



# Security Council

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## Report of the Secretary-General on the situation in Central Africa and the activities of the United Nations Regional Office for Central Africa

### I. Introduction

1. The present report is submitted pursuant to the statement of the President of the Security Council dated 11 June 2015 (S/PRST/2015/12), in which the Council requested the Secretary-General to keep it informed about the activities of the United Nations Regional Office for Central Africa (UNOCA). In the present report, an assessment of the major political and security trends in the Central African subregion since my previous report, dated 31 May 2017 (S/2017/465), and an update on progress in the implementation of the mandate of UNOCA and on efforts to implement the United Nations regional strategy to address the threat and impact of the activities of the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) are provided (see S/2012/481). An update is also provided on the situation in the Lake Chad Basin region, pursuant to Council resolution 2349 (2017), and on the activities of the Joint Force of the Group of Five for the Sahel, pursuant to Council resolution 2358 (2017).

### II. Major developments in the Central African subregion

#### A. Political, peace and security developments and trends

2. The situation in Central Africa was marked by continued political and social tensions in a context of economic downturn and disputed electoral processes. Cross-cutting challenges stemming from the ongoing Boko Haram crisis continued to demand the attention of Governments in the area as well as regional and international stakeholders. Efforts continued to address the persisting threat posed by LRA, including the ongoing reconfiguration of the African Union Regional Task Force.

##### Political developments and trends

3. In Angola, elections were held on 23 August, with the ruling party, Movimento Popular de Libertação de Angola, winning over 61 per cent of the vote and 150 out of 220 seats in Parliament. The former Minister of Defence, João Lourenço, of Movimento Popular, was declared the country's new President and sworn in on 26 September. The opposition parties União Nacional para a Independência Total de Angola and Convergência Ampla de Salvação de Angola — Coligação Eleitoral



garnered approximately 26 per cent of the vote (51 seats in Parliament) and 9 per cent of the vote (16 seats in Parliament), respectively. While União Nacional had initially challenged the outcome of the elections, citing irregularities, and called upon its elected Members of Parliament to boycott legislative proceedings, on 16 September it announced a reversal of its boycott call.

4. In Cameroon, the situation in the North-West and South-West anglophone regions remained calm but volatile, with a continued heavy State security presence. The Government implemented several measures to address the grievances expressed by the Cameroon Anglophone Civil Society Consortium in the judicial and educational systems, including the creation of a common law section at the *École nationale de magistrature*, a department of English law at several universities (Douala, Ngaoundéré, Dschang and Maroua), the redeployment of magistrates according to linguistic criteria and the appointment of more anglophone magistrates to the High Court. In addition, on 30 August, the Government decided to release and drop all charges against most of the leaders and sympathizers of the anglophone movement who had been detained since January 2017. However, tensions persisted as demonstrations and “ghost town” protests were held. Several incidents involving the use of improvised explosive devices took place in Bamenda, North-West region, in September and October and in Douala on 22 September; the Government blamed activists of the anglophone separatist movement for those incidents.

5. In anticipation of the planned events for the Unification Day holiday on 1 October, security forces were heavily deployed and restrictions on movement and assembly were imposed. Access to social media was suspended from 28 September, but intermittent access was restored a few days later. Nevertheless, on 1 October, supporters of the secessionist movement took to the streets, ostensibly to hoist a flag representing an independent English-speaking State. Security forces dispersed protestors, resulting in an unconfirmed number of deaths, injuries and arrests. On 17 October, the Prime Minister, Philémon Yang, visited the two anglophone regions to engage in dialogue. A similar mission led by former Prime Minister and Chair of the National Commission for the Promotion of Bilingualism and Multiculturalism, Mafany Musonge, was deployed to the South-West region. Owing to targeted attacks on security checkpoints between 6 and 10 November, which resulted in the deaths of four members of the country’s defence and security forces, the Government imposed a curfew from 8 to 23 November and ordered the closure of shops and public places in the city of Bamenda, North-West region. The Government also indicated that several weapons caches had been identified. The Government also launched a judicial enquiry into human rights violations and abuses allegedly committed in the North-West and South-West regions on 1 October, including the disproportionate and excessive use of force by security forces.

6. In Chad, the economy continued to be under huge strain from high security expenditures in a context of lower oil proceeds, resulting in a tense social situation. On 11 July, the *Plateforme syndicale revendicative* suspended its participation in the social dialogue following the Government’s decision, on 6 June, to reflect a freeze on transport costs for government workers in the budget alignment. On 21 September, it signed a joint communiqué to resume dialogue with the Government. On 6 June, the opposition coalition, *Front de l’opposition nouvelle pour l’alternance et le changement*, issued a memorandum questioning the legitimacy of the President, Idriss Déby Itno, and attributing the financial crisis to poor governance, mismanagement of funds and the inability of the Government to provide basic social services. On 9 June, the opposition coalition refused to participate in a national forum to adopt institutional and constitutional reforms, calling instead for an inclusive political dialogue. On 10 August, the President held

separate consultations with representatives of the opposition, although a key opposition leader, Saleh Kebzabo, declined the invitation.

7. On 2 August, the results of the parliamentary election in the Congo were announced; the ruling party, Parti congolais du travail, won 90 of the 151 seats available, while the opposition parties Union panafricaine pour la démocratie sociale and Union des démocrates et humanistes won 8 seats each. Elections were not held in eight constituencies of the Pool region owing to insecurity. On 16 August, Clément Mouamba was reappointed as Prime Minister of the Congo, and on 23 August he announced a new Cabinet, whose main tasks would be to negotiate an adjustment programme with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) to assist the flailing economy. From 26 September to 4 October, IMF deployed a mission to Brazzaville to take stock of economic developments, finalize an assessment of the country's debt and update macroeconomic projections. On 5 October, the Government issued a communiqué stipulating its intention to renegotiate the terms of its debt with creditors, which was estimated by IMF to be \$9 billion, or 110 per cent of the gross domestic product.

