



Security Council

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The situation in Central Africa and the activities of the United Nations Regional Office for Central Africa

Report of the Secretary-General

I. Introduction

1. The present report is submitted pursuant to the statement of the President of the Security Council dated 10 August 2018 ([S/PRST/2018/17](#)), in which the Council requested the Secretary-General to keep it informed about the activities of the United Nations Regional Office for Central Africa (UNOCA). It provides an assessment of the major political and security developments and trends in Central Africa since the report of the Secretary-General dated 29 November 2018 ([S/2018/1065](#)) and covers the period from 30 November 2018 to 15 May 2019. The report also provides an update on the situation in the Lake Chad basin region, pursuant to Council resolution [2349 \(2017\)](#).

II. Major developments in the Central Africa subregion

A. Political, peace and security developments and trends

2. The political situation in Central Africa remained volatile and highly charged by recent electoral processes and security and human rights challenges.

3. In N'Djamena, on 24 March, the Central African Economic and Monetary Community (CEMAC) held the fourteenth ordinary session of its Conference of Heads of State, at which it adopted a common policy on emigration, immigration and border security, aimed at accelerating the creation of a visa-free zone. CEMAC leaders further expressed their solidarity with the President of Gabon, Ali Bongo Ondimba, following his recent convalescence and commended the President of the Central African Republic, Faustin-Archange Touadéra, for the signature of the Political Agreement for Peace and Reconciliation in the Central African Republic. The President of Cameroon, Paul Biya, took over the chairmanship of CEMAC for a two-year period.

4. On 13 April, the Conference of Heads of State and Government of the Community of Sahelo-Saharan States decided to temporarily relocate its headquarters from Tripoli to N'Djamena.



Political development and trends

5. In Angola, the President, João Lourenço, ramped up the fight against corruption as part of his Government's commitment to political and macroeconomic reforms. The Government mounted campaigns aimed at combating illegal immigration and illegal mining, which resulted in mass expulsions of foreign nationals. As preparations advanced for the holding of local elections in 2020, underpinning a broader decentralization process, Angola took steps to broaden democratic space and enhance dialogue with civil society.

6. The political and civic space in Burundi continued to be tense, with reports of persistent harassment of opposition parties. In January, the Government suspended 30 international non-governmental organizations after they failed to comply with a recent law strengthening financial controls and requiring the enforcement of ethnic quotas. In December 2018, the Prosecutor General issued an arrest warrant against the former President, Pierre Buyoya, and 16 other officials on conspiracy charges related to the 1993 assassination of the former President, Melchior Ndadaye. On 17 April, the National Assembly passed the new Electoral Code that will guide the 2020 general elections, in line with the May 2018 Constitution.

7. On 1 February, the former President of the United Republic of Tanzania, Benjamin Mkapa, in his capacity as facilitator, at that time, of the East African Community-led inter-Burundi dialogue, submitted a report to the Heads of State of the Community at their twentieth ordinary summit. He also proposed a political road map for the 2020 elections. The President of Burundi, Pierre Nkurunziza, rejected both the report and concerns regarding the political situation. The Community has yet to decide on next steps regarding the inter-Burundi dialogue.

8. In Cameroon, President Biya appointed a new Government on 4 January, which included 11 women. More than half of the country's 60 ministers were replaced. As legislative and municipal elections remained postponed by presidential decree, supporters of the main opposition parties called for a revision of the electoral law. Meanwhile, on 5 April, Parliament enacted a law on decentralization to determine the number of regional councillors. On 26 January, protests erupted in major cities throughout the country, eliciting a violent response by internal security forces and triggering mass arrests. Those arrested included several Members of Parliament from the Social Democratic Front and the leader of the Cameroon Renaissance Movement, Maurice Kamto, together with 200 of Mr. Kamto's supporters, who are currently standing trial before a military tribunal on charges that include rebellion, insurrection and public disturbance. Some of those charges carried the death penalty. In an interview broadcast on 19 March, the spokesperson for President Biya announced that the President would reject dialogue with Mr. Kamto, who had requested a face-to-face discussion.

9. The security situation in the North-West and South-West Regions of Cameroon remained of serious concern, with a new wave of kidnappings and killings in early 2019. On 24 January, the leader of the separatist group, Southern Cameroons Defence Forces, was reportedly killed by the national armed forces. In February, nearly 70 people were killed during a separatist-imposed 10-day lockdown to disrupt National Youth Day activities in the two regions. On 11 February, an arson attack on the Kumba District Hospital in the South-West Region resulted in at least four patients killed and several others injured. On 19 March, the former Secretary of State in charge of secondary education was kidnapped from his residence in Bamenda by suspected secessionist fighters. On 20 March, 16 students were abducted from the University of Buea by unidentified gunmen. The Government accused the secessionists of the abductions. The authorities announced their intention to carry out investigations into alleged human rights violations by security forces in the affected regions, but no outcome was made public.

10. While no concrete progress was made towards a dialogue process, in November 2018, the Government of Cameroon established the National Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration Committee, under the leadership of the Prime Minister, and tasked it with organizing, supervising and managing the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration of former fighters from Boko Haram and armed groups in the North-West and South-West Regions. The Government requested the Committee to work closely with international partners, especially the United Nations. The latter remained engaged and continued to advocate paying urgent attention to the situation of women and children formerly associated with combatants. From 14 to 17 April, the Liberian peace activist and Nobel Peace Prize laureate, Leymah Gbowee, led a mission of the African Women Leaders Network, with the support of the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women, the African Union, UNOCA and the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS), to Cameroon, seeking to reinforce the role of women in efforts to reduce violence and promote peace. The Prime Minister expressed his firm commitment to supporting the work of women's associations active in peacebuilding and social cohesion.

