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Technical assistance and capacity-building

Human rights situation in the Central African Republic

Report of the Independent Expert on the situation of human rights in the Central African Republic, Yao Agbetse*

* The present report was submitted after the deadline in order to reflect the most recent developments.



I. Introduction

1. The present report is submitted pursuant to Human Rights Council resolution 45/35 of 7 October 2020 renewing the mandate of the Independent Expert and requesting him to submit a written report at its forty-eighth session.
2. The present report covers the period from July 2020 to June 2021, during which the Independent Expert was unable to visit the Central African Republic because of the health restrictions imposed in connection with the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic. His last visit took place from 3 to 13 February 2020.
3. Nevertheless, the Independent Expert held regular online meetings with a number of actors on the ground, including representatives of State authorities, justice institutions, United Nations agencies and bodies, the diplomatic corps, Central African and international civil society organizations, media and humanitarian workers, African human rights monitoring mechanisms, other United Nations mandate holders and other individuals and experts who were able to provide information on the human rights situation in the Central African Republic.
4. At the forty-sixth session of the Human Rights Council, the Independent Expert took part in the high-level interactive dialogue on the Central African Republic and highlighted the challenges related to the evolving human rights situation on the ground, placing special emphasis on the status of the fight against impunity, including in the electoral context. Other bodies that participated in the dialogue included the Government of the Central African Republic, the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA), the African Union, and the Network of Non-Governmental Organizations for the Promotion and Defence of Human Rights in the Central African Republic.
5. The Independent Expert also issued press releases,¹ in which he called for an urgent ceasefire and an inclusive dialogue for peaceful, inclusive, credible and transparent elections and condemned the obstruction of humanitarian operations and violations of human rights and international humanitarian law committed during the electoral period. The Independent Expert also issued a joint press release with the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights,² calling on the Central African authorities to prohibit hate speech and ensure respect for fundamental rights in the lead-up to the presidential and legislative elections of 27 December 2020.

II. General situation

A. Ongoing political and military crisis and its impact on human rights and international humanitarian law

1. Organization of the presidential and legislative elections

6. The international community mobilized the resources necessary for the organization of the presidential and legislative elections of 27 December 2020 and the partial and residual legislative elections of 14 March, 23 May and 25 July 2021. Support in various forms was provided to the National Electoral Authority, taking into account the additional needs related to the COVID-19 pandemic. Although there have been political disagreements over the

¹ Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, "Lasting peace in Central African Republic requires commitment of all sides to free elections, says UN human rights expert", press release, 27 August 2020; "CAR: Violations of human rights and international humanitarian law must be punished to prevent ongoing violence and conflict", press release, 15 January 2021; and "CAR elections: Rights and safety of voters and candidates must be protected, says UN expert", press release, 12 March 2021.

² Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights, "UN and African experts call on Central African Republic and armed groups to ensure basic rights during elections", press release, 16 December 2020.

holding of these elections within the constitutionally established time frame, the National Electoral Authority, with the support of the Central African authorities and MINUSCA, have implemented an integrated electoral security plan that covers, inter alia, the delivery of electoral materials, crowd management, the protection of polling stations, and capacity-building in connection with electoral offences. The Constitutional Court has validated the presidential election, the first round of which was won by the incumbent President Faustin-Archange Touadéra with 53.92 per cent of the vote.

7. On 16 December 2020, in view of the tensions prevailing in the country prior to the elections, the Independent Expert, together with the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights, issued a press release calling for a peaceful election, appealing to all actors to avoid engaging in hate speech or incitement to violence and requesting armed groups not to obstruct the electoral process or the free movement of candidates, voters, activists, journalists, electoral materials or polling station staff. On 19 December, however, a number of armed groups³ formed the Coalition des patriotes pour le changement and launched military offensives in several places.

8. The Human Rights Division of MINUSCA has conducted extensive investigations into the deaths of 144 civilians or non-combatants (116 men, 1 boy, 16 women, and 11 victims whose gender and/or age could not be determined, between December 2020 and June 2021). It attributed 72 of these deaths to the Central African armed forces and other security personnel and 61 to armed groups affiliated with the Coalition des patriotes pour le changement. A total of 11 persons died from injuries caused by stray bullets.

