18 January. A total of 137 ex-combatants, including 2 women, from the two Revolution et Justice factions, Sayo and Belanga, and anti-balaka/Ngaissona were disarmed and demobilized. In addition, 103 war weapons, 93 grenades, 7 rockets, 2 mortar shells and 3,199 rounds of ammunition were collected. The Government planned to continue such operations in Bouar and Kouï in late February.

49. To complement these efforts, MINUSCA continued to expand its community violence reduction programme in eight locations, in partnership with the International Organization for Migration and the United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS). As part of the programme, to date, a total of 3,190 combatants, young people and community members, including 1,049 women, have been engaged in rehabilitation works and social cohesion and income-generating activities implemented in partnership UNOPS. From 15 October 2018 to 28 January 2019, 205 weapons of war, 4,466 artisanal weapons, 132 unexploded ordnance and 14,506 small arms ammunition were collected through those programmes. The national community violence reduction strategy, developed with MINUSCA support in consultation with the United Nations country team and national and international partners, was transmitted to the Government for endorsement on 30 November. The strategy provides an overarching framework for harmonizing approaches among all national and international partners involved in the design and implementation of community violence reduction programmes.

VII. Human rights and the fight against impunity

50. During the reporting period, grave violations of human rights, including arbitrary killings and conflict-related sexual violence, continued to be reported as a result of clashes between rival armed groups and of targeted attacks against civilians. MINUSCA recorded 431 violations/abuses of international human rights law and breaches of international humanitarian law affecting at least 871 victims, 844 of whom were victims of armed group violence, mainly by the Union pour la paix en Centrafrique and the anti-balaka. The clashes and targeted attacks caused at least 258 civilian deaths. The violations reflect a cycle of attacks and reprisals in which camps for internally displaced persons, health centres and places of worship have been repeatedly targeted.

51. National authorities, with MINUSCA support, continued to vet existing and new personnel (through the recruitment process) in the defence and internal security forces. During the reporting period, MINUSCA supported the Government in vetting 655 existing soldiers and 17 active members of the internal security forces. MINUSCA continued to condition its support to national security forces on compliance with the human rights due diligence policy on United Nations support to non-United Nations security forces. During the reporting period, the secretariat for the policy received and processed 32 requests to support internal security forces and Central African armed forces through technical cooperation, training and logistical support, and in this connection screened 1,438 Central African armed forces and internal security

forces personnel. As a result, 20 internal security forces personnel were refused United Nations support, 3 were arrested and 2 were dismissed from the police service.

52. MINUSCA continued to support national authorities in the efforts to combat incitement to hatred and violence by establishing a working group, developing an online monitoring tool with the support of the United Nations Global Service Centre and establishing a civil society platform for a systematic response to this issue. MINUSCA has also engaged the national High Council on Communication to combat this scourge through the implementation of a national action plan to prevent public incitement to violence and hate speech. From 14 to 19 October, MINUSCA and the Office of the Special Adviser to the Secretary-General on the Prevention of Genocide provided capacity-building training to media practitioners on preventing religious and ethnic hatred and incitement to violence in the Central African Republic.

Transitional justice

53. In December, the mandate of the steering committee tasked with establishing the truth, justice, reparations and reconciliation commission was extended for six months. The committee continued to prepare its plan for national consultations, with United Nations support. It has undertaken assessment missions to 16 prefectures and noted security challenges that might impede the effective participation of the population in the consultation process.

54. The National Human Rights Commission received 10 human rights-related complaints. MINUSCA provided technical support to the Commission to adopt complaint procedures and inform the public thereof.

Conflict-related sexual violence

55. Government efforts to combat conflict-related sexual violence have continued to expand. The mixed unit for rapid intervention and repression of sexual violence against women and children, with MINUSCA police support, including women officers, launched investigations into the mass rape case that had occurred in Kiriwiri in February 2018. The case represents the first time that the unit has conducted investigations outside Bangui. It interviewed 150 victims during its investigation mission.

56. During the reporting period, 134 cases of judicial investigations were recorded by MINUSCA, involving 149 victims. A total of 62 suspects were referred to the national authorities. Moreover, 13 awareness-raising sessions by MINUSCA on sexual and gender-based violence reached 675 people, including 285 women.