11. In the Central African Republic, considerable efforts were undertaken to revitalize the peace process under the auspices of the African Initiative for Peace and Reconciliation. From 8 to 11 January, the Commissioner for Peace and Security of the African Union and the Under-Secretary-General for Peace Operations of the United Nations visited Bangui, accompanied by a ministerial delegation from the region. Following the visit, talks between the Government and 14 armed groups commenced in Khartoum on 24 January and culminated in the signing of the Political Agreement for Peace and Reconciliation in the Central African Republic, in Bangui, on 6 February. Several neighbouring countries expressed their readiness to re-establish bilateral joint commissions with the Central African Republic that would facilitate discussions on border management and common security challenges.

12. In Chad, progress was made towards the holding of legislative elections, which had been postponed several times since 2015. On 4 April, the members of the Independent National Electoral Commission were sworn in before the Supreme Court. Opposition segments had raised concerns in relation to the individuals representing the opposition in the electoral body. A call by parts of the opposition to suspend their participation in the national framework for political dialogue was short-lived. Members of the presidential majority and opposition continued to come together in equal numbers under the framework, which continued to constitute the main platform for resolving contentious issues related to electoral preparations. Questions surrounding the electoral calendar, the budget and financing were yet to be clarified.

13. The security situation in some parts of Chad remained precarious, owing to armed group activity in the northern province of Tibesti and to Boko Haram terrorist activities in the areas around Lake Chad. In early February, the Government requested military support from France to halt the advance from southern Libya of some 250 fighters associated with the rebel coalition, Union des forces de la résistance. The military operation was deemed a success. On 3 March, the Government closed the country's border with Libya. On 26 March, it announced the establishment of an interdisciplinary security force in Tibesti, tasked with securing the border and intercepting armed criminal groups. Meanwhile, cycles of intercommunal tension between pastoralists and farmers continued in several parts of Chad.

14. While armed groups in the Democratic Republic of the Congo continued to represent a challenge to broader regional stability, the country's presidential, national and provincial legislative elections of 30 December took place in a relatively calm atmosphere and resulted in its first peaceful transfer of power. On 10 January, the Independent National Electoral Commission announced the provisional results of the

presidential election and declared the opposition candidate, Félix Tshisekedi, the winner. A legal challenge presented by the runner-up, Martin Fayulu, was rejected by the Constitutional Court and, on 24 January, Mr. Tshisekedi was sworn in as President. In the legislative elections, the Front commun pour le Congo coalition won the absolute majority. The proportion of women in the National Assembly remained roughly equal to the 2011 results; on 24 April, however, Jeannine Mabunda Lioko was elected as the first woman President of the National Assembly.

15. In Equatorial Guinea, opposition parties continued to face obstacles to participation in political dialogue. On 26 February, several members of opposition parties were arrested and briefly detained by the Government. On 22 March, the trial began for 150 individuals accused of instigating a failed coup d'état in December 2017. On 11 April, the leader of the Convergencia para la Democracia Social (Convergence for Social Democracy) opposition party, Andrés Esono Ondo, was arrested in Chad on suspicion of attempting to buy arms from the Chadian opposition to carry out a coup in Equatorial Guinea. He was released from prison with no charges on 24 April and returned to Malabo of his own volition.

16. In Gabon, a new National Assembly and new municipal councils were set up, following parliamentary and municipal elections in October and November 2018. On 7 January, several insurgents from within the Republican Guard took over the national radio station in Libreville and sought to overthrow the Government. The mutineers were quickly overpowered, and several were killed by internal security forces.

17. Headed by the Prime Minister, Julien Nkoghé Békaké, the new Government was established on 12 January, and then lightly reshuffled on 30 January. On 25 February, President Bongo Ondimba returned to Libreville from his convalescence abroad to convene the first meeting of the Council of Ministers since the establishment of the new Government. In March, some opposition parties and civil society called upon the Constitutional Court to declare a vacancy of power on the basis of what they perceived as the President's poor health. On 23 March, following further treatment abroad, the President returned to Libreville and held another meeting of the Council of Ministers on 29 March.

18. On 6 March, in the Congo, a Brazzaville court sentenced the opposition leader and 2016 presidential candidate, André Okombi Salissa, to 20 years in prison, on charges of illegal possession of weapons and attempting to undermine State security. The country continued to make progress towards the implementation of the ceasefire agreement of 23 December 2017 with former rebels in the Pool Region, although the related disarmament, demobilization and reintegration programme still needed to be fully implemented.

19. Following legislative, local and regional elections in October 2018, the Government of Sao Tome and Principe was formed by a diverse coalition with a one-seat majority in Parliament, ushering in a tense post-electoral period. On 29 November, the President, Evaristo Carvalho, appointed Jorge Lopes Bom Jesus as Prime Minister, to lead the new Government, which consists of 12 ministers and 2 secretaries of State, including 3 women. On 28 December, the new National Assembly reversed several of the decisions of its predecessor by reappointing four judges of the Supreme Court of Justice who had been obliged to retire and by revoking the mandate of the five judges of the Constitutional Court.

