



# Security Council

Seventy-eighth year

## 9265<sup>th</sup> meeting

Tuesday, 21 February 2023, 10 a.m.

New York

*Provisional*

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*President:* Mrs. Frazier/Ms. Gatt . . . . . (Malta)

*Members:*

Albania . . . . .	Ms. Dautllari
Brazil . . . . .	Mr. De Almeida Filho
China . . . . .	Mr. Dai Bing
Ecuador . . . . .	Mr. Pérez Loose
France . . . . .	Mr. De Rivière
Gabon . . . . .	Mr. Biang
Ghana . . . . .	Ms. Barnor
Japan . . . . .	Mr. Yamanaka
Mozambique . . . . .	Mr. Afonso
Russian Federation . . . . .	Mr. Polyanskiy
Switzerland . . . . .	Mrs. Baeriswyl
United Arab Emirates . . . . .	Mrs. Nusseibeh
United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland . .	Ms. Jacobs
United States of America . . . . .	Mr. Wood

## Agenda

The situation in the Central African Republic

Report of the Secretary-General on the Central African Republic (S/2023/108)

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*The meeting was called to order at 10.05 a.m.*

### **Adoption of the agenda**

*The agenda was adopted.*

### **The situation in the Central African Republic**

#### **Report of the Secretary-General on the Central African Republic (S/2023/108)**

**The President:** In accordance with rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representative of the Central African Republic to participate in this meeting.

On behalf of the Council, I welcome Her Excellency Ms. Sylvie Valérie Baipo Temon, Minister for Foreign Affairs, Francophonie and Central Africans Abroad of the Central African Republic.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the following briefers to participate in this meeting: Ms. Valentine Rugwabiza, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for the Central African Republic and Head of the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic, and His Excellency Mr. Omar Hilale, Permanent Representative of Morocco to the United Nations, in his capacity as Chair of the Central African Republic configuration of the Peacebuilding Commission.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

I wish to draw the attention of Council members to document S/2023/108, which contains the report of the Secretary-General on the Central African Republic.

I now give the floor to Ms. Rugwabiza.

**Ms. Rugwabiza:** I am honoured to join the Security Council today to present the most recent report of the Secretary-General on the Central African Republic (S/2023/108) and to update the Council on recent developments and the implementation of the mandate of the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA).

The peace and political process, under the leadership of the Government and effective coordination by the Prime Minister, has continued to advance to the implementation of the time frame adopted by the Gov-

ernment on 29 August 2022, which, as the Council will recall, seeks to mutualize the Political Agreement for Peace and Reconciliation in the Central African Republic and the Luanda road map. While we always wish for the quick realization of peace, we are also pleased to see gradual progress as a result of the Government's increased ownership, such as in preparations for local elections, the reform of the security sector, the extension of State authority and the adoption of an operational framework for border management. Those steps are welcome, as the Central African population faces myriad challenges, compounded by a worsening socioeconomic situation.

Addressing violence is at the heart of the Central African Republic's peace process. The path to sustainable peace is through inclusive and constructive dialogue, as the military option alone cannot decisively or durably resolve the conflict. Political engagement with the leaders of armed groups remains essential and is starting to yield modest results. In December 2022 we saw the dissolution of four armed groups that are signatories to the Political Agreement and represented in the Government, namely, the Rassemblement patriotique pour le renouveau de la Centrafrique, the Mouvement des libérateurs centrafricains pour la justice, the Union des forces républicaines and the Union des forces républicaines fondamentales.

This demonstrates that political engagement coupled with real incentives and alternatives for armed groups can create positive momentum towards inclusive and constructive dialogue. The efforts of the national authorities to explore options for the integration of ex-combatants into the security forces, including the special mixed security units, as well as for the long-term socioeconomic reintegration of ex-combatants, is welcomed and requires the support of international partners.

Commendable steps have been taken, and others are on the horizon. We look forward to the Government convening the next strategic review of the peace and political process following the first, held in June. That will be an opportunity to take stock of the progress made and the challenges to overcome. To that end, the Government's strategy of engagement with leaders of armed groups who remain outside of the peace process remains central to continued progress.

At the same time, there are still opportunities for further advancing the implementation of the peace and political process and sustaining its gains. That

will require more commitment and engagement from the Central African Republic's partners, including in the subregion. A significant opportunity is the upcoming local elections, which will be the first in the Central African Republic since 1988. Those elections could strengthen local governance and advance the decentralization of services in a country where exclusion and centre-periphery discrepancies are among the root causes of recurrent conflicts.

I cannot overstate the importance of local elections, which are a key component of the political peace agreement. They provide an opportunity to expand political space to include traditionally marginalized groups, such as women and youth, while also giving former combatants and leaders of armed groups who laid down their arms and remained in the peace process an opportunity to have a voice. In addition, the elections provide an opportunity for the Government to engage the political opposition in a genuine dialogue.

The Central African authorities have taken steps to create an enabling environment for the local elections, including by developing its legal framework and updating the electoral code to encourage the participation of women. Through the adoption of a new law, more than 200 constituencies were established. Last Tuesday, the Prime Minister, the President of the National Electoral Authority and I signed the integrated security plan for local elections. Those elections need to be inclusive in order to be credible. All citizens, including those living in remote areas and the hundreds of thousands of internally displaced persons, must be provided the opportunity to register to vote.

Regrettably, the organization of the local elections faces many challenges, including an acute financial shortfall. I call on partners of the Central African Republic to support the elections for all the potential gains they are likely to bring for the Central African Republic and its people. There are other challenges. The elections will also be conducted in a challenging security environment, and we must recognize that armed groups could become spoilers. Another challenge will be to make sure that the elected officials have the means and the wherewithal to assume their duties and exercise them normally. After the elections, newly elected officials will need considerable support, especially in places where local administration has been non-existent for decades and where infrastructure has been destroyed or dilapidated during multiple cycles of conflict. Finally, regardless of the disagreement among

key stakeholders, it is essential to maintain an open political dialogue and an inclusive political process in a manner that does not inflame tensions or violence. I welcome the statement by the Prime Minister and Head of Government affirming that local elections will not be combined with any eventual referendum on the Constitution.

The Central African Republic experienced a period of relative stability and calm during the rainy season. However, I must report that since December, with the onset of the dry season, armed groups have increased their activities and attacks. Unfortunately, such a resurgence in violence is the normal pattern of conflict in the country; it is much easier to move across the country during this period, which facilitates hit and run tactics. This time, however, we have witnessed new developments in the modus operandi of armed groups, namely, the use of explosive devices and drones, negatively impacting the population, national security forces, humanitarian actors and United Nations peacekeepers. For example, on 6 February an explosive device detonated near Nzakoun village, killing two Central African Republic soldiers and a civilian. On 10 February, another one wounded 6 civilians near Manga. The use of explosive devices is primarily concentrated in the area of the western Central African Republic.

There have also been other security developments of concern, including increasing attacks against the positions of the national defence forces. Most recently, a week ago, armed groups attacked a detachment of the national armed forces deployed in Sikikédé, in Vakaga prefecture, killing 16 soldiers and kidnapping 20 others. We offer our most sincere condolences to the Government of the Central African Republic and the national army, and we condemn such attacks.

Those new threats have had an impact on the already complex security environment, which requires MINUSCA to maintain flexibility and mobility to effectively respond to the evolving threats against civilians. As I reported during my most recent briefing (see S/PV.9156), we are in the process of closing 13 of our temporary operating bases so as to maximize the effectiveness and mobility of our force, while mitigating the threat to the civilian population and the risk of misconduct. That requires that MINUSCA implement effective mitigation measures, which, in turn, requires greater mobility and information in order to respond appropriately. It also means that the MINUSCA force

and police must have adequate preparation and be able to use all available assets for deployments, particularly in high-risk areas. The acute lack of infrastructure across the country, including roads and bridges, is a major challenge, as are other factors, such as the lack of sufficient military helicopters and the sporadic restrictions on MINUSCA's movements, which have constrained our ability to do that effectively and consistently. Access constraints not only impede an effective security response, but also prevent Central Africans from normalizing their lives. While rationalizing our Mission layout, in particular our force layout, I also continue to prioritize the enhancement of MINUSCA's early-warning system, which is a key component of our overall security posture and approach.

I am pleased to report that, since my most recent briefing to the Council, the Central African authorities have lifted the ban on MINUSCA night flights since December 2022. I appreciate the good working atmosphere and cooperation that enabled a satisfactory resolution of that matter, which posed serious risks for United Nations personnel. However, I regret to inform the members of the Council that, earlier this month, the Ministry of Defence issued a circular banning all drone flights in the Central African Republic except for those of the national defence and security forces. Since then, the Government and I, as well as the leadership of the Forces armées centrafricaines and MINUSCA forces, have been engaging intensively and constructively with a view to resolving the new restriction, which compromises our ability to operate, including to protect civilians.

A few moments before the start of this Council meeting, I received from the Ministry of Defence a derogation to the ban on MINUSCA with conditions and modalities, which I am yet to review. I strongly believe that, with continued goodwill and constructive engagement, a solution to that significant operational restriction will be found. Every day that an orbiter is grounded, valuable information cannot be collected, long-range patrols will not receive overhead air cover, armed elements cannot be located or monitored, at least not regarding their movements, and the condition of roads and infrastructure, such as bridges, cannot be identified and fixed. That clearly increases the risk to the lives of civilians, humanitarian actors and peacekeepers.

The resurgence of tensions at the Central African Republic's borders has highlighted the regional dimension of the country's security crisis, especially along the transhumance routes and the resource-rich

areas in the north-west, the north-east and the centre-south that are conflict hotspots. Those areas are large, volatile and porous. To stem the tide of rebel activity in such areas will need concerted action by the Central African Republic and neighbouring countries through increased subregional mobilization and cooperation. Regional organizations and the United Nations can play a positive role in that regard. In coordination with the United Nations Regional Office for Central Africa, I will use the avenues available to me to work towards the mobilization of regional efforts on those critical border issues.

I regret to report that the human rights and justice situations in the country have not witnessed any significant improvement since my most recent briefing. I am particularly concerned about the increase in conflict-related sexual violence committed by all parties.