8. Concerns remained about the prolonged detention without trial of political leaders arrested following the 2016 presidential election. Despite assurances from the Government that timely and fair trials would be held, initial hearings had yet to take place, including for two former presidential candidates, Jean-Marie Michel Mokoko and André Okombi Salissa. On 11 August, the Government authorized the medical evacuation to France of the detained opposition leader, Modeste Boukadia, who had been sentenced to 30 years of forced labour.

9. In Equatorial Guinea, early legislative and municipal elections were held on 12 November, with a total of 325,554 registered voters and 18 participating political parties. Ahead of the vote, the opposition party Ciudadanos por la Innovación accused the Government of excluding it from the elections, including by preventing it from organizing campaign events. In a meeting with political parties, the Government encouraged them to participate in the elections using their own funds, adding that it would refund them after the final results were announced. On election day, security forces were deployed, Internet access was suspended and the use of private vehicles was banned. Social media had been inaccessible since the start of the campaign, on 27 October. According to reports in the media, most polling stations opened on schedule and the vote took place peacefully. Opposition representatives claimed incidents of fraud and irregularities. On 13 November, the Government convened a meeting with the international community to announce the preliminary results, which indicated that the ruling party, Partido Democrático de Guinea Ecuatorial, had taken the lead across the country.

10. In Gabon, the continued contestation by the opposition candidate, Jean Ping, of the re-election of the President, Ali Bongo Ondimba, in 2016, along with economic hardship, including multiple strikes, dominated the political and social scene in the period under review. On 2 June, Mr. Ping rejected calls by his political allies to participate in a dialogue with Mr. Bongo Ondimba, calling instead for international mediation. On 18 August, Mr. Ping called upon his supporters to demonstrate until he assumed power. On 4 September, 19 individuals were arrested during a rally in Libreville in support of Mr. Ping. On 9 September, the president of the political movement Rassemblement héritage et modernité, Alexandre Barro Chambrier, which is aligned with Mr. Ping, issued a statement in which he denounced what he described as an increase in arbitrary arrests targeting the opposition and called for the unconditional release of all political detainees. On 13 September, the Prime Minister, Emmanuel Issoze-Ngondet, rejected calls for an international enquiry into the 2016 post-electoral violence, instead announcing the creation of a national commission.

11. On 11 July, ruling on a petition from the Government, the Constitutional Court of Gabon authorized a further postponement of parliamentary elections to April 2018 at the earliest. The elections had originally been scheduled for December 2016 and had already been postponed once, to July 2017. The decision by the Court generated criticism from several opposition figures, who argued that there was no justification for an additional delay. On 21 August, a new Cabinet was unveiled, led by the incumbent Prime Minister and tasked with finalizing, by November 2017, the new Constitution, which would subsequently be adopted by the National Assembly. A former presidential candidate, Pierre-Claver Maganga Moussavou, was appointed Vice-President, while Mr. Ping's former campaign manager, René Ndemezo'o Obiang, was appointed President of the Economic and Social Council of Gabon.

12. An intensified political dialogue between the European Union and the Government of Gabon was launched on 13 September. The discussions were focused on the outcome of the national dialogue and electoral reforms, as well as human rights, democratization and fundamental freedoms.

13. In Rwanda, the President, Paul Kagame, won 98.79 per cent of the vote in the presidential election held on 4 August. His two opponents, the independent candidate, Philippe Mpayimana, and the candidate of the Democratic Green Party, Frank Habineza, won 0.73 per cent and 0.48 per cent, respectively. Opposition figure Diane Rwigara was barred by the National Electoral Commission on the grounds that she had submitted forged signatures in support of her candidature, which fell short of the required 600 signatures. Ms. Rwigara was arrested in September, along with two family members, on charges of tax evasion and forgery. On 3 October, the authorities charged her, along with her mother and sister, for incitement to insurrection against the State. At the time of reporting, judicial proceedings were under way against Ms. Rwigara and her mother, having been denied bail on 20 October. Ms. Rwigara's sister was released provisionally after the judge decided to drop the charges against her because of a lack of evidence.

14. On 28 July, the Electoral Commission of Sao Tome and Principe announced that 90,932 voters had been registered, representing a decrease from the previous 111,222 voters registered for the 2016 presidential election. On 14 August, the Government announced that regional and local elections planned for 2017 had been postponed to 2018 to combine them with legislative elections.

## **Sahel**

15. The cross-border dimension of terrorism and its linkages with organized crime continued to pose a serious threat to stability in the greater Sahel region, including in Chad. The establishment of the Joint Force of the Group of Five for the Sahel earlier in 2017 is a welcome development, demonstrating the commitment of the five countries to take ownership of and collectively address the security challenges in the region. Since the issuance of my previous report on the Joint Force (S/2017/869), on 28 October the Joint Force launched its first operation in the Liptako-Gourma triangle that borders Burkina Faso, Chad and Mali. Code-named Operation Hawbi, the campaign deployed several hundred soldiers from Mali, the Niger and Burkina Faso. In its operations, the Joint Force prioritized the Central Sector, bordering the three countries, as it has been the epicentre of cross-border activities by armed terror groups and drugs and arms traffickers in the region.

16. Chad continues to work towards the mobilization and deployment of its own contribution to the Joint Force. On 13 October, Chad repatriated hundreds of its troops from the Niger, where they had been fighting Boko Haram, to their base in Wour, in the Tibesti region, within the framework of the ongoing deployment of the Joint Force. Citing serious financial difficulties in his country, the President of Chad

has publicly raised concerns about the ability of Chad to field troops for the Joint Force.