Children and armed conflict

57. With the launch of the national disarmament, demobilization, repatriation and reintegration programme in January 2019, 119 children (34 girls and 85 boys) were separated from the Revolution et Justice armed group and are being profiled for reintegration programming. Since January 2018, a total of 923 children (264 girls and 659 boys) have been separated from armed groups. Thirty-nine children were killed in various incidents during the reporting period, including 12 Fulani children killed by anti-balaka at an isolated transhumance camp in Haut-Mbomou prefecture in October and 6 on 15 November during an attack on the Alindao camp for internally displaced persons by the Union pour la paix en Centrafrique, supported by armed Muslim young people.

VIII. Socioeconomic situation

58. In December, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) Executive Board completed its fifth review under the Extended Credit Facility arrangement for the Central African Republic, enabling the disbursement of \$31.6 million approved in July.

59. The economic growth rate was estimated at 4.3 per cent in 2018 and, according to IMF, could increase to 5 per cent in 2019. The absence of banks outside the capital, weak public revenue (representing approximately 10 per cent of gross domestic product) and issues linked to governance and the efforts to combat corruption continue to constitute challenges to economic growth.

60. With a Human Development Index value remaining at 0.367 for 2018, the Central African Republic ranks 188 of 189 countries.

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

61. The disbursement of funds for the implementation of the National Recovery and Peacebuilding Plan for the period 2017–2021 continued to accelerate during 2018. Of the some \$2.6 billion pledged by donors since November 2016, more than \$1.4 billion had been disbursed by 31 December 2018, bringing the financial delivery rate to 54 per cent, an increase of 38 percentage points, compared with September 2017, due in large part to the mapping of projects and more effective tracking of disbursements. Efforts to increase national ownership continued, with the annual review of the Plan and the Mutual Engagement Framework being conducted through a series of discussions with national stakeholders, including the Government, the National Assembly and the University of Bangui.

IX. Mission capacities

A. Military

62. As at 1 February, MINUSCA had deployed 11,170 military personnel, 3.3 per cent of whom were women, representing 95.88 per cent of the total authorized strength of 11,650 personnel. A total of 480 are staff officers or military observers, of whom 43 are women, or 8.9 per cent. The force currently comprises 10 infantry battalions, 2 high mobility battalions, 1 reserve battalion, 1 special forces company, 1 quick-reaction force company and several enabling units, including 1 military police company, 5 engineering companies, 1 heavy transport company, 3 level II hospitals and 1 level I plus forward surgery module, and 3 helicopter units, including 1 attack helicopter unit. The Mission's three attack helicopters, however, were not operational during the reporting period, significantly limiting its ability to maintain an effective robust, flexible and mobile posture and negatively affecting its ability to conduct operations. The helicopters were to be replaced in February through the planned rotation programme of the contingent-owned equipment. The Mission, with guidance from Headquarters, is reviewing its capabilities and response procedures to improve its casualty evacuation support.

63. The additional 900 peacekeepers that were deployed are using specialized equipment, including reconnaissance and high mobility armoured vehicles, and enablers such as engineering vehicles, logistics and medical equipment. MINUSCA has reinforced its military posture with two highly mobile battalions, designed as joint task forces composed of three companies, capable of deploying simultaneously and operating autonomously, with integrated force multipliers. They will focus on medium-term field missions and have been successfully deployed in Bambari and Bria.

B. Police

64. As at 1 February, MINUSCA had deployed 2,049 police officers, comprising 382 individual police officers (including 57 women, or 14 per cent) and 1,667 formed police unit and police support unit personnel (including 126 women, or 7.6 per cent), representing 98.5 per cent of its authorized strength of 2,080 police officers (including 400 individual police officers and 1,680 formed police unit and police support unit personnel). Two police support units and six formed police units are operating in Bangui under the joint task force and four formed police units are deployed in Bambari, Bouar, Bria and Kaga Bandoro.