Security developments and trends

Boko Haram/Lake Chad basin

20. Attacks on civilian and military targets continued in the Far North Region of Cameroon and in the Lac province of Chad. Between 1 December 2018 and 30 April

2019, there were, reportedly, 83 Boko Haram-related security incidents in Cameroon, leading to 83 civilian fatalities, and 24 incidents in Chad, leading to 33 civilian fatalities. On 18 February, Chadian security forces arrested five suspected Boko Haram members in N'Djamena. On 22 March, Boko Haram elements launched a large-scale attack on Chadian forces deployed in Dangdala, Chad, that left 23 soldiers dead and 4 wounded. Following the attack, the President, Idriss Déby Itno, replaced the Chief of Staff of the Chadian armed forces. On 6 April, four Cameroonian soldiers were killed during an attack in Sagmé, Cameroon. On 14 April, another large attack killed 7 Chadian soldiers in Bouhama, Chad, and wounded 15 others. The Chadian army reported that 63 Boko Haram terrorists were killed during that attack. On 17 April, 2 Chadian soldiers were reportedly killed and another 12 injured in a Boko Haram attack in Magorone, Nigeria, during which 53 Boko Haram elements were reportedly also killed. On 18 April, Boko Haram elements attacked and burned the village of Tchakamari, in the Far North Region of Cameroon, killing 11 civilians, including children and older persons.

Lord's Resistance Army

21. The Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) continued to loot and kidnap civilians, including for forced labour. The non-governmental organization (NGO) Invisible Children reported a surge in abductions in Haut-Uélé and Bas-Uélé provinces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo during the first quarter of 2019. During the same period, the United Nations Joint Human Rights Office documented 62 human rights abuses committed by LRA combatants in the above-mentioned provinces. Incidents involved the ambushing of civilians, looting of food and non-food items and brief kidnappings of civilians to transport the looted items. Clashes with LRA elements led to the killing of two soldiers of the Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo on 8 and 22 February.

22. In the Central African Republic, unconfirmed reports indicated that LRA elements attacked civilians four times in the diamond-mining region east of Bria and reportedly fired upon armed group elements of the Front populaire pour la renaissance de la Centrafrique. Five LRA defectors were repatriated to Uganda with the support of the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA). LRA elements crossed the porous border between the Central African Republic and the Democratic Republic of the Congo multiple times to prey upon civilians for survival. Reports of civilians abducted by LRA could not be confirmed by MINUSCA during the reporting period, owing to the inaccessibility of the border area.

Maritime security in the Gulf of Guinea

23. In its report on piracy and armed robbery against ships issued on 16 January 2019, the International Maritime Bureau noted that reports of attacks in the Gulf of Guinea had more than doubled in 2018. During the reporting period, 15 attacks were recorded in the ECCAS zone of the Gulf of Guinea, 7 of which occurred off the coast of the Congo. On 2 January, 18 hostages were released off the Bakassi peninsula in Cameroon. On 22 February, three Chinese fishing vessels were attacked, resulting in eight people being taken hostage. At the time of writing, they remained in captivity. On 8 May, the authorities of Equatorial Guinea and Spain reported a joint naval operation in which 20 crew members on a Maltese-flagged merchant vessel were rescued from an assault by pirates in the Gulf of Guinea on 5 May, following which 10 pirates were reportedly arrested.

Poaching and illicit trafficking in wildlife and natural resources

24. On 25 January, the high-level segment of the International Conference of Ministers of Defence, Security and Protected Areas on the fight against poaching and other cross-border criminal activities met in N'Djamena, under the joint auspices of the Congo Basin Forest Partnership and the Commission for the Forests of Central Africa. Conference attendees adopted a declaration acknowledging that climate change was among the drivers of change in transhumance dynamics, which had the potential to jeopardize prospects for development, peace and security.

25. In February and March, the Government of Gabon intercepted 353 containers of kevazingo wood, subject to a ban since 2018, which were sold for illegal export. On 14 March, 2 tons of pangolin scales and 200 elephant tusks were seized in Douala, Cameroon, and 4 traffickers were arrested. At the time of writing, the traffickers remained in custody.

Effects of climate change, ecological changes and natural disasters on the stability of Central Africa

26. According to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, temperatures in parts of Central Africa have been rising 1.5 times faster than the global average. Owing to changing rainfall patterns, the subregion was experiencing more intense and frequent droughts and floods, which undermined food production, livelihoods and stability and elevated the risks of humanitarian crises, natural disasters and violence related to transhumance. In parts of Chad and Cameroon bordering Lake Chad, protracted conflict, combined with increased variability in rainfall and temperature, continued to result in high levels of hunger and malnutrition, subjecting millions to extreme hardship.

27. Urban settlements in the region were at risk owing to more frequent extreme climate events such as flooding and cyclones, combined with population growth and poor infrastructure. Bangui, Kinshasa and Mbuji-Mayi, Democratic Republic of the Congo, were listed as three of the most at-risk cities in the 2018 Climate Change Vulnerability Index.

B. Humanitarian developments

28. In Burundi, some 1.8 million people were affected by the humanitarian crisis and economic downturn. Humanitarian partners are targeting the 710,000 most vulnerable with required humanitarian assistance in 2019. Figures provided by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees showed that there were 351,975 Burundian refugees covered by the Burundi regional refugee response plan in the immediate subregion and beyond. Between 1 January and 31 March, 5,278 Burundian refugees were provided with assistance to return to Burundi from the United Republic of Tanzania, while an additional 2,082 left Burundi as refugees. As at 31 March, some 125,000 Burundians remained internally displaced.