In that context, we must collectively continue to support the authorities of the Central African Republic in strengthening their police, justice and penitentiary systems so that justice is rendered for the victims of serious crimes in a timely, fair and independent manner. I welcome the renewal of the mandate of the Special Criminal Court following consultations between His Excellency President Touadera and myself. Valuable support was provided to the Special Criminal Court by MINUSCA. I call on Member States and partners to contribute to the Court's budget, which has now reached a level of maturity that allows it to handle more cases and render justice to the victims of the conflict.

As Central Africans are acutely affected by the socioeconomic crisis, the humanitarian crisis in the Central African Republic continues to worsen. The World Food Programme projects that the percentage of the Central African population suffering from acute food insecurity will increase from 44 per cent in 2022, which was already one of the highest in the world, to 49 per cent in 2023. That has the greatest impact on the most vulnerable. A majority of the Central African population depends on humanitarian assistance. On 9 February, the Prime Minister and the Deputy Representative of the Secretary-General who was also serving as Humanitarian Coordinator and Resident Coordinator launched the joint humanitarian response plan for 2023, to the tune of \$465 million to be mobilized for life-saving interventions. While I am mindful of the global economic pressures and multiple humanitarian needs in many corners of our



world, the Central African people need international solidarity and support. I encourage all Member States to extend solidarity to the most vulnerable segment of the population by responding generously to that humanitarian appeal.

At the same time, the downward trend in the humanitarian situation will not and cannot be reversed until development takes root. This is far from the reality, and the socioeconomic situation is concerning. The budgetary reductions for 2023 compared to 2022 are indicative of a deep economic contraction, which increases pressure on the population. The vulnerability and socioeconomic pressures on the population risk insecurity, which could undermine the modest gains made on the political and security fronts.

Let me state the obvious: development requires stability, and stability requires development. I call on development partners to support the Central African population, which is one of the most vulnerable and poorest in the world, through targeted and prioritized social and development projects.

MINUSCA has supported and will continue to support Central Africa to create the political and security environment conducive to the peace and political process to advance the restoration of State authority over the country's entire territory. But MINUSCA cannot do it alone. Central Africa cannot do it alone. I call on bilateral and multilateral partners to help to consolidate the security gains achieved so far, use the once-in-a-lifetime opportunity presented by local elections to help Central Africa to build a foundation for local and citizen-centred governance, accelerate the progress in security sector reform towards professional defence and security forces, which, I repeat, remains the only lasting solution for Central Africa to build her capabilities to protect her population and territorial integrity.

**The President:** I thank Ms. Rugwabiza for her briefing.

I now give the floor to Mr. Hilale.

**Mr. Hilale** (*spoke in French*): Let me begin, Madam President, by congratulating you and Malta on your assumption of the presidency of the Security Council for the month of February.

I appreciate the opportunity to address the Security Council on behalf of the Peacebuilding Commission in my capacity as Chair of the Central African Republic

configuration of the Peacebuilding Commission on the progress in and prospects for peacebuilding in that country. I would like to thank the Secretary-General for his very comprehensive report (S/2023/108) highlighting the issues and challenges facing the Central African Republic at a critical moment in its journey towards lasting peace and stability, as well as the recommendations it proposes.

The resurgent activities of armed groups in various areas of the Central African Republic, and the pressures on the country's public finances, are worsening the security and socioeconomic situation and taking a heavy toll on the civilian population. However, despite the many challenges that remain, we witnessed encouraging positive developments during the reporting period that should be capitalized on to sustain and strengthen the country's commitment to recovery.

The first of those developments is that the Central African authorities have demonstrated the political will that is needed for the revitalization and national ownership of the peace process, especially through their implementation of the commitments to ensuring complementarity and maintaining synergy at the political level within the framework of the Political Agreement for Peace and Reconciliation in the Central African Republic, as well as the Luanda joint road map for peace in the Central African Republic agreed on at the International Conference of the Great Lakes Region.

We urge them to continue those efforts, including by approving and implementing the strategy for engaging with the armed groups. In that context, we welcome the official disbanding on 6 December 2022 of four armed-group signatories to the Political Agreement, which we consider a step forward in stabilizing the political and security climate, expanding the democratic space and keeping the Central African Republic on the path to a lasting peace. Peacebuilding can be effective only if it is accompanied by efforts to demobilize armed groups and hold accountable those responsible for serious crimes and human rights violations. We welcome the focus of the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA) on ensuring a protective environment for the population, particularly by supporting the expansion of State authority beyond the provincial capitals.

Secondly, efforts are being undertaken in the region alongside the Central African authorities to mobilize support for advancing the peace process.

As the Secretary-General emphasized in his report, the situation in the Central African Republic has a significant impact on the region as a whole. In that regard, we commend the regional and subregional organizations, as well as Heads of State in the region and of neighbouring countries, for their commitment to ensuring greater cohesiveness in regional action, and we call on all those stakeholders to continue their efforts to defuse tensions in the subregion and address cross-border threats to peace and the political process. I also want to emphasize the importance of the continued constructive engagement of all the Central African Republic's partners, including international financial institutions, regional development banks and bilateral partners. The lack of technical and financial capacities remains one of the main challenges in the Central African Republic. We reiterate our call to all partners, whether from the region, the continent or elsewhere, to pay particular attention to the Central African Republic and provide it with the necessary support, given that its urgent needs are threatening the gains made in terms of peacebuilding and development. The Peacebuilding Fund, of which the current portfolio in the Central African Republic includes nine projects valued at a total of \$18 million, is an example of the value of investing in peacebuilding and durable solutions, which acts as a catalyst and can have a clear and direct impact on populations.

This context underscores the importance of peacebuilding efforts as a tool for addressing the root causes of instability. In 2022 that led the configuration to focus on strengthening the national ownership of the peacebuilding priorities, the first of which is the holding of local elections, which are scheduled for July and October 2023. The country is preparing to vote in those elections, which represent a unique opportunity for promoting local governance with elected officials directly accountable to citizens, thereby helping to advance the decentralization process in the Central African Republic and address one of the root causes of its political and security crises.

We encourage the Government to continue its efforts to ensure that those elections can take place on time and in a free, inclusive and secure atmosphere with the full, equal, meaningful and safe participation of women, including by adopting effective confidence-building measures and prioritizing dialogue with all political and civil-society actors. We are reassured by MINUSCA's support for those elections and its commitment to

making every effort to ensure that they are peaceful, free, non-violent and open to all, including women and young people. However, the significant lack of funding for local elections is very worrisome. The budget deficit, which is the main reason why the elections have already been postponed three times, could affect the holding of the elections and create a real risk for peace and stability. We therefore urge Member States and the Central African Republic's partners to act as quickly as possible to mobilize the necessary funds to fill the gap in the budget, which amounts to nearly \$7 million, through contributions to the United Nations Development Programme basket fund, which manages the programme to support the electoral process.

The second peacebuilding priority is strengthening of the rule of law and transitional justice. Access to justice and combating impunity, which are a sine qua non for the stabilization of the Central African Republic and the success of any national reconciliation project, will contribute to the prevention of conflict in the short term and sustainable peace in the long term. We welcome the operationalization of the Special Criminal Court and the Truth, Justice, Reparation and Reconciliation Commission, thanks to the concerted efforts of the Central African authorities and their international partners, including MINUSCA. They are essential mechanisms for addressing human rights violations, combating impunity and ensuring accountability for perpetrators and justice and reparations for victims.

The configuration is proud to have contributed to that endeavour through its innovative practice of using its forum to advocate for resources to fill the budgetary gaps of the Special Criminal Court and the Truth, Justice, Reparation and Reconciliation Commission. As we have repeatedly said, there can be no peace without reconciliation and no reconciliation without credible mechanisms to combat impunity. In that context, the work of the Court and the Commission is of paramount importance, and we urge all partners to offer greater financial, technical and logistical support for those mechanisms.

Thirdly, the current bleak global economic outlook and food and energy crises, coupled with supply-chain constraints, have had a negative impact on the national budget and on revenue generation for the national peacebuilding plan in the Central African Republic. Investments in the Central African Republic's socioeconomic recovery and development remain critical to implementing of the Political Agreement

and consolidating the peacebuilding dividends that are intrinsically linked to sustainable peace. In that regard, I welcome the continued dialogue between the Government and the international financial institutions, including with the facilitation of MINUSCA.

The configuration will continue to focus on the cohesion and coordination of the actions I have mentioned, in addition to advocating for greater attention and support on the part of the international community to the Central African Republic. I cannot stress enough that the country is at a critical moment in its history and will need our continued support to ensure a return to a lasting peace and long-term stability.

**The President:** I thank Mr. Hilale for his briefing.

I shall now give the floor to those members of the Council who wish to make statements.

**Mr. De Rivièrè (France)** (*spoke in French*): I thank the Special Representative for her briefing and for her work as Head of the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA). I would also like to thank the Chair of the Central African Republic configuration of the Peacebuilding Commission for his briefing. Finally, I welcome the presence among us of the Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Central African Republic.

The situation in the Central African Republic remains very fragile. France condemns the increasing number of attacks committed in recent weeks by armed groups against civilians, the Central African armed forces and MINUSCA. These attacks remind us of the need for the peace process to produce concrete results.

France supports the efforts of the Central African authorities to implement, with the support of MINUSCA and the countries of the region, the Political Agreement on Peace and Reconciliation in the Central African Republic and the Luanda road map. It welcomes the recent disarmament of four armed groups and hopes that this will create momentum for negotiations with other armed groups. The existence of real socioeconomic opportunities and protection for demobilized combatants are essential to the success of the disarmament, demobilization, reintegration and repatriation process.

The support of the countries in the region, the African Union, the Economic Community of Central African States, and the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region is crucial for the peace process in

the Central African Republic to move forward. France welcomes the recent meeting in Luanda between President Touadera, the President of the Chadian Transition and the President of Angola.