C. Civilian personnel

65. As at 1 February, MINUSCA had deployed 1,359 civilian personnel (1,161 staff members and 198 United Nations Volunteers), representing 89 per cent of a total of 1,524 authorized positions. A total of 347 women constituted 26 per cent of civilian personnel, with 27 per cent of that total in positions at the P-5 level and above.

D. Status-of-forces agreement

66. During the reporting period, the Mission continued to engage with the Government on violations of the status-of-forces agreement. Several outstanding issues were resolved, including the signing on 26 December of the customs exoneration to cover MINUSCA fuel supplies and an agreement with the directorate of the customs services to improve communication between MINUSCA and the customs office regarding custom clearances for the Mission.

E. Efforts to optimize performance

67. The Mission's dedicated joint task force continued to implement the recommendations of 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,¹ in the wider context of the Action for Peacekeeping agenda. The Mission has undertaken seven robust operations countrywide, successfully restoring order and clearing cities from armed groups. It has improved its capacity in terms of training, intelligence surveillance and reconnaissance, constructed eight helicopter landing sites capable of supporting night operations and reinforced its military capacities in emerging hot spots. It is also reviewing its footprint and reducing the number of temporary operating bases, where the situation allows, in order to improve the efficacy of its forces and reduce the support burden. The Mission has also sought to enhance accountability by conducting evaluation audits and tabletop exercises. In addition, two innovations are being piloted to strengthen the Mission's efficacy: (a) an integrated technology platform in support of decision-making, operations coordination and crisis management known as the Mission Common Operation Picture; and (b) the Comprehensive Performant Assessment System, which will assist Mission leadership in analysing the Mission's impact. Lastly, the Mission has set up a joint structure with the Central African internal security forces, which has led to the arrest of high-profile criminals.

¹ Available at https://peacekeeping.un.org/sites/default/files/improving_security_of_united_nations_peacekeepers_report.pdf.

68. During the reporting period, MINUSCA also took important action to improve its overall environmental performance. That action included the ongoing finalization of the procurement process for the acquisition of incinerators to manage solid waste generated Mission-wide, as well as a financial agreement with UNOPS for the remediation of the Kolongo landfill in Bangui. As at 22 January 2019, the Mission had installed 39 of 41 planned wastewater treatment facilities to help to significantly reduce any risk relating to wastewater. As part of reducing its emissions, MINUSCA is increasing the use of renewable energy, including by installing photovoltaic systems for some information and communications technology equipment in Bangui and will extend this to field locations. Furthermore, solar street lights have been installed at the MINUSCA logistics base in Bangui, while the installation of them is under way at Mission headquarters. Lastly, the Mission has made progress with respect to the synchronization of generators, which has contributed to reducing its fuel consumption and carbon emissions.

F. Serious misconduct, including sexual exploitation and abuse

69. During the reporting period, the number of allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse declined, with two new allegations recorded by MINUSCA, compared with nine allegations during the previous reporting period. These new allegations are under investigation. The two alleged victims, both adults, were referred for services, including medical and psychosocial assistance, through the United Nations Population Fund and its implementing partners.

70. MINUSCA continued to implement my zero-tolerance policy on sexual exploitation through robust preventative measures, including training for all categories of personnel and regular risk assessments of military camps, including permanent and temporary operating bases. MINUSCA conducted outreach activities, including awareness-raising for local community and youth groups and community and religious leaders. In addition to its toll-free reporting line, the Mission consolidated its alert system by establishing a new community-based complaint mechanism in PK11 in Bangui and by strengthening the capacity of the 20 other existing community-based complaint mechanisms throughout the country.

71. MINUSCA and the United Nations country team continued to address sexual exploitation and abuse in a coordinated manner through meetings of the sexual exploitation and abuse task force and the implementation of the sexual exploitation and abuse information-sharing protocol. These two tools, in addition to the new incident reporting form being piloted in the Central African Republic, have contributed to ensuring synergy and consistency in the collection and sharing of information and in reporting allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse.

72. Following my report to the General Assembly on special measures for protection from sexual exploitation and abuse ([A/72/751](#)), the MINUSCA field victim's rights advocate, along with relevant stakeholders, mapped victims' rights approaches and services available system-wide in the country. Furthermore, the Mission continued to explore ways of addressing the issue of paternity claims and child support resulting from sexual exploitation and abuse in relation to United Nations personnel, through support from the trust fund in support of victims of sexual exploitation and abuse.