9. Since the high-level discussion on the fight against impunity, including in the electoral context, was held in March 2021, the Coalition des patriotes pour le changement, led by former President François Bozizé, has continued to threaten and attack civilians, recruit children into its ranks, commit acts of sexual violence, obstruct humanitarian operations, commit murder, arbitrarily deprive persons of their liberty, impose illegal taxes, engage in cruel and inhumane treatment, commit acts of physical violence, destroy and loot property and occupy schools. Armed members of the Coalition, and other armed groups that are signatories to the Political Agreement for Peace and Reconciliation in the Central African Republic, are alleged to have committed at least 449 human rights violations and abuses, involving at least 770 victims, between December 2020 and 30 June 2021, amounting to 62.97 per cent of the total number of incidents and 59.13 per cent of the total number of victims. The Coalition, which was formed on the eve of the elections of 27 December 2020, disrupted the organization of the presidential and legislative elections and forced the authorities to organize partial legislative elections on 23 May 2021 in the constituencies that had been prevented from voting on account of the Coalition's violent actions. The Independent Expert remains highly concerned about the fate of the victims and recalls once again that most of the Coalition's leaders are on the sanctions list of the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 2127 (2013) concerning the Central African Republic.

10. In order to ensure national reconciliation and the extension of State authority throughout the country, it is necessary for armed groups to cease operating, within the framework of concerted action by the international community.

11. Following the recognition of President Touadéra's re-election, a number of prefectures have seen an upsurge in attacks by the Coalition des patriotes pour le changement against local authorities, officials of the sub-prefectural election authority and the general public in retaliation for their participation in the elections of 27 December 2020. In January, the Coalition carried out two attacks on Bangui but was pushed back by the combined efforts

³ The Coalition des patriotes pour le changement is made up of the Mouvement patriotique pour la Centrafrique, led by Mahamat al-Khatim; Retour, réclamation et réhabilitation (3 R), led by "General Sidiki" and, after his death, "General Bobo"; the Union pour la paix en Centrafrique, led by Ali Darassa; a groupuscule of the Front populaire pour la renaissance de la Centrafrique, led by Nourredine Adam; and the Mokom and Ngaïssona wings of the anti-balaka, led respectively by Maxime Mokom and Dieudonné Ndomaté. This coalition is coordinated by former President François Bozizé, whose presidential election bid was invalidated on 3 December 2020 by the Constitutional Court.

of peacekeepers and the Government's Russian and Rwandan allies. The Coalition has targeted civilian, humanitarian and commercial convoys from Cameroon, disrupting the economic activities of the Central African Republic. The Independent Expert pays tribute to the peacekeepers who lost their lives and highlights the key role played by MINUSCA in the Central African Republic.

12. The towns of Bouar and Bangassou were the scene of clashes in which offensives by armed groups were pushed back by MINUSCA peacekeepers and the Central African armed forces, supported by other security officers. During the clashes, abuses and violations of international humanitarian and human rights law were committed by armed elements affiliated with the Coalition des patriotes pour le changement, State officials and other security personnel. Many schools were looted and ransacked, which seriously disrupted the resumption of schooling at the start of 2021 and constituted a serious violation of children's rights. Roads leading to Bangui have been attacked with a view to isolating the capital, seriously hindering access to essential goods and causing shortages of certain medicines and hospital equipment in hospitals and pharmacies in Bangui and the outlying provinces.