17. An international conference on security and development in the Sahel is scheduled to be held in Brussels on 14 December 2017. The United Nations integrated strategy for the Sahel serves as a vehicle for providing a holistic response to the challenges confronting the Sahel region. Through the Executive Committee working group on the Sahel, chaired by the Deputy Secretary-General, the United Nations is mobilized to accelerate implementation of the strategy, including by raising additional resources.

### **Security developments and trends**

#### **Boko Haram/Lake Chad Basin**

18. Despite significant efforts deployed by affected countries, the Multinational Joint Task Force and regional and international partners, Boko Haram remained a persistent threat in the Lake Chad Basin. The group continued to carry out suicide bombings, banditry, kidnapping, arson attacks and raids on villages, individuals and military installations. Since the issuance of my report on the situation in the Lake Chad Basin region (S/2017/764), from 1 June to 15 October at least 111 civilians were killed and 131 were injured in Cameroon and 1 civilian was killed in Chad.

19. Multiple attacks took place in northern Cameroon, the majority of which were perpetrated by adolescent female suicide bombers targeting camps for internally displaced persons and other places crowded with civilians. The use of young women and girls as suicide bombers increased, creating an atmosphere of suspicion towards women and girls and rendering them targets of harassment, stigmatization and arbitrary arrest by police and military forces. On 14 October, former fighters who had surrendered and their families were handed over by vigilante committees to the local authorities in Mozogo, in the Far North region. Originally from Cameroon, these people, including 58 men, 86 women and 244 children, reported that they had been abducted by Boko Haram during attacks on their villages and taken to Nigeria, where they were forced to join the group.

20. In Chad, only one major attack was reported, although Boko Haram activities continued to disrupt the livelihoods of the local population, in particular transborder trade. The Chadian army reported that on 24 and 25 June, 8 Chadian soldiers were killed and 18 wounded while fighting Boko Haram insurgents on the islands of Lake Chad.

21. The Peace and Security Council of the African Union undertook a visit to the Lake Chad Basin from 27 to 31 July. It subsequently adopted a decision on 28 September in which it, inter alia, expressed concern regarding the resource challenges of the Multinational Joint Task Force and the dire humanitarian situation prevailing in the region; reaffirmed the need for a comprehensive approach in the fight against Boko Haram; and called for a dedicated summit of the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS) and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), with a view to developing a strategy for the promotion of peace, security and development in the Lake Chad Basin.

#### **Lord's Resistance Army**

22. According to the LRA crisis tracker, there were 48 LRA-related criminal incidents during the reporting period, resulting in 7 deaths and 158 abductions. LRA elements continued to pose significant risks to civilians in northern Democratic Republic of the Congo. The locations of security incidents were along the movement corridors of LRA from the Central African Republic through the

provinces of Bas-Uélé and Haut-Uélé and in and out of Garamba National Park in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The national park remained a key source of poaching and gold-mining for LRA. Most of the group's attacks consisted of looting, ambushes, temporary abductions and sexual violence. The dry season from March to June coincided with a peak in LRA-attributed incidents.

23. LRA groups continued to attack and loot communities in the Central African Republic along the Obo-Zemio axis and in the Haute-Kotto prefecture, neighbouring the Kafia Kingi enclave, where LRA fighters were often dispatched to loot food, gold and diamonds. On 5 July, LRA elements entered the town of Kotto 3 and demanded a meeting with community leaders for food. Between 17 and 24 September, LRA elements attacked the community of Kpabou in Haute-Kotto and clashed with ex-Séléka faction fighters.

24. Between April and October 2017, 12 LRA attacks allegedly took place in the Central African Republic, leading to 4 deaths and 35 abductions. This constituted a decrease from 46 attacks during the same period in 2016. Since May 2017, a rift between two powerful factions of the Front populaire pour la renaissance de la Centrafrique provoked a resurgence of armed clashes in Haute-Kotto and Mbomou prefectures, as well as the mobilization of anti-balaka groups along the Bangassou-Obo axis, which created a challenging environment for LRA groups. Consequently, LRA groups gradually shifted to south-eastern Mbomou and Haut-Mbomou prefectures, possibly to avoid confrontations with other armed elements.

25. Nonetheless, the withdrawal of the African Union Regional Task Force from the Central African Republic has left a security vacuum that has been exploited by loosely associated armed militias, criminal gangs and various local splinter factions operating in Mbomou and Haut-Mbomou. The economic consequences have affected localities, illustrated most tangibly by price inflation for basic foodstuffs. As insecurity has disrupted seasonal harvesting, strong food demand is outstripping the capacity of the local market.

26. While the resurgence of violence throughout the subregion has had a harsher impact on civilians, the declining trend in LRA attacks has led to abductions rather than civilian casualties, necessitating new approaches to the protection of civilians. The deliberate targeting of the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA) by armed groups has restricted the Mission's capacity to respond to incidents and threats in areas affected by LRA.

27. On 4 July, the African Union Regional Task Force completed its withdrawal from Yambio, South Sudan, and moved its headquarters to Koboko, Uganda.

### **Maritime security in the Gulf of Guinea**

28. Since my previous report, seven incidents of piracy and armed robbery at sea in the Gulf of Guinea have been reported by the International Maritime Organization.

29. Following a meeting held in Yaoundé on 8 June, the Gulf of Guinea Interregional Network was established to tackle maritime crime in the Gulf of Guinea. With a total budget of 9.2 million euros for a four-year period, the network is supported by the European Union and covers all the coastal countries of the Gulf of Guinea.