G. Safety and security of United Nations personnel

73. Security remains a serious challenge for United Nations personnel. During the reporting period, 158 security incidents were recorded, including 47 attacks and ambushes by armed groups and criminal gangs targeting United Nations personnel, premises, equipment and convoys, which resulted in the death of one peacekeeper in Gbambia (Mambéré-Kadéï prefecture) on 17 November. One peacekeeper died in a road traffic accident in Ouanda Djallé (Vakaga) on 6 November. A total of 13 cases of death threats against and harassment of United Nations civilian personnel were reported, attributed to armed and criminal groups. A total of 28 civilian and military personnel were injured, of whom 6 were injured in ambushes and hostile attacks by armed groups and 8 in road traffic accidents. Nine demonstrations against the United Nations took place in Bangui and other towns.

H. Financial aspects

74. The General Assembly, by its resolution [72/290](#), appropriated the amount of \$930.2 million for the maintenance of MINUSCA for the period from 1 July 2018 to 30 June 2019. As at 25 January 2019, unpaid assessed contributions to the Special Account for MINUSCA amounted to \$555.9 million. The total outstanding assessed contributions for all peacekeeping operations as at that date amounted to \$3,921.3 million. Reimbursement of troop and formed police costs has been made for the period up to 31 October 2018, while reimbursement of the costs of contingent-owned equipment has been made for the period up to 30 September 2018, in accordance with the quarterly payment schedule.

I. Observations

75. Since taking office, I have been unequivocal and steadfast in my conviction that the only path out of crisis for the Central African Republic must be forged through political dialogue. Now, two years later, we can point to important strides towards that end with the direct talks held in Khartoum between the Central African government and armed groups, under the auspices of the African Union, within the framework of the African Initiative for Peace and Reconciliation and supported by the United Nations.

76. The Political Agreement, signed in Bangui on 6 February, represents an important milestone towards a durable political solution for the Central African Republic. The Agreement has laid a foundation upon which all national, regional and international stakeholders must now come together to build an inclusive and sustainable peace, placing at its heart the deeply rooted concerns of the people. I welcome the participation, as observers, of members of parliament, political parties, religious leaders and civil society, including representatives of victims, women and young people, in those talks. Their participation is key to ensuring that the Central African people, the main victims of these recurring cycles of violence, especially women and young people, are at the heart of the peace process.

77. As with many agreements elsewhere, the implementation of the Political Agreement will be challenging, in particular regarding the operationalization of transitional security arrangements. Sustained, constructive dialogue between the Government and the former armed groups will be necessary, with support from the United Nations, regional partners and the broader international community, to prevent a relapse into cycles of violence and help to rebuild trust among all Central Africans.

78. The cost of conflict is too high. I am outraged by the egregious acts of violence against civilians, peacekeepers and humanitarian workers. I condemn in the strongest

terms such unacceptable attacks, some of which may constitute war crimes. I reiterate my calls to the Central African Republic authorities to investigate swiftly those attacks and prosecute the perpetrators.

79. Peace can succeed only if all parties honour their commitment in good faith. I welcome the public pledge of President Touadera to address the root causes of the crisis in his country, including by eradicating marginalization policies that have excluded some minority groups from political participation and socioeconomic benefits. Armed groups must act on their commitment to abandoning irrevocably and halting the campaigns of violence and intimidation that have destabilized so many communities throughout the country for far too long, traumatizing generations of Central Africans. It is unacceptable that certain armed groups, in the weeks and days before traveling to Khartoum to discuss peace, escalated their violent activity, including horrific attacks on the country's most vulnerable populations in Alindao and Ippy. The announcement of the date of the peace dialogue in Khartoum was marred by attacks perpetrated by the Union pour la paix en Centrafrique and the Front populaire pour la renaissance de la Centrafrique in Bambari and Bakouma, prompting a robust response by MINUSCA to protect civilians. I commend MINUSCA for its action and its continued use of a robust posture to protect civilians and support the peace process, in line with its mandate. Armed groups participating in the peace process must demonstrate their good faith and commitment to peace through their actions and cease hostilities without preconditions or sunset clauses. They must be held to account whenever and wherever they engage in illegal activity or acts that are contrary to the pursuit of peace. MINUSCA will continue to do its utmost, in line with its mandate to support peace and stability in the country.