29. In Cameroon, humanitarian needs increased sharply in the first quarter of 2019. Some 4.3 million people will require humanitarian assistance in 2019, an increase of 30 per cent compared with 2018. In addition to the impact of the Lake Chad basin crisis on the Far North Region, more than 1.3 million people are in need of urgent humanitarian assistance in the North-West and South-West Regions, owing to the ongoing violence there. More than 530,000 people were internally displaced in those two regions, as well as in the Littoral and West Regions, by the end of April 2019, and another 35,858 had sought asylum in Nigeria. School closures, multiple abductions of students and teachers, movement restrictions and incidents of sexual

and gender-based violence contributed to a climate of fear and intimidation, negatively affected local economies and access to basic social services and significantly increased protection risks. In addition, Cameroon had 263,000 internally displaced persons in the Far North Region and hosted 278,884 refugees from the Central African Republic in the East Region.

30. Protracted armed conflict and insecurity in the Central African Republic left over 63 per cent of the population, or 2.9 million people, in need of humanitarian assistance. More than 656,000 people remained internally displaced, and 592,000 had sought refuge in neighbouring countries.

31. In Chad, close to 4.3 million people needed humanitarian support, of whom 2.2 million required nutrition support, a 29 per cent increase since 2018. Of the country's 23 provinces, 16 were declared to be in a nutrition emergency. Chad was also affected by high levels of forced displacement, with large refugee caseloads from Sudan (338,799) and the Central African Republic (103,837).

32. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, 12.8 million people were in urgent need of humanitarian assistance. Humanitarian workers and the Ministry of Health battled to contain the ongoing Ebola outbreak in North Kivu and Ituri. As at 13 May, there had been more than 1,705 confirmed and probable cases of Ebola, and 1,122 deaths. Distrust among parts of the population and cases of community resistance to the response resulted in 19 documented attacks on health facilities, as well as hostility against response staff. More than 112,000 people had been vaccinated as at 13 May.

Boko Haram/Lake Chad basin

33. A surge in armed attacks accelerated population displacement throughout the Lake Chad basin region in recent months. Tens of thousands of civilians fled the attacks, bringing the total number of Nigerian refugees as at 30 April to 15,456 in the Lac province of Chad and 102,327 in the Far North Region of Cameroon. In February, 30,000 Nigerian refugees returned to Nigeria in what was considered to be an induced return. As at 31 March, there were 183,472 internally displaced persons and returnees in the Lac province of Chad and 253,813 internally displaced persons in the Far North Region of Cameroon. By the end of April, some 2.8 million people were displaced across the Lake Chad basin, the highest level to date.

C. Human rights trends

34. On 23 January, the National Assembly of Angola adopted its first penal code since independence and removed the provision prohibiting same-sex conduct. In February, the National Security Council approved the extension of its Operation Transparency, which targeted citizens and foreign nationals associated with illegal mining. Since September 2018, the Government's anti-corruption measures have resulted in more than 400,000 foreign citizens leaving the country to go to the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Unofficial sources reported that, in January and February, some 70 members of the Movimento Independentista de Cabinda (Cabinda Independence Movement) were arrested, of which 60 were later released.

35. Recorded allegations of human rights violations in Burundi included killings, forced disappearances, ill-treatment, arbitrary arrests and detentions and restrictions on the freedoms of association, expression and movement. Most of the victims of human rights violations were members of opposition political parties or coalitions, those perceived as opponents to the Government and human rights activists. The police, the national intelligence services and the Imbonerakure militia were accused of being the main perpetrators. The ongoing political impasse, along with the Government's decision to suspend cooperation with the Office of the United Nations

High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) in Burundi in October 2016, the subsequent closure of the Office in February 2019 and restrictions on the activities of some international NGOs, had a negative impact on the situation of human rights in the country.

36. Intensified fighting in the North-West and South-West Regions of Cameroon between government forces and separatists impeded the free movement of civilians, with violence and destruction of property attributed to both government forces and armed groups. There were also regular reports of human rights violations committed by government security forces and armed separatist groups. The International Crisis Group estimated that at least 1,850 people, including civilians, separatist fighters and government forces, had been killed since September 2017. In the Far North Region, Boko Haram continued to deliberately target public places such as markets, mosques and main commercial areas, with attacks often perpetrated by girls and women co-opted by the terrorist group.

37. The charges against the opposition leader, Maurice Kamto, and his supporters in Cameroon were pending with military courts after the High Court of Mfoundi in Yaoundé denied their plea for habeas corpus. The trial of separatist leaders extradited from Nigeria and detained since January 2018 was due to resume before the military tribunal on 8 April; the accused, however, failed to appear in court. The defence insisted that the case could not continue at the military tribunal while an appeal against its verdict on its competence over the defendants was still pending at the Appeals Court.

38. In the Central African Republic, violence by armed groups persisted throughout the country as part of their attempts to gain territorial control; meanwhile, national defence and security forces were absent in large parts of the country. Civilians continued to be targeted and killed, sometimes along ethnic and religious lines, by different ex-Séléka splinter groups and anti-balaka elements.

39. In Chad, commissioners for the national human rights commission were yet to be selected. OHCHR strengthened its advocacy with the Government to accelerate the appointment process. According to local NGOs and the judicial authorities, four cases of human rights violations affecting 14 victims (12 women and 2 men) were reported during the period. According to the same sources, those cases included deaths following sequestration and torture, as well as ill-treatment, arbitrary detention and physical violence, and involved elements of the security services. Access to social media remained suspended for over one year.

40. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the volatile security situation in parts of the country was conducive to an environment of violence and human rights violations, in particular sexual violence. Between the beginning of the electoral campaign on 22 November and the inauguration of President Tshisekedi on 24 January, the United Nations Joint Human Rights Office documented 304 human rights violations related to the electoral process, including 21 fatalities due to the disproportionate use of force. In addition, 203 people were injured, and 656 others detained, by State agents across the country. In his inaugural speech, President Tshisekedi cited human rights as a priority and later announced that all political prisoners would be rapidly released.