Progress has been made in the fight against impunity and in transitional justice. That must continue. France welcomes the extension of the mandate of the Special Criminal Court, which has delivered its first verdict, and the launch of the work of the Truth, Justice, Reparation and Reconciliation Commission. However, we remain very concerned about the increasing number of human rights violations, as mentioned in the report of the Secretary-General (S/2023/108). We condemn in the strongest terms the abuses committed against civilians by armed groups, but also by the Central African armed forces and Wagner mercenaries, who are responsible for most of the violations documented in the report.

Peace in the Central African Republic can only move forward in a peaceful, open and democratic political climate. Violations of the rule of law and of the independence of judicial institutions have increased in recent months. Restrictions on civic space, constant threats against the opposition and civil society, and the proliferation of hate speech are of great concern. A truly inclusive dialogue, in which all voices, including those of youth and women are heard, is needed. The success of local elections depends on that.

In that context, MINUSCA's action is more necessary than ever to assist the Central African Republic on the path to peace and reconciliation. France welcomes the dialogue between the Mission and the Central African authorities, which has made it possible to lift the ban on night flights. We call on the Central African Republic to lift the ban on the use of drones, which is essential for the safety of peacekeepers.

Finally, I would like to reiterate France's full support for the Special Representative in her work and our gratitude for the professionalism and dedication of the MINUSCA personnel.

**Mr. Biang (Gabon)** (*spoke in French*): I have the honour of delivering this statement on behalf of the African members of the Security Council, namely, Ghana, Mozambique and Gabon (A3). We thank Ms. Valentine Rugwabiza, Special Representative of the Secretary-General, and Ambassador Omar Hilale, Chair of the Central African Republic configuration of the Peacebuilding Commission, for their informative

briefings on the latest developments in the country and on the activities of the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA). I also welcome the participation of the Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Central African Republic at today's meeting.

The report of the Secretary-General (S/2023/108) on the situation in Central African Republic and its consequences for peace and stability gives us the opportunity to reiterate the support of the A3 for the restoration of peace and security in the Central African Republic despite the security and humanitarian challenges the country is facing and in view of the remarkable resilience the country has shown, which deserves to be recognized and upheld.

We will examine these three pillars in the light of the Secretary-General's report.

On the political level, the A3 takes note of the debates around the composition of the Constitutional Court and consider the regular referrals to this important organ by civil society and opposition actors to reflect its scope and leadership. We encourage the Central African authorities to continue dialogue with all political actors to maintain a space for discussion, which is necessary for definitively silencing the weapons in the Central African Republic.

The Government's efforts to organize the first local elections in more than 20 years are noteworthy. These elections, which could be held if the security situation permits in the country's 176 communes, are awaited by the Central African people, who aspire to lasting peace and free, transparent and credible elections. We welcome the opening of local branches of the National Electoral Authority in 20 prefectures of the country and the finalization of the electoral mapping despite the multiplication of security incidents resulting from sporadic attacks by armed groups.

The A3 recalls that the overall budget for the organization of local elections is estimated at around \$11 million and that the Central African State has made a financial commitment of \$4.56 million. Given that difficult economic context, the Central African Republic is in greater need than ever of the international community's financial support, which is crucial for the effective holding of local elections within the agreed time frame. The Central African Republic has recently signed a local elections financing agreement with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP),

guaranteeing transparency in the funds allocated to the electoral process support project, which is directly managed by UNDP itself. The holding of local elections is a crucial step that will contribute to the restoration of State authority, which is essential for the Central African Republic's stabilization.

It would be a pity if the hard-won gains made thus far owing to considerable efforts were to be wiped out at this stage. The crisis in the Central African Republic has an impact on international peace and security — which is the responsibility of the Security Council — and it is crucial that the international community mobilize alongside the Central African authorities so that those local elections, demanded by the people, are held. We also welcome the continued support of the International Organization of la Francophonie in strengthening democracy and the rule of law in the Central African Republic, particularly through support for institutions such as the National Electoral Authority, the Constitutional Court and the national human rights commission.

We encourage the Central African authorities to continue their efforts in the fight against disinformation and misinformation, in particular through the actions of the country's communications authority. We also call on the Government of the Central African Republic to continue working towards ensuring social cohesion and tolerance, which are prerequisites for durable peace in the country. There should be no room for hate speech or incitement to violence within the Central African Republic, and the perpetrators of such acts should be swiftly brought to justice by the State authorities.

At the regional level, Ghana, Mozambique and Gabon welcome the holding of a tripartite summit between the Central African Republic, Angola and Chad on 8 February in Luanda, devoted, in particular, to the prevailing political and security situation in the Central African Republic. That mini-summit constitutes a considerable step forward in strengthening bilateral relations between the Central African Republic and Chad, which is crucial for the consolidation of security along the borders separating those two countries.

The A3 takes note of the announcement in December 2022 of the comprehensive dissolution of four armed groups signatories to the Political Agreement for Peace and Reconciliation in the Central African Republic. We are encouraged by the holding of the second meeting of the strategic review for the further implementation



of the Political Agreement through the joint road map of the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region (ICGLR), and we ask all signatories to support the holding of local elections and thereby prioritize political solutions to resolve the crisis in the country.

The A3 welcomes the role played by the African Union, the ICGLR and the Economic Community of Central African States in the Central African Republic, as well as the visit of the Council of Elders of the African Union in November 2022 to Bangui — tangible proof of the African Union's determination to continue to promote mediation and prevent conflicts in the country. We invite subregional organizations to step up their involvement in strengthening inter-State cooperation in order to secure common borders.

On the security front, we are deeply concerned by the continuous cycle of violence to which armed groups are subjecting the civilian population and by the asymmetrical attacks against MINUSCA and the Forces armées centrafricaines as they fight, on a daily basis, to preserve the territorial integrity of the country. Ghana, Mozambique and Gabon strongly condemn all such repeated attacks against the civilian population, MINUSCA personnel and the Forces armées centrafricaines, including the increasing use of explosive devices by armed groups, which impede the free movement of persons and goods. We express our sincere condolences to the families of the victims and call on the Central African authorities to take all appropriate measures to bring to justice those guilty of those heinous crimes.

The A3 underscores that a lasting peace is possible only if the Central African authorities have the capacity to take control of their territory; to effectively complete the implementation of the disarmament, demobilization, reintegration and repatriation programme; and to ensure the successful reintegration of demobilized armed groups into society. We invite international partners to mobilize to provide financial support to the country in its quest for peace and development in order to address the root causes of the conflict.

There is no military solution to the crisis in the Central African Republic. There are only political solutions. However, there will be no solution at all without responding to the root causes of instability. The Central African Republic, already weakened by internal crises, must also deal with multiple crises, such as the coronavirus disease and rising oil and food prices, that

weigh heavily on its future. Overcoming those cycles of violence and crises requires economic development and the restoration of basic services, which must receive the financial support of the international community.

In addition, we note with satisfaction the lifting of the ban on night flights for the benefit of MINUSCA. Dialogue and the strengthening of cooperation between the Central African authorities and MINUSCA must continue in order to jointly define the appropriate procedures for the protection of Central African airspace against possible attacks.

We welcome the unity of the Security Council in adopting resolution 2648 (2022) on the lifting of the arms embargo. We believe that such a significant step forward will enable the country to continue its actions to protect its populations and to defend its territory and its natural resources.

The Forces armées centrafricaines must be able to assume their sovereign missions throughout the country's territory. Faced with new security challenges that are evident in the continuous increase in asymmetric threats, the A3 remains convinced that the strengthening of the Forces armées centrafricaines' operational capabilities must be commensurate with the threats emerging on the ground. To that end, training and capacity-building activities for the defence and security forces must be intensified, particularly in the areas of mine clearance, logistics and human rights. We reiterate that allowing MINUSCA to remain in the Central African Republic will be considered an admission of failure for the international community. The Central African forces must ultimately be able to secure their territory in a sustainable manner.

There is no security without justice. We commend the efforts of MINUSCA to promote capacity-building for magistrates in particular. However, we are curious about the continuous increase in human rights violations due to the methodology used to identify them, which unfortunately does not reflect the efforts of the Central African authorities, supported by MINUSCA, in that area. We reiterate that the Central African Republic is facing multidimensional challenges that require an increased mobilization of resources, particularly with regard to infrastructure construction, capacity-building, the purchase of equipment and the training of personnel, which are key steps towards the restoration of State authority. The Central African Republic cannot meet those challenges without the support

of its development partners. Taking a quantitative approach in the field of human rights, without duly considering the qualitative and substantial efforts of the Government, is far removed from the reality in and priorities of the country. That approach must therefore be more balanced and constructive.

The humanitarian crisis in the Central African Republic continues to worsen, amid an upsurge in violence against civilians by armed groups and insecurity in areas outside urban centres. We strongly condemn the attacks by armed groups against humanitarian personnel, which significantly hamper their work on the ground. As a result, millions of people are seeing their vulnerability growing and their livelihoods eroding. The A3 welcomes the commitment of humanitarians despite the security risks. We encourage donors to remain mobilized for the financing of the humanitarian response plan to meet the assistance needs of 3.4 million Central Africans, including 1.6 million children.

In conclusion, Ghana, Mozambique and Gabon reaffirm their commitment to respecting the territorial integrity and sovereignty of the Central African Republic. We reiterate our support for Ms. Valentine Rugwabiza, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, and her team for their constant efforts on the ground.

**Ms. Dautllari** (Albania): I would like to thank Special Representative of the Secretary-General Rugwabiza and Ambassador Hilale, in his capacity as the Chairperson of the Central African Republic country-specific configuration of the Peacebuilding Commission, for their briefings. I would also like to welcome the Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Central African Republic to this meeting.

Albania is grateful to the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA) for its tireless efforts to support the national authorities in fostering peace in the country. The relationship between the Central African Republic and MINUSCA should be based on mutual respect. While we note the progress that has been made in building trust and increasing communication, we believe that implementing the status-of-forces agreement is essential. We welcome the Government's decision to lift the ban on MINUSCA's night flights for medical and casualty evacuations. However, we continue to be

concerned about the ongoing violations of the status-of-forces agreement and restrictions on the freedom of movement and operational capacities of the Mission, including the suspension of unmanned aerial system flights, which undermine operational effectiveness, as the Special Representative mentioned. Albania also remains deeply concerned about the security situation and the troubling trend of human rights violations by armed groups and especially the Wagner Group. The conflict-related sexual violence, grave violations against children, undermining of humanitarian access and attacks on humanitarian personnel must stop.