### **Poaching and the illicit trafficking in wildlife and natural resources**

30. On 25 and 26 July, ECCAS organized an expert-level meeting in N'Djamena on conflicts related to land use, wildlife and natural resources, followed by a

ministerial meeting on 27 July at which several strategic and operational tools were validated, including a human/wildlife conflict management system and land conflict management mechanisms.

## **B. Humanitarian developments**

31. Ongoing conflicts and new outbreaks of violence continued to affect millions of people across the subregion. Some 2.4 million people have been displaced by the Boko Haram crisis, which has also sparked severe food insecurity and health and protection risks, including widespread sexual and gender-based violence. In the affected areas across the Lake Chad Basin, humanitarian organizations were striving to assist 8.2 million people, including 1 million people in the affected areas of Cameroon and Chad.

32. The humanitarian response to the Lake Chad Basin crisis, which was scaled up further in 2017, has effectively reached more than 5 million people. Needs are likely to remain acute into 2018 and beyond, however, and require sustained aid and recovery efforts. By September 2017, just over half of the required \$1.5 billion for relief assistance across the four affected countries had been funded. To address the most urgent needs until the end of the year, United Nations agencies and non-governmental organizations were still seeking \$661 million.

33. In the Central African Republic, approximately 600,000 people were internally displaced, an increase of almost 50 per cent between January and August 2017, while the number of refugees had also risen to 500,000, bringing the total number of displaced persons to 1.1 million, the highest level recorded in the country. Humanitarian operations have come under huge strain. Since the beginning of 2017, there have been more than 200 acts of violence against aid workers. Relief assistance was suspended multiple times or stopped entirely in some violence-stricken localities in a country where half of the population needs aid to survive. With the worsening crisis, the response budget was increased to \$497 million from around \$400 million to provide life-saving aid to 1.8 million people. As at 13 November, it was only 36 per cent funded.

## **C. Human rights trends**

34. In Chad, reports of restrictions on the rights to freedom of expression, demonstration, assembly and association continued, combined with claims of harassment, arrest and detention of opposition and civil society leaders. The Government has refuted these claims and reiterated its commitment to institutional reforms to consolidate the rights of citizens and the rule of law. The Government submitted a draft law to the National Assembly to reform the legal framework that established the National Commission on Human Rights, which would help Chad to comply with the principles relating to the status of national institutions for the promotion and protection of human rights.

35. In its final report, issued on 4 September, the Commission of Inquiry on Burundi concluded that there were reasonable grounds to believe that crimes against humanity had been and continued to be committed since April 2015 and requested the International Criminal Court to open an investigation. The Commission documented human rights violations and abuses, including extrajudicial executions, arbitrary arrests and detentions, torture, cruel, inhumane or degrading treatment, sexual violence and forced disappearances. The Government has not agreed to cooperate with the Commission thus far. On 13 September, six unidentified armed persons broke into the premises of the Office of the United Nations High

Commissioner for Human Rights in Bujumbura. The authorities have opened an investigation into the incident. On 9 November, the International Criminal Court announced that on 25 October, the Office of the Prosecutor formally opened an investigation into the situation in Burundi, and that there was a reasonable basis to believe that members of the Burundian security forces and the Imbonerakure had carried out a deliberate attack against the civilian population.

36. On 28 and 29 September, the Human Rights Council adopted two resolutions on Burundi. In its resolution 36/2, the Council requested the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights to urgently dispatch three experts to collect and preserve information on the human rights situation, to be forwarded to the judicial authorities of Burundi to pursue accountability. The High Commissioner was also requested to present an oral and written report regarding the findings of the experts to the Council in 2018. In its resolution 36/19, the Council extended for a period of one year the mandate of the Commission of Inquiry on Burundi and requested the Commission to present a report to the Council and at the seventy-third session of the General Assembly, in 2018.

37. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, widespread violations of civic and political rights continued in the context of a persistent trend of restrictions on democratic space, intensified inter-ethnic and intercommunal violence and human rights violations by defence and security forces. In the Kasai region, 87 mass graves were identified and several hundred civilians reportedly killed. In Tanganyika Province, intercommunal violence resulted in the killing and rape of dozens of civilians. A general ban on demonstrations remained in place. Alarming, there were increasing restrictions on the work of journalists and human rights defenders.

38. In the Central African Republic, MINUSCA documented verified incidents of violations or abuses of human rights, including targeted attacks against civilians along religious and ethnic lines. Following his visit to the country from 6 to 11 October, my Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide condemned the manipulation and incitement to ethnic and religious hatred.

39. In Cameroon, on 9 October, the National Commission on Human Rights and Freedoms condemned violence committed against demonstrators on 1 October, as well as arbitrary arrests and detentions. It reiterated its call for constructive dialogue to find lasting solutions to the crisis. On 13 October, an international non-governmental organization reported that at least 500 people were arbitrarily arrested and detained during a string of demonstrations in September and October. Some 200 detainees have reportedly been released since.

40. The United Nations continued to receive allegations of impunity for violations and abuses of international human rights and international humanitarian law in the context of counter-terrorism responses to Boko Haram by the Multinational Joint Task Force and the security forces of Cameroon and Chad. Such information included arbitrary arrests, prolonged detentions without trial and incidents of rape, including in camps for internally displaced persons. The application of the death penalty by Cameroon and Chad, as provided under the current terrorism legislation, remained of concern.

#### **D. Socioeconomic trends**

41. A slow recovery in commodity prices and the sharp fall in oil prices between 2014 and 2016 revealed major policy and structural deficits in the countries of the subregion, including the inadequate diversification of the national economies, non-inclusive growth, insufficient creation of income-generating jobs, especially for



a growing youth population, and a general lack of significant improvement in the lives of populations.