41. In Equatorial Guinea, the opposition political party, Convergencia para la Democracia Social, was outlawed on 26 February.

42. In Gabon, trials began for some of the political dissidents imprisoned following the 2016 presidential election. Deteriorating prison conditions, overcrowding and increasing lengths of pretrial detention remained serious concerns. Despite an appeal launched by the National Union of Magistrates of Gabon on 7 March, the Government

did not provide any information on the deaths of two insurgent soldiers in connection with the events of 7 January (see para. 16 above).

43. On 8 March in the Congo, the third criminal court of the High Court of Brazzaville charged 6 police officers with manslaughter and non-assistance to persons in danger in the case of the 13 youths found dead inside the Chacona police station in Brazzaville in July 2018. The court was declared incompetent on the issue of civil interests, depriving victims' families of the right to compensation.

D. Socioeconomic trends

44. The overall economic and financial situation in Central Africa remained fragile and challenging. Fiscal consolidation and restrictive monetary policies within CEMAC, combined with rising oil prices, led to improved economic performance in 2018. While real growth in gross domestic product (GDP) in the CEMAC zone was estimated to have reached 2.7 per cent in 2018, up from 0.9 per cent in 2017, CEMAC countries continued to contend with insufficient reserves, low economic activity and a lack of social protection for the most vulnerable groups. A gradual decline in oil production was projected over the medium term. As oil prices continued to rise, GDP growth was projected to further increase in 2019; economic diversification, however, remained largely unachieved.

45. In Gabon, heavy constraints on the budget led to unpopular measures adopted by the Government, such as a reduction in the public sector payroll and attempts to eliminate subsidies to high school and university students, triggering a wave of social protests. In Chad, social tensions eased slightly in early 2019, following a partial reversal of pay cuts for civil servants and a restoration of soldiers' salaries. In the Congo, the socioeconomic situation remained of significant concern, and the Government and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) continued discussions over a support package. In Equatorial Guinea, IMF was reengaging with the Government on access to the Fund's Extended Credit Facility.

III. Activities of the United Nations Regional Office for Central Africa

A. Good offices, preventive diplomacy and mediation

Cameroon

46. My Special Representative for Central Africa pursued efforts to promote a peaceful resolution of the crisis in the North-West and South-West Regions through political dialogue. From 19 to 22 January, he travelled to Yaoundé to meet with national authorities, including the new Prime Minister and the Director of the Civil Cabinet of the Presidency. He reaffirmed the commitment of the United Nations to supporting national efforts to preserve the country's stability and discussed with authorities the process for requesting eligibility to receive, under the Peacebuilding Fund, additional resources crucial for accelerating decentralization, disarmament, demobilization and reintegration, the promotion of bilingualism and elections. In a letter dated 12 February, the Prime Minister informed my Special Representative that President Biya supported the country's request for eligibility to receive support from the Peacebuilding Fund. Subsequently, the Prime Minister established an interministerial committee to coordinate closely with the United Nations country team in preparing the necessary documentation. The United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights visited Yaoundé from 1 to 4 May and called for the Government to

allow OHCHR to conduct a human rights assessment mission. The High Commissioner and President Biya both expressed their willingness for further cooperation aimed at improving the protection of and respect for human rights in the country.

Central African Republic

47. On 24 and 25 January, my Special Representative for Central Africa participated in the opening of direct dialogue between the Government of the Central African Republic and armed groups in Khartoum. He continued to advocate constructive and coordinated regional engagement in the implementation of the Political Agreement for Peace and Reconciliation in the Central African Republic. From 2 to 5 April, my Special Representative undertook a joint mission to Bangui with the Secretary-General of ECCAS to show unified support for the Agreement. In a joint communiqué, they emphasized the central role of countries in the region in the implementation of the Agreement and invited Governments to use the framework of the United Nations Standing Advisory Committee on Security Questions in Central Africa to accelerate the re-establishment of bilateral joint commissions between the Central African Republic and neighbouring States.

Chad

48. From 11 to 13 March, my Special Representative for Central Africa visited N'Djamena and met with members of the ruling majority and the opposition to discuss the preparations for the legislative elections to be held later in 2019. He urged all stakeholders to arrive at a consensus on the composition of the Independent National Electoral Commission and to continue to engage through the national framework for political dialogue. My Special Representative further discussed modalities to operationalize the Electoral Commission. He returned to N'Djamena on 5 April to pursue those discussions.

Equatorial Guinea

49. From 5 to 10 May, UNOCA conducted a human rights assessment mission to Malabo to identify, together with the United Nations country team, areas of support required to strengthen the Government's efforts in the field of human rights.

Gabon

50. Since the legislative and local elections held in October 2018, and in particular after President Bongo Ondimba took ill at the end of October, my Special Representative for Central Africa met regularly with leaders of the main national institutions and key stakeholders to promote respect for the Constitution, the rule of law and stability. Those leaders included the Prime Minister, the President of the Constitutional Court, the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Cooperation, the Francophonie, Regional Integration and Gabonese Living Abroad and the Minister of State for Justice and Human Rights, as well as opposition leaders and civil society representatives.

51. From 25 February to 1 March, UNOCA held a training workshop for 37 senior Gabonese police officers, including 11 women. Issues discussed included the application of human rights standards and gender perspectives, and readiness to deploy in United Nations peacekeeping operations.