That brings me to my next point. It is vital to reinvigorate the efforts to implement the Political Agreement for Peace and Reconciliation in the Central African Republic through the joint road map for peace in the Central African Republic of the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region. We commend the recent dissolution of four armed groups as a positive step in that direction and call on the Government to accelerate its efforts to bring the remaining armed groups to the negotiating table as a critical element in the success and consolidation of the disarmament, demobilization, reintegration and repatriation programmes. We urge the Government to deepen its engagement with Chad and the Sudan to address the persistent insecurity in their border areas, and all the armed groups to renounce violence and recommit to the peace process. Peace and security cannot be achieved without accountability and justice. In that regard, Albania welcomes the renewal until 2028 of the mandate of the Special Criminal Court. We believe that equal access to justice for all citizens is crucial to ending impunity.

We are also following the political developments that could create new risks for the country if not handled properly. While we are encouraged by the electoral preparations and the new electoral calendar, we call on the Government and all stakeholders to commit to creating an environment conducive to a wider democratic space, with more meaningful participation of women and young people, that can ultimately enable free and fair elections later this year. We also welcome the integrated electoral security plan signed this month between the Government and MINUSCA to facilitate the security measures necessary for holding local elections.

In conclusion, we are concerned about the debate on constitutional reform and changes in the Constitutional Court and welcome the efforts of MINUSCA to engage

with the Government, opposition leaders and other stakeholders to encourage dialogue to address those issues. We have noted the Government's intention to keep local elections separate from a potential constitutional referendum and echo the Secretary-General's call for an open and meaningful dialogue to meet the Central African population's aspirations for durable peace.

**Mrs. Baeriswyl** (Switzerland) (*spoke in French*): I thank the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Ms. Valentine Rugwabiza, and the Chairperson of the Central African Republic country-specific configuration of the Peacebuilding Commission, Ambassador Omar Hilale, for their briefings and especially for their valuable work. And I welcome the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Francophonie and Central Africans abroad of the Central African Republic.

Switzerland was pleased to read in the Secretary-General's most recent report (S/2023/108) that the security situation in the Central African Republic has seen a slight improvement. After decades of conflict, any sign of peace is encouraging. At the same time, the violence continues to weigh heavily on the Central African people. Civilians must be protected. It is their right, and it is the duty of all the parties to guarantee that protection. I would like to emphasize three points.

First, Switzerland supports the implementation of the Political Agreement for Peace and Reconciliation in the Central African Republic and its road map. The recent dissolution of four armed groups is a welcome step. We encourage the Government to maintain a genuine dialogue with the armed groups and neighbouring countries with a view to consolidating the security gains made so far. For peace to establish itself, combatants must lay down their arms and return to civilian life in a sustainable manner, and civil society, especially women, must be at the forefront of the Political Agreement follow-up. We encourage MINUSCA to continue its efforts in that regard, including by providing its good offices. We would like to remind the Central African Government that its full support for the Mission remains essential to success.

Secondly, the improvement in the security situation in some areas has been offset by the intensification of violence in the west and north of the country. The dry season has arrived. Armed groups are moving around more and ramping up their activities, including the illicit exploitation of natural resources. Climate change

is contributing to the modification of transhumance corridors and fuelling conflicts between farmers and herders. As is often the case, the civilian population is paying the highest price. Armed groups continue to violate the physical and moral integrity of civilians and to recruit and use children. Switzerland condemns the human rights violations and abuses and the violations of international humanitarian law. We call on all the parties, including Government forces, the Wagner Group and armed groups, to respect international humanitarian law and human rights.

Thirdly, Switzerland is encouraged by the Government's efforts in the fight against impunity, which is an essential foundation for peace and the rule of law. We welcome the work of the Special Criminal Court, which recently handed down its first verdict on crimes against humanity and war crimes. The operationalization of the Truth, Justice, Reparation and Reconciliation Commission is also a sign of progress in dealing with the past. However, Switzerland is concerned about the spread of hate speech and the numerous arbitrary arrests and detentions by the defence and security forces. We encourage the Central African Government to protect the civic space and ensure inclusive democratic processes, including by working with the opposition. Respect for the independence of democratic institutions is fundamental to building trust between the people and the Government.

Last year Switzerland strengthened its engagement in the Central African Republic by opening an office in Bangui, enabling us to work more closely with the communities and the authorities in the Central African Republic. That is vital, because sustainable peace and development are built on the ground and by the people. That principle will continue to guide Switzerland during its term on the Security Council. Together with all Council members, we will continue our efforts to ensure lasting peace for all Central African people.

**Mr. De Almeida Filho** (Brazil): My delegation would like to thank Special Representative of the Secretary-General Valentine Rugwabiza for her briefing.

I welcome Minister Sylvie Valérie Baipo Temon to today's meeting and look forward to listening to her statement.

We welcome the opportunity to deal with the situation in the Central African Republic, while counting on the perspective of the Peacebuilding

Commission (PBC). My delegation not only lends full support to further cooperation between the Council and the PBC, but also intends to work, in its capacity as liaison between the two bodies, to strengthen such interaction and make it happen more often. In that context, we thank Ambassador Omar Hilale, Chair of the Central African Republic country-specific configuration of the PBC, for his comprehensive and informative intervention.

Regular interaction and dialogue, when based on constructive engagement, will eventually bear fruit, as we can see from the lifting of restrictions on the night flights of the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA). We commend the Special Representative of the Secretary-General and the authorities of the Central African Republic for reaching a solution to that critical issue. It is a major factor in helping MINUSCA to fulfil its mandate and provide better protection to its peacekeepers and civil personnel alike, in what otherwise remains a challenging security and humanitarian environment.

With particular regard to the ongoing security and humanitarian challenges on the ground, there are two points that my delegation would like to highlight. The first is our deep concern related to incidents with explosive ordnance, including improvised devices, because of the risk they represent to the safety of peacekeepers and civilians. We must ensure that MINUSCA is equipped to tackle that threat. The second point is our belief that renewed emphasis on strategic communication would be timely and could contribute to improving the situation.

It is encouraging to hear that MINUSCA has been able to assist the Central African authorities in improving the presence and capacity of local officials throughout several prefectures across the country. At the same time, we believe that ensuring independence and balance among State institutions, at all levels, is as important as developing their capacities. In addition, Brazil echoes the calls of the Central African Republic country-specific configuration of the PBC to ensure that every step in the peace process is inclusive.

Another point we wish to underscore is the key role played by the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR) programmes in the implementation of the 2019 Political Agreement for Peace and Reconciliation in the Central African Republic and encourage the Central African authorities to persevere in their work in that field.

We hope that the collaboration between the Government and MINUSCA to put in place violence reduction programmes in local communities will continue to have a positive impact on global DDR efforts. Furthermore, it is necessary to advance with the national recovery plan and provide a socioeconomic foundation to the peace process.

My delegation believes that it is equally important to strengthen the rule of law, especially in the light of the various reports on human rights and international humanitarian law violations committed against civilians, as well as the security violations of the Political Agreement by certain armed groups. We understand that the authorities of the Central African Republic and the international community have the same degree of ambition in achieving that goal. In that regard, we would like to reiterate our support for, first, the efforts of local authorities to deliver justice, in particular the work of the Special Criminal Court since April 2022, and, secondly, the action taken by MINUSCA to assist in the operationalization of the Truth, Justice, Reparation and Reconciliation Commission.

We reiterate our full support for the renewed engagement of the International Conference of the Great Lakes Region in favour of the implementation of the September 2021 road map. We also welcome the initiative of special representatives and special envoys in Central Africa to work on common strategic visions on a number of critical regional issues. Their cross-border nature makes concerted action essential.

I would like to conclude by underlining that Brazil understands the enormity of the challenges faced on the ground by the authorities of the Central African Republic and in addressing this phase of its political life and wishes the Central African Republic every success.

**Mr. Yamanaka** (Japan): I thank Special Representative of the Secretary-General Rugwabiza and the Chair of the Central African Republic country-specific configuration of the Peacebuilding Commission, Ambassador Hilale, for their insightful briefings and contributions. I would also like to thank the Foreign Minister of the Central African Republic, Ms. Baipo Temon, for her presence at today's meeting.

Japan commends the tireless effort of the personnel of the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA) and would also like to pay tribute to all of those who have made sacrifices.



Achieving lasting peace and stability in the Central African Republic is long overdue. Prolonged conflicts and hostilities have too long prevented the people of the Central African Republic and the greater region from achieving their full potential. The 2019 Political Agreement for Peace and Reconciliation in the Central African Republic remains the key instrument for achieving that goal, and its full implementation continues to be the highest priority. In that regard, I would like to emphasize three important points related to MINUSCA's mandate.

First, reconciliation through inclusive and constructive dialogue among all stakeholders, including armed groups, should be at the core of any efforts of the Government of the Central African Republic to strengthen and achieve peace and stability in its State. We welcome the Government's commitment to the dissolution of four armed groups that are signatories to the Political Agreement.

Demonstrating the successful cases of disarmament, demobilization and reintegration and the benefits of reconciliation is essential in facilitating future engagement with the majority of armed groups that have not yet laid down their weapons. Reported political confrontations over constitutional reform should not derail the Government's reconciliation efforts. Incitement of violence by all sides must cease.

Secondly, regional arrangements need to play a more active role in addressing the fragility of the region. We welcome the strategic review meeting held in Bangui last June. It brought about vital momentum for progress made under the Luanda road map and the continued implementation of the Political Agreement. We further encourage the leadership and engagement of Angola, as Chair of the International Conference of the Great Lakes Region, as well as of the Economic Community of Central African States and African Union as guarantors. The agreed quarterly monitoring process should be utilized as envisaged to boost regional cooperation. Cross-border flows of armed combatants, arms and conflict minerals need to be urgently addressed. The Central African Republic and neighbouring countries should be united to strengthen border controls through regional arrangements.