42. Member States of the Central African Economic and Monetary Community (CEMAC) have made concerted efforts to improve policies and ensure macroeconomic stability at the national and subregional level, in compliance with the decision taken by Heads of State and Government during the Yaoundé summit of December 2016. The leaders have endorsed structural reforms aimed at strengthening public financial management, fighting corruption and enhancing the business environment and policies that would promote measures to reduce macroeconomic imbalances. Those efforts culminated in the approval by IMF of new support programmes for Cameroon and Chad of \$666.2 million and \$312.1 million, respectively, under its Extended Credit Facility, and \$642.0 million for Gabon, under its Extended Fund Facility. IMF provided additional support to the Central African Republic and is currently in discussions with the Congo and Equatorial Guinea.

43. On 30 October, at an extraordinary summit held in N'Djamena, CEMAC took note of the ratification by all its member States of the 2013 agreement on the free movement of persons within the subregion.

44. From 6 to 8 September, the Government of France hosted a round table for donors in Paris, at which the Government of Chad presented its national development plan for the period 2017–2021. The event was chaired by the President of Chad, with organizational support from the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the World Bank. The Government of Chad received pledges totalling \$20 billion, including \$7 billion from multilateral and bilateral partners and \$13 billion from private investors.

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

#### **A. Good offices, preventive diplomacy and mediation**

45. During the reporting period, my Special Representative for Central Africa was actively engaged in the subregion in promoting regional peace and security and preventing conflict, including by undertaking several country-specific visits.

##### **Burundi**

46. From 8 to 13 July, my Special Representative visited Burundi, where he met the President, Pierre Nkurunziza, senior Government officials, members of the diplomatic corps and the United Nations country team. He underscored the need for genuine and sustained commitment to and support for an inclusive dialogue that contributes to reconciliation, stability and prosperity in Burundi.

##### **Central African Republic**

47. My Special Representative for Central Africa continued to engage with regional leaders on the situation in the Central African Republic, in close coordination with my Special Representative for the Central African Republic. In this context, he mobilized the coordinated support of neighbouring countries and subregional organizations for the peace process, urged the region to demonstrate leadership and called for the harmonization of all diplomatic efforts under the umbrella of the African Initiative for Peace and Reconciliation and the Libreville road map. In this regard, a country-specific discussion on the situation in the

Central African Republic took place during the forty-fourth ministerial meeting of the United Nations Standing Advisory Committee on Security Questions in Central Africa, held in Yaoundé from 29 May to 2 June, and it was decided that a mission of the Committee Bureau would be deployed to the country ahead of the forty-fifth ministerial meeting of the Committee. The Bureau visited the Central African Republic on 30 and 31 October.

48. While in Chad from 27 to 30 July, my Special Representative met with the President of Chad to seek his views on developments in the Central African Republic and discuss avenues for the contribution of Chad to reinforce bilateral cooperation and the stabilization of the country. They agreed that a relaunch of the bilateral joint cooperation commission, which covers issues of common interest such as security, transhumance and refugees, would be a valuable next step.

49. I visited the Central African Republic from 24 to 27 October. In addition to spending United Nations Day in Bangui, I met with the President, Faustin-Archange Touadéra, the Government, religious leaders and representatives from civil society, women and youth groups. I visited Bangassou (Mboumou Prefecture) and the predominantly Muslim PK5 neighbourhood in Bangui. I also addressed the National Assembly. In my interactions, I stressed the need to advance the peace process and national reconciliation

### **Cameroon**

50. Throughout the reporting period, my Special Representative maintained close contact with the Cameroonian authorities and continued to encourage dialogue to defuse tensions in the English-speaking North-West and South-West regions. UNOCA took part in a United Nations electoral needs assessment mission to Cameroon from 10 to 21 July.

51. On 27 October, I met with the President, Paul Biya, during a stopover in Yaoundé. I reiterated the commitment of the United Nations to the unity and territorial integrity of Cameroon, while also calling upon the Government to ensure the proportionate use of force in responding to the crisis in the country, in conformity with international human rights standards. I reiterated the call for genuine dialogue to find a lasting solution to the crisis and underlined the readiness of the United Nations to provide any assistance requested by the Cameroonian authorities.

### **Chad**

52. My Special Representative travelled to N'Djamena from 26 to 30 July, where he met with the President of Chad, senior Government officials, political actors and international partners to discuss the internal situation and regional issues. He reiterated the need for inclusive dialogue and encouraged national stakeholders to meet to discuss the time frame and modalities for such dialogue. An initial round of meetings between the President and political and civil society actors was held in N'Djamena in August and September.

53. From 6 to 8 September, my Special Representative participated in the Paris round table for donors, at which he urged national and international partners to support the national development priorities, given the contribution of Chad to the stability of the subregion and the humanitarian crisis it faced. He stressed the need to pursue an inclusive and genuine political dialogue towards implementing political and institutional reforms.

54. From 25 October to 1 November, UNOCA co-led an inter-agency mission to Chad to assist the United Nations country team in developing a peacebuilding

strategy, following my designation of Chad as eligible for financing from the Peacebuilding Fund.

### **Gabon**

55. My Special Representative maintained regular contacts with political actors, with the aim of defusing tensions that have persisted since the 2016 presidential election. He emphasized the need for dialogue to address grievances and to refrain from acts of provocation. Following the national dialogue that ended on 27 May, he interacted frequently with Government officials and opposition leaders to encourage them to take the steps necessary to implement the recommendations resulting from the dialogue. He underlined the need to work collaboratively on the agreed reforms and on a comprehensive road map to ensure the peaceful holding of legislative elections.