80. Taking into account experience with past peace agreements, I stress the need for timely implementation by all parties without delay. In order to build mutual trust and confidence in the peace process, I count on the national authorities to do their part in accelerating necessary legislation and reforms and adhering to their commitments. While current national authorities inherited a legacy of cyclical crises, they can set an example and leave a legacy of peace, stability and development. At the same time, prospects for peace and the rule of law require that the provisions for peace respect the constitution and international law. I would also call upon national, regional and international stakeholders to uphold their commitments to and active participation in the follow-up mechanisms, which are critical to keeping peace on track.

81. The choice is clear. Power and authority through guns and violence have no place in the Central African Republic. State authority must come through constitutional means, including the ballot box, and through political parties with platforms addressing the needs of their country and people. I would therefore strongly encourage eligible armed groups to move from violence to votes and evolve as legitimate political parties or movements, with a view to the 2020–2021 elections as provided for in the Political Agreement.

82. The upcoming elections of 2020–2021 will be a formidable test of the commitment of national stakeholders to political coexistence and inclusive governance, which remains fragile after years of intercommunal conflict. In this regard, the Government of the Central African Republic, with support from the United Nations and international partners, must mobilize quickly to ensure that national authorities have the technical, logistics, security and financial assistance required.

83. Peace without justice is not sustainable. The United Nations supports efforts to end impunity. How to address this in the context of the Central African Republic has been the subject of intense division and debate. The Central Africans themselves need to chart a path of peace, justice and stability that resonates with them and addresses their call to end impunity and work towards reconciliation. Accordingly, a

comprehensive and victim-centred framework for transitional justice must be at the heart of a peace process, together with other means of redress and reconciliation and the efforts to combat impunity, in compliance with international human rights norms and standards. I call upon Member States to continue to prioritize and invest in justice sector reforms and the work of the Special Criminal Court.

84. Since my last report, there have been a number of important milestones in the efforts to combat impunity in the Central African Republic. These include trials by national ordinary courts, the launch of investigations by the Special Criminal Court, continued progress in trying conflict-related crimes in the Bangui and Bouar Courts of Appeal and the recent surrender of two suspected Central African war criminals pursuant to requests by the International Criminal Court. These developments mark the collective determination of the Government of the Central African Republic and the international community to bring perpetrators of the gravest crimes to justice. The Commission on Truth, Justice, Reparation and Reconciliation must be established as a matter of priority and without further delay. If justice is to bring about peace and healing in the country, it must reach beyond courthouses to touch the lives of all Central Africans, in particular those who have faced forced displacement and violence. For this reason, the safe, voluntary and dignified return of refugees and displaced persons to their homes must be prioritized and supported politically and financially. I am encouraged by progress towards legislation ensuring respect for housing, land and property rights. I call upon the Government of the Central African Republic to be resolute in pursuing all measures necessary to achieve this, including through the operationalization of the local peace and reconciliation committees and the involvement of civil society in reconciliation and social cohesion initiatives.

85. The long-awaited launch of the national disarmament, demobilization, repatriation and reintegration programme in December 2018 marks a milestone towards reintegrating ex-combatants back into society. I call upon all armed group elements to immediately and fully demobilize and disarm, in line with the Political Agreement, and urge the region and the international community to encourage them to do so. To be sustainable, it must also form part of the transitional justice strategy and offer a perspective to eligible former armed group elements to serve their country in its security services. Seeing them disarming, returning to civilian life or joining the defence and internal security forces will reassure the population and build public confidence in the peace process.

86. While the demobilization and disarmament of armed groups would relinquish their hold on communities, long-term stability will require a much greater presence of State institutions, and an inclusive civil service, outside of the capital to prevent violence and criminality from thriving and to provide equitable basic services. I welcome the progress made in deploying civil servants throughout the territory and in establishing mechanisms to improve their sustained presence. The international community must significantly scale up its financial and technical assistance to support the capacity of Central African institutions and the expansion of essential infrastructure throughout the country so that the dividends of peace can be bolstered and consolidated.