Finally, good governance is the key to ensuring sustained peace and stability in the country. Upcoming local elections must be able to provide a solid foundation for the much-awaited extension of State authority

in rural areas. The conduct of credible, peaceful and inclusive elections will serve as a springboard to garner people's confidence in the State's authority. Ensuring the security of voters is of primary importance for its success.

In that regard, we welcome the recent security plan for the elections, signed by the Government of the Central African Republic and MINUSCA. Furthermore, institution-building in the justice sector at the national and local levels is essential to promoting the rule of law in the Central African Republic. The current progress in the fight against impunity, including through the Special Criminal Court, is a significant development for long-term reconciliation.

Since the Central African Republic's return to democracy, Japan has extended its assistance to support the country in its efforts to build a stable democratic nation, as well as to address its humanitarian challenges. We are deeply concerned about the human rights violations committed by armed groups and State actors, including other security personnel mentioned in the report of the Secretary-General (S/2023/108) as allegedly responsible. We hope that MINUSCA will continue to engage the Government with regard to such situations and to report back to the Security Council. Japan will continue to explore how we can best help the Central African Republic address its multifaceted challenges in order to enable us to grow together.

**Mr. Dai Bing** (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): I thank Special Representative of the Secretary-General Rugwabiza and Ambassador Hilale for their briefings and welcome the Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Central African Republic, Ms. Baipo Temon, to this meeting

The Central African Republic has recently achieved major results in advancing the peace process, strengthening State governance and furthering the country's development and reconstruction. China commends that progress. This is a critical period in the Central African Republic's transition from peacekeeping to peacebuilding, and the international community should step up its support to help the country achieve lasting peace and security.

First, with regard to the full implementation of the Political Agreement for Peace and Reconciliation in the Central African Republic, the ceremony held by the Government of the Central African Republic to mark the dissolution of four armed groups late last

year marked an important step in the peace process. China calls on other armed groups to join the political dialogue and disarmament process without delay. The holding of the local elections planned for this year will be momentous in terms of consolidating the peace, and the Government of the Central African Republic has worked hard on their organization. As the preparations for holding the elections are still underfunded, the international community should provide support to ensure their smooth conduct.

Issues such as constitutional reform are internal affairs of the Central African Republic. The international community should respect the country's sovereignty and ownership and support it by enabling it to follow a development path that suits its particular conditions. Peace in the Central African Republic is closely linked to regional peace and stability. Recently the Government of the Central African Republic, regional organizations and other countries of the region have worked together to implement the road map of the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region through the establishment of a monitoring mechanism and strengthened border controls. The relevant subregional organizations should continue to play an important role by encouraging the countries of the region to coordinate their efforts to maintain regional stability and calm through increased unity and cooperation.

Secondly, the threat posed by armed groups must be curbed. The recent reporting period saw armed insurgent groups engage in frequent attacks on security forces and civilians and in illegal taxation, kidnapping, extortion and other activities that threaten security and stability and disrupt the social order. China supports the efforts of the Government of the Central African Republic to safeguard national security in accordance with the law and calls on the parties concerned to end their violence. The international community should focus on assisting the Central African Republic in its efforts to implement its national defence policy, build a professional, efficient and strong security sector and address new security threats, including the use of improvised explosive devices. The expansion of State authority is crucial to maintaining sovereign security and should be a higher priority for the international community and for the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA). Given the continued impact of the Security Council's sanctions on the country's security capacity, those measures should be lifted altogether.

Thirdly, we support a greater role for MINUSCA. Under the leadership of Special Representative of the Secretary-General Rugwabiza, MINUSCA has strengthened its communication and coordination with the Government of the Central African Republic and worked diligently to address security threats, protect civilians and support disarmament, demobilization and reintegration programmes. We have also seen progress made on resolving the issue of MINUSCA's night flights and continued improvements in the implementation of the status-of-forces agreement. It is an undeniable fact that greater cooperation and mutual trust with host countries is a prerequisite to successful peacekeeping operations. China supports MINUSCA in stepping up its efforts to address the threat posed by armed groups and to advance the peace process and the holding of local elections.

Fourthly, it is the shared responsibility of the United Nations and the international community to support the development and reconstruction of the Central African Republic. The country is currently facing a grave humanitarian situation, with acute food insecurity and a dire energy shortage. Half the population is in need of humanitarian assistance. The international community should increase its humanitarian assistance, focusing on poverty reduction and food security and accelerating the building of infrastructure. The main donors should resume their unconditional aid as soon as possible. China stands ready to continue its efforts with the international community to provide further support for achieving peace, stability and economic and social development in the Central African Republic.

**Ms. Jacobs** (United Kingdom): I thank Special Representative of the Secretary-General Rugwabiza and Ambassador Hilale for their detailed briefings. We welcome the Peacebuilding Commission's input today at today's Security Council's discussion highlighting the broader work of supporting peacebuilding in the Central African Republic. I would like to make three points in response to what we have heard today.

First, the United Kingdom agrees with others today that the Political Agreement for Peace and Reconciliation in the Central African Republic is the only viable option for ending the conflict and crisis in the country. That needs renewed commitment from all the parties involved to revitalizing the peace process. Building on the steps forward that were made in December 2022, we call on the authorities of the Central African Republic, with the support of the region and the United Nations

Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA), to ensure tangible political progress and meaningful engagement with all political actors in the country.

Secondly, the increase in the number of human rights violations and abuses over the past year remains deeply concerning. The Forces armées centrafricaines and the Wagner Group, through their joint operations, are now responsible for the majority of such violations. Put simply, the Government of the Central African Republic must do a better job of protecting its civilian population, in particular the Fulani and Muslim communities. We continue to urge the Government to conduct full and timely investigations into allegations of human rights violations and abuses and ensure that all perpetrators are held accountable.

Thirdly, the United Kingdom would like to commend MINUSCA's efforts. As a key player in supporting the peace process, MINUSCA must be able to implement its mandate without interference. In that regard, the United Kingdom welcomes the recent removal of restrictions on MINUSCA's freedom of movement, including reinstating night flights for medical and casualty evacuations. But the continued violations of the status-of-forces agreement are undermining MINUSCA's safety and effectiveness. I therefore join others in expressing concern about the removal of MINUSCA's airport surveillance camera and about the Government's recent ban on unmanned aerial systems, both of which undermine MINUSCA's surveillance capability, as the Special Representative of the Secretary-General highlighted earlier. We call on the authorities of the Central African Republic to maintain full freedom of movement by allowing MINUSCA unhindered and immediate access throughout the country's territory.

The United Kingdom will continue to work with international partners to support the Government of the Central African Republic in implementing the peace agreement in order to end the violence, build stability and protect human rights.

**Mr. Wood** (United States of America): I thank Special Representative of the Secretary-General Rugwabiza for her leadership and informative briefing, which illustrates the critical role that the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA) plays in supporting peace and security in the Central African

Republic. I also welcome the presence here today of the Foreign Minister of the Central African Republic and the Chair of the Central African Republic configuration of the Peacebuilding Commission.

I would like to address three core themes today — MINUSCA's positive contributions to peace and security in the Central African Republic, the importance of respecting the Mission's status-of-forces agreement and the need for a political solution to ending the country's conflict.

First, I want to convey my appreciation to the staff and peacekeepers of MINUSCA and its leadership and troop- and police-contributing countries for their commitment to peace in the Central African Republic. As the Secretary-General's report (S/2023/108) describes, MINUSCA's proactive and robust posture protects civilians, limits the movements of armed groups and supports the restoration of social services and the return of humanitarian actors and development partners. We commend the Mission's work and join the Government of the Central African Republic in encouraging MINUSCA to further deter armed-group attacks on civilians by proactively addressing sources of instability. That is particularly timely given the uptick in armed-group attacks since the onset of the dry season.

The United States is proud to be a firm supporter of MINUSCA and a partner to many of its troop- and police-contributing countries. Through our Global Peace Operations Initiative, we provided training and support to the Peruvian engineering unit that rehabilitated a road linking Bossangoa and Bossembélé. We have also provided support to Zambia as it prepares to deploy its infantry battalion, a unit that has been recognized for its performance, particularly in helping protect civilians and expelling armed groups from Ouanda-Djallé last summer. To enable MINUSCA to effectively fulfil its mandate and ensure the safety and security of United Nations personnel, it is critical that it be permitted full freedom of movement. We welcomed the agreement late in 2022 between the Government of the Central African Republic and MINUSCA reauthorizing unrestricted United Nations night flights. However, the new restrictions on unmanned aerial vehicles directly hinder MINUSCA's ability to fulfil its mandate. Lifting one restriction and replacing it with another is not progress.

That leads me to my second point, which is the need for the Central African armed forces to demonstrate greater respect for the Mission's status-of-forces agreement. We were disheartened to see an increase in violations of the agreement over the reporting period, despite the Mission's efforts to cooperate with the Forces armées centrafricaines. Obstructing Mission patrols and detaining convoys impedes MINUSCA's ability to protect civilians from armed groups, identify and clear explosive ordnance and support the stabilization of the Central African Republic.

We share the Government of the Central African Republic's concern about the reported increases in armed-group activity, including cross-border violence. The heinous attack in late January on the Beloko customs facility represents a stark escalation by armed groups, and we encourage all actors in the region to play a constructive role in helping to stabilize the country. Sustainably addressing that challenge requires coordination between border-patrol forces, positive engagement by regional actors and a recommitment to the peace process.

That leads me to my final point, which is that there can be no military-only settlement of the crisis in the Central African Republic. The only durable solution is through political dialogue, in addition to the full implementation of the 2019 Political Agreement for Peace and Reconciliation in the Central African Republic and the regionally brokered 2021 road map, along with the reassertion of State authority and justice for victims. The full, equal, and meaningful participation and leadership of women, the diverse and effective engagement of young people and the participation of members of ethnic and religious minorities in political dialogue are critical to making the peace process in the Central African Republic more effective, inclusive and sustainable.