56. My Special Representative welcomed the decision of the Government of Gabon to engage in an intensified political dialogue with the European Union, with a view to normalizing relations following the post-electoral crisis. UNOCA participated as an observer in the dialogue that was held in Libreville in September and October.

### **Congo**

57. In the run-up to the legislative and local elections, my Special Representative visited the Congo from 3 to 5 June to encourage inclusive participation and to promote a peaceful environment. He also stressed the importance of stabilizing the Pool region and called upon the Government to create conditions conducive to the holding of legislative elections in the eight constituencies of the region, where voting did not take place owing to security reasons. My Special Representative travelled to Brazzaville again on 13 October, where he met with the President of the Congo, Denis Sassou Nguesso, and the presidents of the two chambers of the parliament. He welcomed the initiatives of the Congolese authorities aimed at resolving the crisis in the Pool region through dialogue and encouraged the Government and the parliament to accelerate the operationalization of the platforms for political and social dialogue provided for under the Constitution of 2015. My Special Representative highlighted the need for a timely and fair trial and good detention conditions for the detained opposition leaders in accordance with international standards. He commended the authorities for the release of some detainees on humanitarian grounds.

58. UNOCA deployed a technical team to Brazzaville from 27 June to 2 July to highlight the importance of further addressing the root causes of the situation in the Pool region, including persisting impunity and human rights abuses, and the need for a disarmament programme. My Special Representative consistently urged the Government to allow humanitarian access to the region.

59. On 8 October, UNOCA deployed another working-level mission to the Congo to participate in a conflict analysis and scenario-planning exercise, jointly with the United Nations country team and UNDP.

### **Sao Tome and Principe**

60. From 6 to 10 August, my Special Representative undertook a visit to Sao Tome and Principe, where he met with the President, Evaristo Carvalho, the Prime Minister, Patrice Trovoada, and the Minister of the Presidency of the Council of Ministers and Parliamentary Affairs. He also held meetings with the National Electoral Commission and representatives of political parties. He was briefed on the preparations for local elections, including the updating of the voter list. He

encouraged the Government to take appropriate measures to address the concerns expressed by the opposition with regard to the accuracy of the updated voter list and the lack of universal fingerprint identification.

## **B. Support to United Nations, regional and subregional initiatives on peace and security**

### **United Nations Standing Advisory Committee on Security Questions in Central Africa**

61. In its capacity as the secretariat of the United Nations Standing Advisory Committee on Security Questions in Central Africa, UNOCA organized the forty-fourth meeting of the Committee, held in Yaoundé from 29 May to 2 June. The Committee reviewed the political and security situation in Central Africa and made specific recommendations on actions to address the prevailing challenges. It dedicated a session to the regional dimension of the situation in the Central African Republic and adopted a declaration on the issue. The Committee considered the findings of the evaluation that had been commissioned at its forty-third meeting and adopted a declaration endorsing some of the recommendations resulting from the evaluation, in particular those pertaining to its working methods and the need for greater collaboration and synergy with relevant ECCAS peace and security organs. Among other things, the Committee agreed to a more flexible agenda, a revised format for the ministerial meeting and the institutionalization of national focal points to improve the implementation of the Committee's recommendations by relevant national authorities. The forty-fifth meeting of the Committee is scheduled to be held in Kigali from 4 to 8 December.

62. UNOCA organized a visit by the Bureau of the Committee to Bangui on 30 and 31 October to assess recent developments in the Central African Republic. The findings of the mission will be presented at the forty-fifth ministerial meeting.

### **Collaboration with regional, subregional and intergovernmental organizations**

63. On 21 July and 12 October, my Special Representative and the Secretary-General of ECCAS convened their second and third working meetings, respectively, to strategically assess the situation in the region, identify key issues and priorities for joint action and examine progress in the cooperation between their respective institutions.

64. On 31 July and 1 August in Libreville, UNOCA and the ECCAS secretariat, in collaboration with the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS), the ECOWAS Commission and the West Africa Network for Peacebuilding, organized an interregional workshop at which participants exchanged good practices between civil society in West and Central Africa. Over 40 representatives of civil society organizations from the ECCAS region participated in the workshop, at which an action plan was adopted for developing a more coordinated partnership between ECCAS and civil society in early warning and conflict prevention in Central Africa.

65. Furthermore, from 2 to 4 August in Libreville, the four partners organized another workshop on mainstreaming gender in early warning and conflict prevention in Central Africa. The workshop, which was facilitated by the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women), was attended by around 22 participants from the ECCAS secretariat, the ECOWAS Commission and relevant ministries from five ECCAS member States.

66. On 30 August in Yaoundé, UNOCA, in collaboration with ECCAS, facilitated the creation of a regional network of women in the media for peace and security in Central Africa. The network will contribute to a greater mobilization of women across the region, promote enhanced advocacy for the effective implementation of Security Council resolution 1325 (2000), serve as a platform for collaboration with other entities and highlight issues with regard to women and peace and security in Central Africa.

67. In furtherance of the women and peace and security agenda, UNOCA, in collaboration with ECCAS, has recruited an international consultant to facilitate the development of a regional action plan for the implementation of Security Council resolution 1325 (2000). The consultant will seek political commitments from countries of the subregion to reduce gender inequalities and the underrepresentation of women in peace processes and governance. Additionally, UNOCA, in cooperation with ECCAS and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, developed a joint three-year regional programme on strengthening the capacity of youth in managing an early warning system to promote peace and security in Central Africa. A workshop to launch the subregion-wide, three-year project is planned to be held in Libreville from 30 November to 2 December.