52. In March, UNOCA and the United Nations Development Programme held consultations with representatives of the Ministry of Justice and Human Rights, the National Human Rights Commission, civil society, women's groups and the European Union. The consultations informed the development of a project to strengthen

national capacity for the promotion and protection of human rights and sustaining peace. On 15 March, the Minister of State for Justice and Human Rights endorsed the proposal and designated a national focal point to coordinate further with United Nations system entities and other stakeholders.

Congo

53. My Special Representative for Central Africa visited Brazzaville from 13 to 16 February. He noted the improving situation in the Pool Region and encouraged the Government to disburse, without delay, its share of the funding received for disarmament, demobilization and reintegration, in order to encourage donors to fulfil their pledges. He encouraged opposition leaders to join the Conseil national du dialogue (National Dialogue Council) as the only legal framework for dialogue. He also encouraged the presidential majority to provide more political space for the opposition.

Sao Tome and Principe

54. From 28 to 31 January, my Special Representative for Central Africa visited Sao Tome and Principe to offer support to the new Government. He held meetings with the President, the Prime Minister, the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Cooperation and Communities, the President of the National Assembly, the President of the Electoral Commission, the President of the Constitutional Court, leaders of the ruling majority and opposition parties, representatives of civil society and heads of resident United Nations agencies. Immediately following the visit, I received a letter from the Prime Minister, formally requesting the support of the United Nations in strengthening social cohesion, political dialogue and legal reforms, including the reform of the electoral system. A technical assessment mission visited the country from 6 to 8 March to assess options for the provision of possible support. The findings of the mission highlighted the need for a more constructive dialogue process between the ruling majority and the opposition. My Special Representative returned to Sao Tome and Principe on 12 and 13 April and held meetings with senior officials on the margins of the annual meeting of the heads of United Nations presences in Central Africa (see para. 70 below).

B. Support for United Nations, regional and subregional initiatives on peace and security

United Nations Standing Advisory Committee on Security Questions in Central Africa

55. In its capacity as secretariat of the United Nations Standing Advisory Committee on Security Questions in Central Africa, UNOCA organized the forty-seventh meeting of the Committee in N'Djamena, from 3 to 7 December. In its final communiqué, the Committee highlighted the growing threats of mercenary activities and the growing number of conflicts related to pastoralism and transhumance in the subregion, among other issues.

56. From 24 to 29 March, members of the Bureau of the Committee (Angola, Chad, Democratic Republic of the Congo and Equatorial Guinea), accompanied by representatives of Cameroon and the Central African Republic and an international expert on pastoralism and transhumance-related issues, conducted a field mission to Dungu, Democratic Republic of the Congo. The mission examined the peace and security angle of pastoralism and transhumance in the area. The mission is expected to report on its findings at the forty-eighth meeting of the Committee, to be held in Kinshasa from 27 to 31 May.

Collaboration with regional, subregional and intergovernmental organizations

57. On 11 and 12 March, in Addis Ababa, UNOCA participated in the twelfth consultative meeting of the United Nations, the African Union, the regional economic communities and the regional mechanisms on the topic of the prevention, management and resolution of conflicts. Among other issues, participants discussed regional dynamics in Central Africa, enhanced collaboration between regional, subregional and intergovernmental organizations and mediation processes in Africa.

58. UNOCA supported the participation of representatives of civil society organizations from Cameroon, Chad and Gabon, as well as a representative of the ECCAS secretariat, at the sixty-third session of the Commission on the Status of Women, held in New York from 11 to 22 March.

59. From 25 to 29 March, UNOCA participated in a workshop organized by ECCAS in Douala, Cameroon, with the support of the Government of Cameroon, the African Union and the European Union. The aim of the workshop was to strengthen the capacity of civil society organizations in conflict prevention, resolution and transformation in Central Africa. The participants, including more than 50 civil society representatives, agreed to set up a regional early warning coordinating mechanism, modelled on the West Africa Network for Peacebuilding. Participants also agreed on a workplan, with several recommendations to be examined at the ECCAS ministerial meeting to be held later in 2019.

60. On 17 and 18 April, UNOCA and the ECCAS secretariat held a joint retreat, at which they reviewed modalities for cooperation and adopted a joint action plan for 2019, placing a priority on conflict prevention, security cooperation, capacity-building and monitoring and evaluation.

Boko Haram

61. From 11 to 23 February, UNOCA and the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS) undertook a joint working-level technical assessment mission to Chad and Cameroon to review support for the Lake Chad Basin Commission in the fight against Boko Haram. A similar joint working-level mission to Niger was conducted from 11 to 17 March. The teams met with representatives of a broad range of national and local authorities in communities affected by Boko Haram, as well as with representatives of the Lake Chad Basin Commission, the Multinational Joint Task Force, national security and defence services, civil society, humanitarian agencies and international partners. The mission focused on assessing national and regional capacities to address security threats, impacts on the humanitarian and human rights situation and the need for more sustainable modalities to better channel United Nations and international support to Member States and subregional mechanisms.

62. The above-mentioned technical assessment missions prepared the ground for joint high-level visits by my Special Representatives for Central Africa and for West Africa and the Sahel, to Chad, from 14 to 16 March, to Cameroon, from 25 to 27 April, and to Niger, from 28 to 30 April. They were joined in Chad by the Executive Director of the Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate and in all three countries by the European Union Special Representative for the Sahel. The delegation met with national and regional interlocutors in the capitals and visited affected local communities around Lake Chad, where they spoke to local and traditional authorities and returnees. The visits raised awareness of the vulnerability of civilians living in Boko Haram-affected areas and highlighted the importance of enhanced development and education efforts, including through increased State presence.