Unfortunately, some predatory entities in the Central African Republic are seeking to destabilize the country in order to further exploit its wealth for their own gain. The Wagner Group perpetuates numerous human rights abuses as part of its campaign to control the Central African Republic's sovereign natural resources. We are disappointed that the Secretariat continues to self-censor by using euphemisms to refer to the Group when it is clear that its forces are responsible for many of those abuses. The Wagner Group came to the Central African Republic promising to reduce armed-group violence, but on the contrary,

its actions are fuelling further insecurity and conflict. Without accountability for human rights abuses, the Central African Republic will not be able to achieve the peace that is necessary to unlock the country's vast potential. We once again call on all actors to lay down their weapons and choose the path of dialogue. The Central African people deserve peace.

**Mrs. Nusseibeh** (United Arab Emirates): I would first like to thank Special Representative of the Secretary-General Rugwabiza for her comprehensive briefing. I also thank Ambassador Hilale for briefing us and for Morocco's notable contribution as Chair of the Central African Republic configuration of the Peacebuilding Commission (PBC), which is another good example of the value added by the PBC's engagement with the Security Council. I also welcome the participation of Foreign Minister Baipo Temon in today's meeting.

Through the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA), the Council has committed to achieving peace and stability in the Central African Republic. The United Arab Emirates reiterates its full support to the Special Representative and the Mission, and we underscore that a constructive relationship between MINUSCA and the Government is essential to the country's success. MINUSCA's effectiveness will be amplified by the recent decision regarding the operation of night flights, which we welcome. We hope that this constructive engagement continues and that it can be expanded to address other key issues to enable the full implementation of MINUSCA's mandate. I would like to raise three points that underline the importance of dialogue and pragmatism for the road ahead.

First, despite a complex array of challenges, it is important to take a moment to acknowledge the progress that the Government and the people of the Central African Republic continue to make. Some important developments include the plans for holding elections in 2023; Government ownership of the implementation of the Political Agreement for Peace and Reconciliation in the Central African Republic and the Luanda road map; and efforts aimed at institution-building and the improved provision of basic services. All of those represent improvements that must be safeguarded. To help preserve those gains, the Council, Member States, regional actors and the United Nations should continue to support the Central African Republic. Sustained assistance will be critical, whether through capacity-building or technical and financial support.



Secondly, given the persistence of insecurity in the Central African Republic, protecting civilians must remain at the heart of the United Nations, regional and international responses. Special attention must be paid to protecting women and girls from the rampant sexual violence that many reports continue to highlight. For women to be truly empowered, they must be full, equal and meaningful participants in the country's political processes. Any attempts to harm them or prevent their participation must be stopped. The United Arab Emirates is clear-eyed about the challenges confronting MINUSCA as it executes that core element of its mandate. Chief among them is the expansion of the activities of armed groups and the grave risk they pose to civilians. Bangui and its neighbours have to work together alongside multinational and regional actors in order to counter the expansion of those groups and sever their regional networks.

The complexity of the situation in the Central African Republic must not overshadow our belief that building peace through inclusive dialogue is achievable. In the face of the ongoing escalation in intercommunal and interreligious tensions, intercultural and interfaith dialogue remain key to preserving the country's social fabric. That is why MINUSCA and the Government of the Central African Republic should redouble their efforts to counter the spread of the misinformation and disinformation that fuel hate speech. The recent dissolution of four armed groups is an encouraging development. It is important for MINUSCA and the Government to continue focusing on disarmament, demobilization and reintegration, with an emphasis on community-level violence-reduction programmes.

Thirdly, I would like to draw attention to the links between climate change and conflict. We have seen in the past that the arrival of the dry season is often accompanied by increased activity among armed groups. With greater mobility, they are able to pillage resources and expand their footprint further. There is a clear and urgent need to tackle climate change and its ramifications in the Central African Republic, including its ongoing impact on food insecurity. In the Central African Republic, some 3.4 million people — more than half of the population — are in a critically acute state of food insecurity. Climate change is forcing farmers to contend with less reliable rainy seasons and ever more extreme weather patterns. That has resulted not only in rising food insecurity but also in increased tensions between farmers and herders, creating more fragility

and further destabilization. As co-Chair of the Informal Expert Group of Members of the Security Council on Climate and Security and incoming president of the twenty-eighth Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, we intend to convene major discussions to address this issue. We need to better understand the intersection of climate and fragility and identify and deploy the tools at our disposal to address that nexus.

In conclusion, we must continue to support the work of the United Nations in the Central African Republic while building on the leadership of the African Union, the Economic Community of Central African States and the International Conference of the Great Lakes Region. We must all work together to support the Central African Republic on its path to peace and stability.

**Mr. Pérez Loose** (Ecuador) (*spoke in Spanish*): I thank the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Ms. Rugwabiza, for her briefing and Ambassador Omar Hilale, Chair of the Central African Republic configuration of the Peacebuilding Commission, for his important briefing. I welcome the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Francophonie and Central Africans Abroad of the Central African Republic to this meeting.

The Central African Republic is navigating towards peace in an adverse international situation marked by international supply chain disruption, the economic situation and rising inflation. That is compounded by insecurity and violence, which have not allowed human displacement to stop. According to the Secretary-General's report (S/2023/108), 56 per cent of the population of the Central African Republic will need humanitarian assistance. International support therefore must not decline.

We agree that the political challenges and the conditions of insecurity in the Central African Republic are complex, and we welcome the progress made thanks to the efforts of the Central African Government, with the support of the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA).

In that regard, we welcome the Government's decision to lift the ban on night flights for MINUSCA and urge that the same be done for the deployment of drones, which are necessary for the Mission's work. We urge that all possible support be provided to MINUSCA, in line with the status-of-forces agreement.

Regarding the challenges facing the Central African Republic, many of which are reflected in the report, I would like to focus on four aspects.

First, territorial control is central, both for the strengthening of the rule of law and for institutionality and decentralization, which is why the progress achieved in the implementation of the Political Agreement for Peace and Reconciliation in the Central African Republic and recent advances with respect to the disbanding of four armed groups have been fundamental. We recall the importance of the inclusion of women in political spheres as managers in the peace, demobilization and reintegration processes.

Secondly, the volatile security situation of the civilian population is of concern owing to the growing number of incidents involving explosive devices. The work of MINUSCA in training Blue Helmets and humanitarian personnel is timely. Organized crime has its tentacles in the trafficking of natural resources, which is why the implementation of the national strategy and the action plan of the National Commission to Combat the Proliferation of Small Arms and Light Weapons, supported by MINUSCA, are indispensable.

Thirdly, Ecuador supports democratic processes and welcomes the upcoming municipal and regional elections for the five-year period 2023–2028, scheduled for July. We believe that coordination between the Government and MINUSCA in the process of local elections, the reconfiguration of the administrative districts and the mobilization of funds are necessary in order to achieve the electoral time table. Peace cannot be maintained by force. We therefore urge that dialogue prevail over disinformation and hate speech, as well as incitement to violence and threats. Ecuador categorically rejects this type of violence, which includes incitement to sexual violence against the opposition, especially against women, and we recognize the work of MINUSCA in denouncing it.

Fourthly, as the delegation of Gabon stated, there is no peace without justice. That is why we encourage the work of the Special Criminal Court that punishes war crimes and crimes against humanity, as well as the Truth, Justice, Reparation and Reconciliation Commission.

The State has the primary responsibility to protect the population. We therefore urge that the human rights of the people of the Central African Republic be respected and guaranteed and that all cases of human rights abuses and violations be investigated and prosecuted and their perpetrators brought to justice.

Ecuador welcomes the signing of the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (2023–2027) between the United Nations and the Government. We call for increasing support from the United Nations system and global and regional financial institutions in order to provide cooperation and access to finance to the Central African Republic.

Finally, I would like to reaffirm Ecuador's commitment to MINUSCA by contributing permanently with officers, mostly women, to this Mission, as one of the contributions we make to the Organization in the search for sustainable and lasting solutions for peace processes.

**Mr. Polyanskiy** (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): I would like to thank the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Ms. Valentine Rugwabiza, for her briefing. We are grateful to the Permanent Representative of Morocco, Mr. Omar Hilale, for the statement he delivered in his capacity as Chair of the Central African Republic configuration of the Peacebuilding Commission. We welcome the participation of the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Francophonie and Central Africans Abroad of the Central African Republic, Ms. Sylvie Baipo Temon, in today's meeting.

We follow very closely the security developments in the Central African Republic. Overall, the country is under the control of Government forces, and the capacities of many illegal armed groups have been significantly reduced.

At the same time, we note the increased activity of the remaining fighters in a number of border areas in recent months. The intensification of activities by illegal armed groups, including the most intransigent amongst them, the Unité pour la paix en Centrafrique and the Retour, réclamation et réhabilitation groups, gives rise to serious concern. Another worrisome trend is the emergence of new armed formations, such as Coalition Siriri, which operates in the border area with the Sudan, in coordination with the Unité pour la paix en Centrafrique and the Retour, réclamation et réhabilitation groups.

In that regard, we call for more decisive steps on the part of the Security Council towards a complete lifting of the arms embargo against the Central African Republic. We believe that measure is necessary in order to strengthen the defence capacity of the country and to

help it to combat the illegal armed groups who refuse to participate in national reconciliation and make it more difficult to prepare the new elections in the country.

The African Union, the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region and the African members of the Security Council speak unequivocally in favour of lifting sanctions. The people of the Central African Republic also remain very vocal in that regard. It is clear that lasting stabilization and progress on the political process are not possible unless the Central African Republic receives effective support in the capacity-building of its national military and law enforcement.

We believe that the Political Agreement for Peace and Reconciliation in the Central African Republic, signed in Bangui on 6 February 2019, remains the basis for achieving stability and security. We welcome the practical steps taken by Bangui in order to continue the political process, with a view to normalizing the situation in the country. We call on all parties to implement the unilateral ceasefire announced by the Head of State on 15 October 2021.

We need to ensure that the illegal armed groups that did not sign the Luanda road map also participate in the process. According to the road map, the parties undertook to stop fighting, begin disarmament and demobilize former combatants. Rebel leaders must abandon violent fighting methods and engage in meaningful dialogue with Bangui, as there is no alternative to a political and diplomatic settlement in the Central African Republic.