87. The redeployment of the national defence and internal security forces throughout the country continues to be a key element of the restoration of State authority. Clearly, a key component of sovereignty is the reoperationalization of the national army and police. I commend the progress made to date, as well as the coordinated support from international partners. The objective is not simply to equip and deploy armed units throughout the territory, but rather to support the Government of the Central African Republic in building a corps of professional, accountable and regionally balanced defence and internal security forces that respect and protect the rights of all Central Africans. To this end, I welcome the launch in November 2018 of the first-ever nationwide recruitment campaign for the Central African armed

forces. The Government must now uphold its commitment to transparent, representative and merit-based recruitment standards in order to increase the diversity of the armed forces. More international assistance, however, is urgently needed to accelerate the operational deployment of the army, police and gendarmes, and the Government must ensure that these deployments are sustainable and accepted by the local population.

88. As the Government of the Central African Republic increases the presence of State institutions, it must accelerate progressive decentralization of State authority, including with respect to resources. An inclusive approach to decentralization is at the heart of the peace process and will be instrumental in empowering marginalized communities in charting their own course towards stability and prosperity. It will also be essential to ensuring that the wealth of the State benefits the people. I commend President Touadera for his commitment to decentralization and hope that the National Assembly will pass a decentralization bill in the first half of 2019. I call upon international partners to work with national authorities to ensure that the Government has the technical, logistical and resource capacities required to implement the associated reforms in a timely manner.

89. I am alarmed by the continued dire humanitarian situation. Continued attacks against those providing aid leading to the suspension of their activities are particularly unacceptable, and I call upon all armed groups to facilitate the delivery of aid and development.

90. To be sustainable, peace must be met with equal investment in development. I commend the progress made in the disbursement of funds and in the national ownership of the National Recovery and Peacebuilding Plan. The Political Agreement offers a unique opportunity to expand economic recovery activities and provide the population with concrete peace dividends, as well as to ensure good governance. Serious consideration should be given to prioritizing development in historically marginalized areas of the country. These efforts will be sustainable only if the security environment improves, which requires armed groups to lay down their weapons and for the State to ensure the legitimate exercise of force within the rule of law. This will lay the groundwork for improving the security and well-being of the population and enabling recovery and development activities to expand and progressively replace humanitarian assistance.