Regional strategy and plan of action on counter-terrorism and the non-proliferation of small arms and light weapons in Central Africa

63. On 7 December, on the margins of the ministerial meeting of the United Nations Standing Advisory on Security Questions in Central Africa, the United Nations Regional Centre for Peace and Disarmament in Africa and UNOCA signed a memorandum of understanding with the ECCAS Secretariat to jointly support the implementation of the Central African Convention for the Control of Small Arms and Light Weapons, their Ammunitions and Components that can be used for their manufacture, repair or assembly, known as the Kinshasa Convention. The memorandum entailed a joint project to build national capacity to implement the Kinshasa Convention in Central Africa, in line with the African Union 2063 Agenda. In that regard, a regional technical and legal capacity-building workshop was held in Yaoundé from 24 to 26 April.

Coordination of the implementation of the United Nations regional strategy to address the threat and impact of the Lord's Resistance Army

64. On the margins of the consultative meeting on the prevention, management and resolution of conflicts (see para. 57 above), UNOCA held working-level discussions with the African Union Commission on possible joint activities. Such activities included joint assessment missions to the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and South Sudan to explore modalities of putting in place ECCAS-led alternative security arrangements to the African Union-led Regional Cooperation Initiative for the Elimination of the Lord's Resistance Army, within the framework of the African Standby Force, in line with the recommendations of the 795th meeting of the African Union Peace and Security Council, held on 20 September 2018.

Transhumance and farmer-herder conflicts

65. From 9 to 11 April, a UNOCA-ECCAS workshop on regional pastoralism and transhumance took place in N'Djamena, bringing together ECCAS member States and some 70 experts. Workshop participants identified key pillars and principles for maximizing the socioeconomic benefits of pastoralism, while reducing risks of insecurity and instability for peaceful transhumance.

Link between illicit trafficking in wildlife and natural resources and financing of armed groups in the subregion

66. Reports received by UNOCA, including from recent LRA defectors, alluded to financing through specific proxies and the exchange of natural and wildlife resources for weapons and ammunition in the Kafia Kingi enclave where Joseph Kony was believed to have been living for several years. The same sources reported that LRA had derived resources from gold and diamond mining sites in Haute-Kotto and Mbomou prefectures of the Central African Republic, as well as from elephant poaching in Garamba National Park in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

C. Enhancing United Nations coherence and coordination in the subregion

67. On 17 and 18 January, my Special Representative for Central Africa met in Addis Ababa with the Chairperson, the Commissioner for Peace and Security and the Commissioner for Political Affairs of the African Union Commission, within the context of the Joint United Nations-African Union Framework for Enhanced Partnership in Peace and Security. They explored options for joint initiatives in the

areas of peace and security and conflict prevention in Central Africa. He also met with my Special Representative to the African Union to discuss strengthening cooperation and coherence of the United Nations in the region.

68. On 18 February, my Special Representative participated in the political coordination meeting between my Special Envoy for the Great Lakes Region and senior United Nations officials in the region, including the members of the Management Board of the Great Lakes Regional Strategic Framework. On 19 February, he participated in the United Nations-European Union coordination meeting on the Great Lakes region and briefed attendees on the situation in Central Africa. The meeting was hosted by my Special Envoy.

69. On 21 March, UNOCA and UNOWAS held a working-level exchange on support for the Lake Chad Basin Commission in the context of the fight against Boko Haram; maritime security; interregional cooperation; and joint support for the regional economic communities.

70. On 12 and 13 April, in Sao Tome and Principe, UNOCA convened the seventh annual meeting of special representatives and envoys of the Secretary-General, regional directors of United Nations entities and United Nations resident coordinators in Central Africa. Under the theme “Advancing the Sustainable Development Goals to promote peacebuilding”, the meeting served as a platform for sharing analyses of the subregion and enhancing coordination around multidimensional peace and security challenges. A representative of the Civil Society Platform for Peacebuilding and Statebuilding briefed participants on efforts to support Central African countries by holding inclusive and participatory voluntary national reviews on Sustainable Development Goal 16. The meeting resulted in a set of recommendations for common actions and priorities for United Nations system entities in Central Africa, to be reviewed in April 2020.

IV. Observations and recommendations

71. Inclusive, genuine and credible electoral processes remain a key factor for stability in Central Africa. While a number of important transitions took place in 2018, several others remain on the horizon. Some countries continue to manage fragile post-electoral situations that will require concerted and inclusive political dialogue. While elections can provide an important framework for consolidating stability in the subregion, the dividends are hindered by abundant security, development and economic governance challenges, as well as insufficient institutional capacity.

72. An increasingly dominant feature highlighted in the present report is the prevalence of human rights issues at the heart of national politics. In several countries, questions of justice related to elections became central political questions. In others, citizens asserted themselves more actively for freedom of expression and the enjoyment of democratic economic, social and cultural rights. I appeal to all actors to uphold and promote international human rights standards in their efforts to find lasting solutions to conflicts through peaceful and inclusive political dialogue.

73. The signing of the Political Agreement for Peace and Reconciliation in the Central African Republic reaffirms, now more than ever, the importance of constructive and coordinated regional and international engagement to bring an end to the conflict. I commend countries in the region for their readiness to cooperate in the Central African Republic under the African Initiative for Peace and Reconciliation in order to deliver on the Agreement, and I stress that their role must continue throughout its implementation. It is crucial that the countries of the subregion be

considered part of the solution, that they remain constructively engaged in the implementation phase of the Political Agreement and that they do so in a coordinated manner. In that regard, I welcome the meeting of the Central African Republic-Cameroon joint commission in Bangui on 6 and 7 May and strongly urge the re-establishment of the other bilateral joint commissions between the Central African Republic and its neighbours, which could also serve as a tool to support the implementation of the Agreement.