We believe that the decisions taken in the context of the implementation mechanism of the Political Agreement for Peace and Reconciliation in the Central African Republic — the Khartoum agreement — and the Luanda road map will promote peace efforts in Bangui.

We continue to assist the Central African Republic in strengthening its defence capabilities. More than one shipment of military goods was delivered to the country with the knowledge of the sanctions Committee established pursuant to resolution 2127 (2013) concerning the Central African Republic. Russian instructors sent there in response to a request by the legitimate authorities are successfully operating in the Central African Republic. The campaign to discredit them and the attempts in general to place the blame for human rights violations on the Central African Republic armed forces and bilateral partners are custom-made and are not supported by verified facts.

We welcome the efforts of the Central African Republic authorities to ensure a State presence, strengthen administrative structures, continue security sector reform, develop the judicial system and prepare for the first local elections since 1988. In that context, we once again draw attention to the politicized decisions taken by some external donors to freeze direct budgetary support to the Central African Republic. That situation directly threatens to exacerbate the situation in the country, in particular in humanitarian terms, and jeopardizes the achievements of recent years with regard to national reconciliation.

We believe that it is important to continue effective support to the authorities on the part of MINUSCA, headed by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Ms. Rugwabiza. We thank the military personnel of the troop-contributing countries, who risk their lives on a daily basis in carrying out their duty. We welcome the signing of a comprehensive plan for election security with MINUSCA's assistance. In general, we would like to reiterate that MINUSCA should particularly devote its resources to assisting the authorities in establishing State control, countering armed groups and protecting civilians.

We are very concerned that terrorist attacks in the Central African Republic are targeting Russian nationals. We strongly condemn the attack on Mr. Syty, Director-General of Russian House, a company operating in the Central African Republic, which took place in Bangui on 16 December 2022. We trust that the perpetrators of that crime will be identified and duly held accountable. Additional coordinated steps by the authorities of neighbouring States are needed to curb the illegal cross-border movement of militants.

In conclusion, we would like to stress that only the comprehensive normalization of the security situation will enable Bangui to focus on a constructive domestic agenda in the interests of the citizens and the State. The Security Council must do its utmost to facilitate that process, including by lifting the remaining sanctions restrictions against the legitimate Government.

**The President:** I shall now make a statement in my capacity as the representative of Malta.

I thank Special Representative Rugwabiza and Ambassador Omar Hilale, Chair of the Central African Republic country-specific configuration of the Peacebuilding Commission, for their briefings. I welcome the participation of the Minister for Foreign

Affairs of the Central African Republic in this meeting. I also extend my condolences to the families of the six United Nations personnel who died recently while they were serving in the country.

Our message today is one that looks forward to the achievement of peace and stability in the Central African Republic through a genuine investment in trust. We understand the need of the Government to extend State authority, especially when it comes to addressing the threat of armed groups, which take advantage of the security vacuums to gain footholds in exhausted communities.

However, we are deeply concerned about the findings of the report of the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA) on human rights. We condemn all violations perpetrated by armed groups, the Forces armées centrafricaines and other security personnel, namely, the Wagner Group.

In addressing the threats caused by non-State actors, we stress the importance of a resilient justice system. We welcome the first verdict of the Special Criminal Court, delivered on 31 October 2022, which found the defendants guilty of crimes against humanity and war crimes. We also welcome the extension of the Court's mandate until 2028.

Malta is deeply committed to combating all forms of violence, including sexual and gender-based violence and grave violations committed against children. We welcome the decision by the Government to create a strategic committee to prevent and respond to gender-based violence linked to conflict. Furthermore, we urge the development of a strategy to prevent and eliminate the six grave violations against children, as recognized by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict.

Further trust will be safeguarded if a renewed commitment is dedicated to the Political Agreement for Peace and Reconciliation in the Central African Republic. The critical work of the Truth, Justice, Reparation and Reconciliation Commission and progress on the disarmament, demobilization, reintegration and repatriation programme remain central. We welcome the dissolution of four armed groups among the signatories and encourage the Government to consolidate such gains. Only through a ceasefire and continued dialogue

between the Government and armed groups can a path towards peace be forged, in partnership with international and regional partners.

We also look forward to the holding of local elections later this year for the first time since 1988. Having inclusive, free and fair elections and creating a civic space that represents all stakeholders are crucial to all democratic societies. The full, equal, meaningful and safe participation of women, young people, internally displaced persons and refugees remains of the utmost importance. At the same time, we are concerned about reports regarding the challenges that the authorities are experiencing in the holding of local elections, as well as the recently adopted referendum law and the dismissal of members from the Constitutional Court. We acknowledge the Government's public commitment that the current budgetary plans will be adapted in order to facilitate the local elections.

Malta remains supportive of MINUSCA's work. We are pleased about the recent decision concerning the night-flight ban, which is no longer an impediment to MINUSCA's efforts to ensure the medical evacuation of injured peacekeepers. While we take note of the violations of the status-of-forces agreement, it is important for MINUSCA to continue to operate without restrictions. On that note, Malta welcomes MINUSCA's efforts to raise awareness of its mandate, which is fundamental to fighting misinformation.

We must also work to address the humanitarian situation, as 3.4 million people face limited or no access to basic services, such as water and sanitation. Inflation also continues apace, as most basic products have at least doubled in price since the war in Ukraine began, thereby exacerbating the humanitarian needs of millions of people already facing acute food insecurity and climate change.

In conclusion, we emphasize the importance of engendering trust in MINUSCA's dealings with the people of the Central African Republic. We are convinced that investing in good governance will facilitate increasing dialogue and justice over violence and impunity. Malta will continue to express its deepest commitment to supporting the Central African Republic in its path towards long-lasting peace and stability.

I now resume my functions as President of the Council.



I give the floor to the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Francophonie and Central Africans Abroad of the Central African Republic.

**Ms. Baïpo Temon** (Central African Republic) (*spoke in French*): Allow me to extend my warm greetings to the Security Council, and my thanks for the greetings that were addressed to me. I would also like to thank all the participants here today, and I convey to them the thanks of His Excellency Mr. Faustin Archange Touadera, President of the Central African Republic and Head of State, the Central African Government, led by Mr. Félix Moloua, Prime Minister and Head of Government, and the Central African people for the interest shown in our country, the Central African Republic, through the support of the international community, represented by the United Nations, in particular the Security Council.

Allow me to take this opportunity to congratulate the new States that have joined the Security Council as non-permanent members. I would like to especially congratulate you, Madam President, on your country's presidency for the month of February.

It is with renewed pleasure that I appear before the Security Council to speak on behalf of the Central African Republic, my dear and beautiful country, in order to share with Council members the situation in my country as well as my Government's remarks and commentary on the report of the Secretary-General (S/2023/108), which has just been presented to us in summary form by Special Representative Valentine Rugwabiza, Head of the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA). I would like to take this opportunity to thank and congratulate her for her clear and concise briefing and for the work she has done with the Central African authorities, and also to provide her with encouragement as she meets the heavy burden of leading MINUSCA to achieving results.

I could not end my thanks without acknowledging Ambassador Hilale's commitment to the Central African Republic Chair of the country configuration of the Peacebuilding Commission. I would like to express to him the gratitude of the people and the Government of the Central African Republic for the work he has carried out to mobilize the partners and the friendly countries of the United Nations to remain in solidarity with my country. This gratitude also extends to every member of his team. I add my voice to his in calling for

support for the upcoming local elections, to be held in July 2023, the timetable of which has been set out by the National Electoral Authority.

Turning to the subject that has brought us together today, namely, the situation in the Central African Republic, on which the Secretary-General has issued a report organized around 11 points, I would like, first of all, to express the gratitude of the people and the Government of the Central African Republic for the international community, acting through MINUSCA, and thank it for its multifaceted support in a context that is as complex as it is complicated. In addition, I would support Ambassador Hilale's briefing and urge the international community to remain involved in the Central African Republic in order to strengthen security cooperation and achieve success in the form of an effective return to peace.

While we welcome the achievements resulting from our collective efforts, it should be noted that improvements still need to be made through coordinated and mutually respectful work so that anomalies and inconsistencies cease to be a hindrance to the political process for peace and that they stop fuelling insecurity and precariousness in the Central African Republic.

I would now like to share with the Council the situation in the Central African Republic and my Government's comments on the report of the Secretary-General. Council members should know that the Central African Republic, my country, is a country with an estimated population of 5 million inhabitants, which means that there are 5 million women and men whose rights and dignity continue to be disregarded and scorned, in this twenty-first century, by lawless and faithless enemies of peace. In the madness of their desire to serve dark causes, these enemies of peace wage a proxy war against the Central African people and the institutions of the Republic, obtaining remuneration through the illicit exploitation of natural resources that they galvanize to strengthen themselves with weaponry. In this way, they remain useful actors in all efforts aimed at destabilization with a view to gaining power by force or through any other means.

We are in the twenty-first century, and those who have had the opportunity to visit the Central African Republic could describe the paradox of the country to the Council. The Central African Republic is a sparsely populated State, vast in surface area and possessing innumerable natural resources and a generous land. But

the country is subject to the tyranny of men, forcing an entire people to live in a situation of unacceptable and, above all, incomprehensible insecurity.

Indeed, with abuses and violent extremism perpetrated by armed groups, the population cannot have access to their land for cultivation to meet their personal consumption needs. The Central African authorities are cut off from any possibility of exploiting the resources of its subsoil that could allow it to support efficient economic and social development programmes.

Furthermore, a campaign of demonization in the Central African Republic, driven by the geopolitical and geostrategic interests of Powers that are motivated by economic and positioning objectives, relies on all means to marginalize a country and a population that have already been badly damaged. In addition, a negative campaign aimed at taking the Central African population hostage has been actively undertaken to prevent any financial support for the Central African authorities, strangling the country and fomenting a social crisis.