### **Mediation**

68. From 11 to 13 September, UNOCA and UNOWAS organized a workshop for the ECCAS secretariat and the ECOWAS Commission in Abuja. The workshop benefited from the technical expertise of the Department of Political Affairs of the Secretariat, UNDP, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization and the West Africa Network for Peacebuilding. The subregional organizations exchanged lessons learned and good practices in early warning, mediation support, civil society engagement, electoral violence prevention, security cooperation, regional integration, institutional reforms and resource mobilization. Participants agreed to finalize a memorandum of understanding between the ECCAS secretariat and the ECOWAS Commission to formalize their cooperation and coordination in addressing transregional challenges and priorities.

### **Boko Haram**

69. In accordance with the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy, Security Council resolution 2349 (2017) and the United Nations system-wide strategy on the Lake Chad Basin crisis, UNOCA is developing an integrated plan to tackle the root causes of the crisis. The plan will be focused on non-military solutions to support Multinational Joint Task Force operations and actions to help to remedy the effects of the violence committed by Boko Haram and the consequences suffered by local populations. A joint monitoring system will be initiated with UNOWAS to pool efforts and assist in creating coherence with regard to the interventions of the two regional offices.

### **Regional integration**

70. Despite constraints, some progress was made by ECCAS in the implementation of its sector programmes designed to facilitate trade and the free movement of people, notably in the areas of policy advocacy and institutional capacity-building. My Special Representative reinforced the work of the ECCAS secretariat by advocating to Heads of State and Government for the need to overcome barriers to regional integration in Central Africa, including by accelerating institutional reforms to the ECCAS secretariat, and by advocating to Heads of State and Government for the rationalization of ECCAS and CEMAC.

71. As part of a broader strategy to strengthen the institutional capacity of the ECCAS secretariat, participants in the ECCAS-ECOWAS workshop mentioned in paragraph 68 above discussed lessons learned and strategies in accelerating regional integration, fostering intraregional security coordination and cooperation in support of regional integration, and undertaking institutional reforms and transformation.

#### **Maritime security in the Gulf of Guinea**

72. On 4 and 5 October, UNOCA participated in a meeting of Navy Chiefs of Staff and other maritime actors of ECCAS member States in Libreville. The aim of the meeting was to, inter alia, further implement the Code of Conduct Concerning the Repression of Piracy, Armed Robbery Against Ships and Illicit Maritime Activity in West and Central Africa, propose judicial reforms concerning maritime affairs and further clarify and implement the legal, operational and financial measures provided for in the regional maritime security strategy.

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

73. Following extensive consultations between member States of the United Nations Standing Advisory Committee on Security Questions in Central Africa, the Committee reiterated, at its forty-fourth meeting, that the coordination of and follow-up to the implementation of the regional strategy would be placed under the responsibility of the ECCAS secretariat. The Committee also called upon the ECCAS peace and security organs, notably the Council for Peace and Security in Central Africa, to officially endorse the strategy, and urged ECCAS member States to take ownership of the strategy.

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

##### *Operationalization of the African Union Regional Cooperation Initiative for the Elimination of the Lord's Resistance Army*

74. From 23 to 30 July, UNOCA and the African Union conducted a joint mission to assess the prevailing situation in Obo, Central African Republic, following the withdrawal of the Ugandan troops from the African Union Regional Task Force and the end of the mandate of the special forces of the United States of America. Information gathered during the mission indicated the threat of increased violence in Obo, along with concerns about social cohesion and food security in the area. The mission recommended a strengthened security presence in Obo with an intensive awareness campaign on the importance of social cohesion and the rehabilitation of the Obo-Bambouti road, which would enable the flow of goods and ease food security concerns.

75. In cooperation with the African Union, UNOCA organized a workshop on 19 and 20 October in Entebbe, Uganda, for the benefit of sector commanders of the African Union Regional Task Force and with the overall aim of establishing an information-sharing forum between the Regional Task Force and United Nations missions in areas affected by LRA.

76. On 30 November and 1 December, UNOCA, in cooperation with the African Union, organized the tenth meeting of LRA focal points to review the regional strategy.

*Protection of civilians and humanitarian assistance*

77. Also under the regional strategy, MINUSCA advocated for reinforcement of the Central African Armed Forces in Obo and reinforced its own contingent there as part of the current arrangement with the national armed forces for improved coordination on the ground.

*Disarmament, demobilization, repatriation, resettlement and reintegration*

78. The United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo continued to encourage LRA elements to surrender, including through broadcasting campaigns. Ten individuals surrendered during the reporting period.

*Long-term development and peacebuilding support*

79. Stabilization and recovery efforts in areas affected by LRA remain seriously underfunded and mostly unaddressed. State authorities and humanitarian and development actors, including United Nations entities, are largely absent.

### **C. Enhancing United Nations coherence and coordination in the subregion**

80. Enhanced cooperation between my Special Representative and United Nations resident coordinators and country teams in the subregion has further improved the ability of the United Nations to engage with national authorities and other relevant actors with a view to defusing political tensions, facilitating confidence-building measures and ensuring inclusive dialogue. It has also been essential for highlighting links between existing national and subregional priorities for conflict prevention and peacebuilding and for strengthening United Nations system-wide cooperation and support for the subregion.

81. Ahead of the legislative elections in the Congo, UNOCA, in cooperation with UNDP and UN-Women, supported the holding of a capacity-building workshop for 300 female candidates in Brazzaville from 19 to 24 June. The elections resulted in an increase in the number of women representatives in the National Assembly from 12 to 17 and in the local councils from 135 to 246.