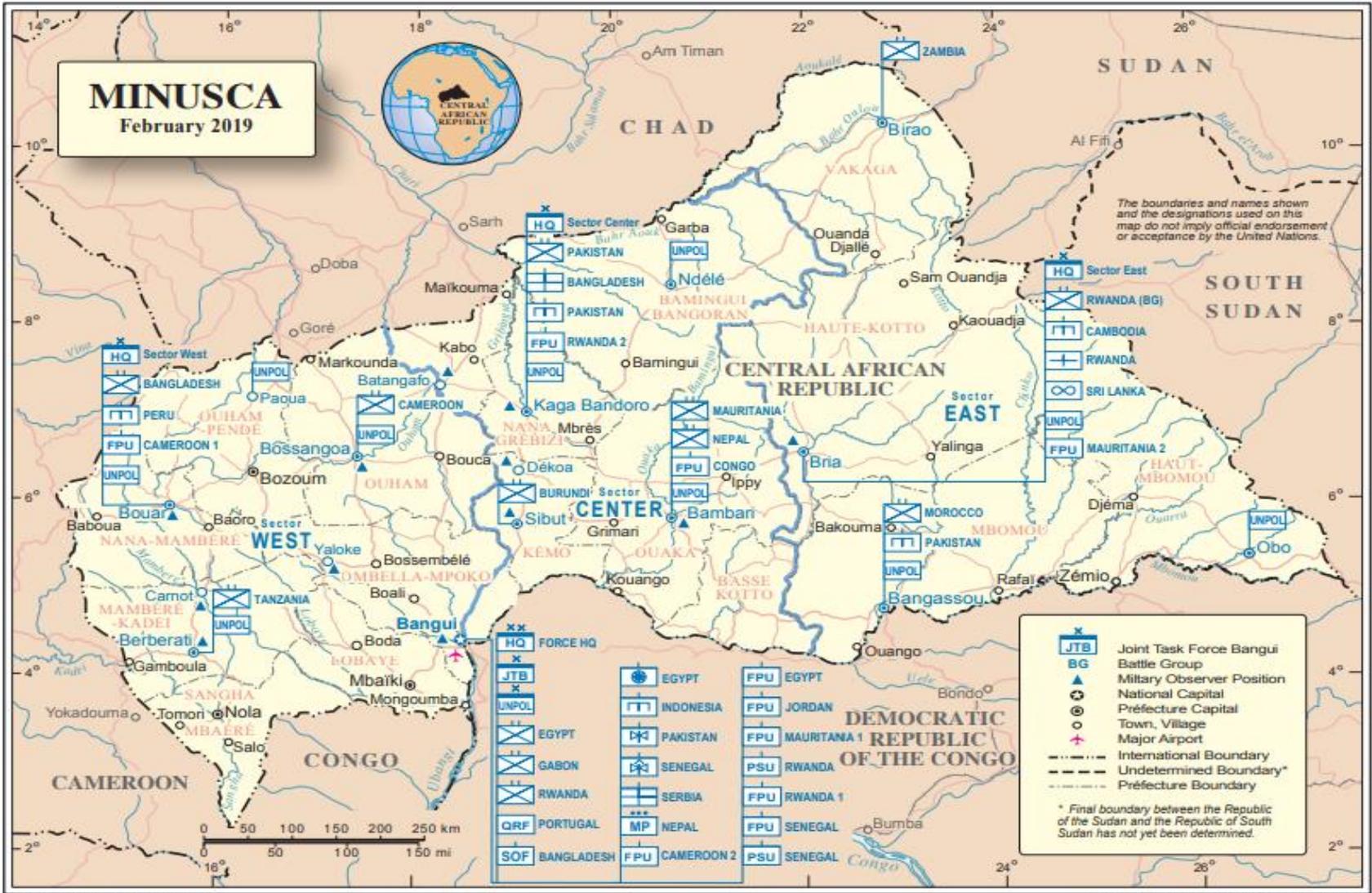
91. I also call upon the Government of the Central African Republic to continue its efforts in strengthening institutional and structural reforms in key sectors, while improving governance and the business climate, and combating corruption. The support of the United Nations and of international partners, especially the European Union and the World Bank, will be key to launching strategic recovery and development initiatives to foster stabilization and sustaining peace.

92. I am particularly pleased to highlight the excellent cooperation between the African Union and the United Nations in our unified support for the Central African Republic, which is one of my key priorities. Together, we have demonstrated that our institutions share a common vision for an inclusive and sustainable peace in the Central African Republic. It is imperative that we have the full and unified engagement of the region as we move forward to support a definitive end to conflict. Notwithstanding progress made in this regard, we are only at the beginning of a long road. The cohesion and unity of purpose between the African Union, the United Nations, the region and the broader international community will be essential as we walk the path of peace with Central Africans, in particular throughout the implementation of the Political Agreement.

93. I call upon the international community, in close coordination with MINUSCA, the African Union and the International Support Group on the Central African Republic, to support the implementation of the Political Agreement and to actively

participate in the inclusive follow-up mechanisms established in the Agreement and provide adequate resources to ensure that all agreed measures have a transformative effect on the lives of ordinary Central Africans.

94. I am very grateful to my Special Representative, Parfait Onanga-Anyanga, for his unwavering dedication and leadership. I am immensely grateful to the resolute commitment of the personnel of MINUSCA, the United Nations country team and the troop- and police-contributing countries, often in extreme and challenging conditions. I am also grateful to my Special Representative for Central Africa and Head of the United Nations Regional 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, bilateral and international partners, including through the International Support Group on the Central African Republic, and NGOs for their continued efforts to help the Government of the Central African Republic and all Central Africans to realize a peaceful and stable country.



Map No. 4522 Rev. 14 UNITED NATIONS February 2019 (Colour)

Office of Information and Communications Technology Geospatial Information Section