This means that the youth of the Central African Republic — a youth that aspires only to peace, which every human being should be able to enjoy in the land of their forebears — can look forward only to a very sad future. It also means that the future holds only one option: violence in response to violence, as that is the only way to survive. Indeed, while the Secretary-General's report makes a good number of points, it does not go to the heart of the matter, in particular what the Central African people aspire to.

It would be appropriate to sit down one day and discuss the results expected from the implementation of the peacekeeping operation in the Central African Republic, because, first of all, we are accountable to the population for them. Let us not forget that MINUSCA's mandate is to protect civilians. Secondly, we should do this because it is not enough to take stock of the security and political situation in the Central African Republic without evaluating the actions and expected results of what we are doing. Indeed, we will have to face the fact that we must work together for peace and stop merely talking about peace. To do this, we must focus on the realities experienced by Central Africans, and not on facts deliberately extrapolated in the name of humanity, or even in the name of compassion for a people living in misery or facing the illicit exploitation of natural resources of which the Central African State is deprived.

Members of the Security Council should know that we are well aware of the realities of this world and the paradox between the wealth that the Central African Republic possesses and the misery in which its population lives. It is also a sad consequence of the reality of this world despite collective efforts — a world in chaos, a world of chaos — simply because the solutions advocated are out of phase with the realities of States.

We will continue to meet in this Chamber to discuss as many reports and draft resolutions as we want. But would it not make more sense, after 13 multilateral peace operations and nine years of peacekeeping operations through MINUSCA, to focus urgently on the fact that we need to truly establish this oft-invoked peace before we can finally be able to maintain it.

We can debate the different points of the report submitted by the Secretary-General, and we can also continue to count the dead, the displaced and the refugees. But would it not be better to focus on finding a concrete solution for what is causing the Central African problem? Or, instead, we can focus on non-issues, such as restrictions on night flights, which was a topic constantly brought up during the debate on the renewal of MINUSCA's mandate, so that we would forget that the original mandate is far from being achieved.

We know the cause of the Central African problem, and the Council knows it too. All we need to do now is to want to address it. Let us remember that Central African Republic's appeal to the international community was made because of aggression that ensued from the Séléka rebellion in 2013, which in a few days massacred thousands of innocent people and displaced thousands more. What is the situation today, nine years later?

On the political level, efforts continue in a political process for peace and reconciliation shared with the Luanda road map, which came as a complement to bring the recalcitrant armed groups that had resumed their rebellion back to the Political Agreement for Peace and Reconciliation in the Central African Republic, in the presence of United Nations forces consisting of approximately 13,000 people. We should appreciate the authorities' unceasing efforts to preserve the foundations of democracy, build the rule of law and restore State authority throughout the country. That is a long and wearisome process, but the approaching deadline for local elections should enable us to speed up our decentralization policy and through that our local

development. I would like to echo Ambassador Hilale's request that the international community mobilize funding for the holding of local elections to enable us to finalize a democratic process that we all desire and have initiated together.

The state of the world today suggests that sanctions that are imposed solely to punish are completely ineffective, especially when they are disproportionate, unjust and cruel, forcing a people to their knees simply because they have made a legitimate cry for help to survive. As I said, we should understand that the political process for a young State like the Central African Republic is long and wearisome. Above all, it has been made difficult and painful by incessant interference with the sole objective of distracting us from our primary goal and the real issue, which is giving the people back their sovereignty and their ability to express themselves on the subject that most concerns them, their development and social welfare. Let us not forget that no one can claim to care about the Central African Republic more than the Central Africans themselves.

With regard to security, the resurgence of attacks by armed groups and the use of explosive devices and drones has created an alarming situation. The latest incidents include the 14 February attack on Sikikédé, in the Vakaga region, in which lives were lost and officers of the Forces armées centrafricaines were taken hostage, and the assassinations on 18 February in Paoua, as well as attacks on United Nations forces and humanitarian personnel. All of that should compel us to review MINUSCA's mandate so that it can deploy more efficiently in a way that compels it to effectively protect civilians while attacks by negative forces are actually happening rather than in their aftermath. We should also review the mandate so that the mistakes made in the run-up to the previous electoral deadlines are not repeated, especially the plan to secure the elections that failed to produce the expected results and sparked a new aggression by armed groups. In the light of the resurgence in armed-group attacks and the threats, disinformation and incitement to hatred that are being disseminated on social networks with the aim of angering and frightening the people, we must sit down and consider the supposed effectiveness of the increase in United Nations troops, which has been presented as a response to the failure of that security plan for the 2020–2021 electoral timetable, during which a new rebellion emerged that has forced us to once again appeal to the international community and subregional organizations.

The Secretary-General's report discusses the situation of MINUSCA in the Central African Republic and the restrictions on its freedom of movement in particular. It is important to point out that the appeals made by the Central African authorities for coordinated efforts, particularly in the context of the growing numbers of troops and their identity, have still not answered. Is the Council aware that despite our constant requests, we have seen no sign of collaboration or coordination, in total violation of the sovereignty of the Central African Republic? In my view, it is important that in all the relevant resolutions of the Council, it is stressed that it is first and foremost the responsibility of the Central African authorities to ensure the protection of their population and territory. How can we respond if we do not even have the right to know who has been invited to set foot on Central African soil? Is that not an insidious way to flout a sovereign right? Would any country here accept such practices?

The terms of the status-of-forces agreement with the Central African Government regarding MINUSCA's operations are clear. The Government has tolerated a number of exemptions — even some that are barely acceptable — but it is important to remember that the Central African Republic has requested support in its quest for security, not a trusteeship or any kind of substitution for the Central African authorities. The restrictions we have announced should be understood in the light of the abuses committed and considering the vulnerability of the Central African Republic. They highlight the contradictions in a mandate where there is securitization without an adequate level of control. As an example, that minimal level of control led to the arrest of a couple, parents to a six-month-old baby, who came to the Central African Republic ostensibly on a religious mission and were found on the outskirts of the Central African capital using drones. They were arrested and expelled from Central African territory. That is one case among many demonstrating the minimum level of control we need to talk about securitization.

On the economic front, the persistent problems — exacerbated by the coronavirus disease health crisis and the Ukraine-Russia crisis — have not spared the Central African economy, which was already in dire straits thanks to its situation as an underdeveloped country. The Central African Republic is not immune to the consequences of soaring prices for basic necessities and petroleum products, which are fuelling social tensions. That worrisome economic and financial back-

drop is aggravating an already alarming humanitarian situation resulting from constant attacks by armed groups and the illicit exploitation of natural resources. The peace-keeping operation and humanitarian non-governmental organizations, with their tax exemptions, are also hampering the Central African economy.

How can we possibly improve the humanitarian situation without addressing the issue of the armed groups that are its root cause? They are obstructing the people's access to their own backyard and preventing the Central African authorities from implementing economic programmes based on the country's rich potential in natural resources. How can we reduce the humanitarian problems when 80 per cent of donations pledged are used solely to ensure the operations of non-governmental organizations and other associations? How can we resolve those issues when poverty is supported by the exploitation of Central African personnel, even on their own territory?

We can end this alarming humanitarian situation, but first we need the will to do it. We have to reduce the armed groups' lethal capacity. I will not dwell on the issue of human rights violations in view of the double standards that are apparent in the handling of certain cases — specifically, where work was done without the knowledge of the local Central African authorities, in cases where the claims have been unverifiable and in decisions motivated by known inconsistencies, such as the withdrawal of Gabonese troops in 2021 on the basis of slanderous denunciations or even misinformation. The fight against impunity functions at two entirely different speeds, with a list of sanctions ignored, thereby allowing the executioners of the Central African people to continue their abuses.

We cannot ask for the possible and the impossible at the same time. Building a State based on the rule of law and simultaneously functioning as a stable State are not humanly possible. Our ability to be effective depends on structured, coordinated and orderly work. If we try to chase several hares at the same time, we will not catch any of them — which is to say that we will not achieve any results, because there is no security solution or alternative other than to work together to fight the enemies of peace in the Central African Republic, the forces of evil that are the armed groups.

Stabilizing the Central African Republic is more imperative today than ever before. Together we must think about how to stabilize the Central African Republic and bring back peace. There is no question that in the face of heavily armed groups equipped with sophisticated weapons, in a region of Central Africa where no State

manufactures or sells weapons, the Mission's mandate must be revised under Chapter VII of the Charter of the United Nations. We need a robust and effective operation that can put an end to the suffering of a people exhausted by decades of aggression against their territory, crimes against their citizens, destabilization of their institutions and illicit exploitation of their mineral resources.

The Central African context demands that we not ignore the failures and mistakes that have complicated the political and security situation in the Central African Republic if we are to put in place an operation whose goal is to impose peace and stability in order to overcome the country's issues of precarity, and consequently of human rights violations, disinformation and incitement to hatred, by offering people sane and genuine alternatives, not empty promises. Let us work together to create dreams, not sell them. To do that, let us work in solidarity, without considering strong versus weak or who is dominant versus who can be dominated. Let us not forget that we are all human beings. Let us work to reduce discrimination and to lift unjust, perverse and ineffective sanctions. Let us stop legitimizing armed groups with sanctions that have the opposite effects to those intended, and above all, let us not turn victims into oppressors and torturers into victims.

In conclusion, I encourage Council members to put themselves in the place of the people of the Central African Republic and to treat their cause as their own — their quest for a life of dignity — by supporting the lifting of the unjust sanctions on their Government such as those in resolution 2127 (2013), on the embargo on Central African Republic, which gave legitimacy to the armed groups to the detriment of the legitimate authorities and makes no sense in the wake of the lifting of the restrictions on access to arms for the regular forces, the lifting of the remaining sanctions under the Kimberley Process and the implementation of sanctions on the free movement and the freezing of assets of persons under sanctions for crimes against humanity.

The people of the Central African Republic ask the members of the Council not to be mistaken about who their enemies are. The country, the people and the Government of the Central African Republic are not their enemies, and they are not the enemy. The Central African people simply want mutually beneficial partnerships based on the principles of equality and non-discrimination.

May peace take shape in this world of constant struggle. May peace take shape in the Central African Republic.

*The meeting rose at 12.25 p.m.*