82. On 6 October, UNOCA and UNOWAS convened a joint meeting in Dakar to strengthen their partnership in support of ECCAS and ECOWAS. The two regional offices agreed to institutionalize their cooperation in the areas of maritime security, the prevention of and the combat against violent extremism and terrorism, transhumance and the provision of institutional capacity-building support to the subregional organizations.

## **IV. Observations and recommendations**

83. I remain concerned by the continuing political tensions in parts of the subregion linked to contested electoral processes and exacerbated by social and economic difficulties. These tensions have the potential to spiral into widespread violence. I call upon all stakeholders to resolve their differences in a peaceful manner and in conformity with existing legal frameworks. I also call upon the Governments of concerned States to ensure that internal security measures and operations are conducted in conformity with international law. I welcome and

encourage the efforts that have been undertaken to calm tensions, including through inclusive dialogue.

84. I call upon the Government of Cameroon and all Cameroonians to take immediate steps to prevent any further outbursts of violence and to work together, including through a process of open and inclusive dialogue, to devise long-term solutions to address grievances. I welcome the launch of the judicial investigations into alleged human rights violations and abuses committed against demonstrators by security forces in the North-West and South-West regions on 1 October. I condemn the use of any form of violence and reiterate the need to exercise restraint. I urge the Cameroonian authorities to ensure that security forces exercise restraint and take measures to prevent the use of force when policing demonstrations.

85. I call upon the Government of the Congo to put in place the Commission nationale du dialogue. I call upon the Government of Gabon to ensure the full implementation of the recommendations from the recently held national dialogue. I encourage the Government of Chad and Chadian actors to further open the space for political dialogue and to work together towards common solutions for the challenges faced. My Special Representative will continue to carry out his good offices role and engage in preventive diplomacy across the subregion, in cooperation with regional organizations.

86. I am encouraged by the efforts undertaken to strengthen the capacities and role of ECCAS and by the outcome of the evaluation of the United Nations Standing Advisory Committee on Security Questions in Central Africa, and I call for further work and progress to harmonize regional efforts to address common security threats and strengthen capacities. I welcome the efforts by Governments of the subregion to accelerate and deepen the process of regional integration. UNOCA will work with the member States of ECCAS in this regard.

87. I am equally encouraged by the successes in the fight against Boko Haram and by the regional and international cooperation that made those successes possible. This has resulted in commitments to address the root causes of the crisis beyond the military dimension. However, the terrorist group continues to pose a serious threat to regional peace and security and remains capable of carrying out asymmetric attacks that result in devastating consequences for the affected areas.

88. I urge all stakeholders to redouble their efforts to address the Boko Haram crisis, in full conformity with international humanitarian, human rights and refugee law. I call upon the Governments concerned to address the immediate manifestations of Boko Haram violence and accelerate the development of a regional strategy to address the root causes of the crisis, as well as to deal with the cases of former Boko Haram members who surrender in addition to those already in custody. I urge the international community to increase its political, humanitarian, early recovery, logistical and financial assistance to the affected countries, the Multinational Joint Task Force and the Lake Chad Basin Commission. Additionally, I encourage ECCAS and ECOWAS to continue to deepen cooperation and coordination on this issue. UNOCA and UNOWAS stand ready to support the two organizations in this regard.

89. The upcoming international conference on security and development in the Sahel, to be held in Brussels on 14 December, provides another opportunity to mobilize resources for the Joint Force of the Group of Five for the Sahel and raise awareness of the development needs of the region. I urge the international community to contribute generously to ensure that the Force is fully equipped to deliver on its mandate. However, the international community should not lose sight of the broader objectives of promoting peace, good governance and development in the Sahel region.



90. I reiterate my call upon Member States of the region and international partners to provide the resources needed to fully operationalize the Interregional Coordination Centre for Maritime Safety and Security in the Gulf of Guinea and for the full implementation of the maritime security strategy. I also call upon ECCAS, ECOWAS and the Gulf of Guinea Commission to deepen their cooperation and coordination to fully realize the gains and advantages of the strategy. UNOCA and UNOWAS will continue to provide assistance and mobilize support for combating maritime insecurity.

91. Poaching and illicit wildlife trafficking continue to threaten endangered animals and have a negative impact on the overall environmental, governance and security situation in the subregion, including through the continuing links between the illicit wildlife trade and armed groups. I urge Governments in the subregion to focus efforts on eradicating poaching and on operationalizing the decisions contained in General Assembly resolutions 69/314 and 70/301 and the African Strategy on Combating Illegal Exploitation and Illegal Trade in Wild Fauna and Flora in Africa. In collaboration with the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, UNOCA will continue to support subregional efforts to identify collaborative approaches to address the issue.

92. I am extremely concerned by the deterioration of security in certain parts of the Central African Republic, as well as the overall, pervasive instability and continued human rights violations in the country. I urge the African Union, ECCAS and Governments of the subregion to quickly operationalize the African Initiative for Peace and Reconciliation and to remain actively engaged in stabilization efforts. My Special Representative for the Central African Republic and my Special Representative for Central Africa will continue to work closely with neighbouring States and regional and subregional organizations in support of national efforts towards finding a peaceful solution to the crisis. They will also work to mobilize financial support for the humanitarian response programmes for the affected population.

93. I remain concerned that LRA continues to demonstrate its ability and willingness to target civilians in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Central African Republic and negatively affect the security situation in both countries. I call upon the African Union and troop-contributing countries to quickly agree on the necessary reconfiguration of the African Union Regional Task Force and increase their support for the training of the Central African Armed Forces. I reiterate my conviction that a steady commitment on the part of affected States and regional and international partners to address the immediate manifestations of LRA violence, as well as to finance broader protection, humanitarian and development programmes, is crucial to finally ending the threat posed by LRA.

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

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