74. I am deeply troubled by the deteriorating security situation in the North-West and South-West Regions of Cameroon. There has been no major progress made towards a peaceful resolution of the crisis through dialogue, and the humanitarian consequences are increasingly high. I am also concerned by the alarming human rights situation in the two regions and note that violence and abuses appear to be perpetrated by both government forces and armed groups. I call upon all stakeholders to show restraint, renounce violence and work with the national authorities through adequate dialogue mechanisms. It is likewise critical that women be fully engaged at all levels and, in that regard, I commend Ms. Gbowee and the African Women Leaders Network for their efforts to further engage Cameroonian women in peacebuilding. I call upon regional partners to work closely with my Special Representative to support national dialogue efforts. There has been a recent increase in international offers of support for the Cameroonian authorities in addressing the situation in the North-West and South-West Regions. Those offers were expressed through several high-level visits to Yaoundé. I urge the national authorities to avail themselves of all means of support needed to enter into genuine and inclusive political dialogue, including to address the situation in the North-West and South-West Regions and to ensure that unimpeded access is granted to humanitarian and human rights organizations.

75. I note that the evolving security situation in Chad risks further reducing the focus on development, which is essential for sustainable peace. I urge that inclusive dialogue be initiated with local communities to help to address the volatile situation in Tibesti province. I also urge the Government to work towards the opening of political space, notably with respect to freedoms of expression, association and assembly, in order to defuse tensions and facilitate conditions more conducive to peaceful, inclusive and credible elections. I welcome the Government's approach to inclusive dialogue with the political opposition and look forward to further progress in that regard within the national framework for political dialogue. I call on partners to invest more generously towards sustainable peace and development in Chad.

76. Over the past several months, Gabon has shown resilience, in particular during the prolonged absence of President Bongo Ondimba. Nevertheless, the economic context remains difficult despite some efforts on the part of the Government to consolidate public finances, which must be undertaken in consultation with socioeconomic actors to maintain the stability of the country. My Special Representative will continue to work with political stakeholders to consolidate good governance and impress upon their adherence to upholding respect for the Constitution and the rule of law.

77. I welcome progress made towards the implementation of the ceasefire agreement in the Congo and encourage the Government to ensure that any future arms and ammunition recovered are handled in compliance with international small arms control standards and relevant regional instruments, namely the Kinshasa Convention and the Nairobi Protocol. The Government and international partners should disburse their pledges to enable the launch of the national disarmament, demobilization and reintegration programme. The success of the peace process in the Pool Region and sustained broader stability in the Congo will be contingent on a credible and inclusive political process and more inclusive governance at the national level. The protection

and promotion of human rights must be at the centre of peacebuilding efforts. I strongly encourage the opposition leaders to join the Conseil national du dialogue and engage in a national dialogue process without delay. The United Nations stands ready to assist the Government in that regard.

78. I welcome the further consolidation of the democratic process in Sao Tome and Principe and call on the ruling majority and the opposition to engage in a constructive dialogue process. The United Nations stands ready to provide its support in that regard.

79. I commend Member States for showing greater willingness to cooperate on efforts to regulate transhumance at the subregional level, namely through the development of a regulatory framework on pastoralism under ECCAS. I commend the United Nations Standing Advisory Committee on Security Questions in Central Africa for addressing the issue, and I invite Governments and local communities to continue to work together to address common challenges relating to transhumance. UNOCA will continue to lend its full support to ECCAS and its member States, in close cooperation with the broader United Nations system.

80. Armed group activity continues to be a significant factor in regional instability. Illegal armed groups in the Cameroon, the Central African Republic and the Democratic Republic of the Congo have a severe impact on peace and stability in the subregion. I remain concerned by ongoing violence against civilians perpetrated by LRA. I support the decision of the African Union Peace and Security Council to maintain the Regional Cooperation Initiative for the Elimination of the Lord's Resistance Army, pending the development of a strategy to progressively phase out the Initiative, without leaving any security vacuum that LRA could use to renew and intensify its destabilization activities in the affected areas. I am concerned about the long-term effects of poaching and illicit trafficking in wildlife and natural resources, which are unambiguously linked with the prolongation and exacerbation of the conflict.

81. The intensity of the violence committed by Boko Haram in the countries of the Lake Chad basin region remains intolerable. I would urge Member States not to lose focus on the hard-earned gains made through our collective action and through the African Union and Lake Chad Basin Commission regional strategy for the stabilization, recovery and resilience of the areas of the Lake Chad basin affected by Boko Haram activities, as well as the support pledged by international donors. The United Nations, including through my Special Representatives for Central Africa and West Africa and the Sahel, will continue to support Member States in that regard. I also call for continued support for the Multinational Joint Task Force.

82. I would like to express my appreciation to the Governments of the subregion, the African Union, ECCAS, CEMAC, the Lake Chad Basin Commission, the Gulf of Guinea Commission and other regional and subregional institutions for their continued collaboration with UNOCA. I would also like to express my appreciation to the Multinational Joint Task Force and troop-contributing countries for their dedication and commitment to the service of peace and stability. I am grateful to the Government and people of Gabon for their generous hospitality and support to UNOCA. I would like to thank the various entities of the United Nations system working in Central Africa, including the heads of United Nations peace operations, regional offices, country teams and other entities, for their support to and cooperation with UNOCA.

83. Finally, I would like to thank my Special Representative, François Louncény Fall, and the staff of UNOCA for their continuing support for regional efforts to advance the cause of peace and security in Central Africa.