2. Recapturing occupied territories

13. Thanks to the combined efforts of the Central African armed forces, MINUSCA peacekeepers and the allied forces of the Central African Republic, the armed groups were driven out of the towns of Bouar, Kaga-Bandoro, Bambari, Bangassou, Nzako, Bakouma, Grimari, Kouï, Bocaranga, Yaloké, Bossemptélé, Boda, Bossembélé and Ndélé. Actors on the ground have informed the Independent Expert that, in the course of operations to liberate places held by armed groups, numerous human rights violations were allegedly perpetrated, including by Russian instructors allied with the Central African Government. On 31 March 2021, the Working Group on the use of mercenaries as a means of violating human rights and impeding the exercise of the right of peoples to self-determination issued a press release on abuses, attacks on civilians and human rights violations committed by Russian instructors. Following this press release, the Independent Expert wrote to the Central African authorities to ask what they knew about the allegations and to express his willingness to provide any technical assistance required.

14. The Government of the Central African Republic has issued an order⁴ establishing a commission of inquiry to investigate allegations of abuses and violations committed by the Central African armed forces, the Central African defence and security forces, and the internal security forces and their allies. The mandate of this commission should be extended to include the killing of 13 victims near Bossangoa on 21 July 2021.

15. The Human Rights Division of MINUSCA documented human rights violations committed by members of the Central African armed forces, the Central African defence and security forces, the internal security forces, and other security personnel (Russian bilateral forces) during the course of operations to liberate areas occupied by armed groups. Between December 2020 and 30 June 2021, members of these groups perpetrated at least 245 human rights violations and abuses involving 470 victims, including extrajudicial killings and executions, death threats, rapes, acts of torture, cruel and inhuman treatment, acts of physical violence, occupation of schools, looting, confiscation, and arbitrary arrest and detention, equating to 34.36 per cent of the total number of incidents and 36.02 per cent of the total number of victims. As a matter of urgency, the Central African authorities must promptly conduct independent, impartial investigations to identify the soldiers responsible for committing or instigating these acts, irrespective of their rank or status. The authorities must also devote special attention to the victims of the violations. The military courts should be mobilized to this end in accordance with the Code of Military Justice (Act No. 17.012 of 24 March 2017).

⁴ Central African Republic, order establishing the special commission of inquiry, 013/21/MJDHGS/DIRCAB/PGCA.BGUI, 4 May 2021.

B. Human rights and international humanitarian law

1. Patterns of violations of human rights and international humanitarian law

16. The Independent Expert has been informed of various episodes of violence involving abuses and violations of human rights and international humanitarian law, including cases of conflict-related sexual violence and grave violations of children's rights committed throughout the electoral process by armed groups, including those affiliated with the Coalition des patriotes pour le changement; by national law enforcement agencies, including the Central African armed forces and the internal security forces; and by other security personnel, including Russian instructors and employees of private security companies operating in the country, either independently or in conjunction with other State actors. Between July 2020 and June 2021, the Human Rights Division of MINUSCA documented 986 incidents of human rights abuses and violations across the country, involving 1,773 victims (937 men, 207 women, 98 girls, 47 boys, 267 unidentified victims and 217 groups of collective victims). The investigations conducted by the Division established that armed groups were responsible for 710 of these incidents (72 per cent), involving 1,241 victims (70 per cent). Armed groups that are signatories to the Peace Agreement were responsible for 685 incidents (69 per cent), involving 1,144 victims (65 per cent). The Central African armed forces, the internal security forces and other security personnel were responsible for 276 incidents (28 per cent), involving 532 victims (30 per cent).

17. In investigations conducted in Bangui and in the country's interior, the Human Rights Division of MINUSCA has not documented any violations of human rights or international humanitarian law by members of the Rwandan bilateral force during their operations.

18. A marked increase in the number of human rights violations may be observed if the data held by the Human Rights Division of MINUSCA for January to June 2021 is compared with the data for July to December 2020. Between January and June 2021, following the deterioration of the security and human rights situation triggered by the elections in December 2020, 609 incidents of human rights violations and abuses involving 1,106 victims were documented, resulting in 168 conflict-related civilian deaths. Armed groups were responsible for 371 incidents involving 663 victims. A total of 355 of these incidents, involving 622 victims, were committed by armed groups that are signatories to the Peace Agreement. State officials were responsible for 238 incidents involving 443 victims. By contrast, 379 human rights violations and abuses, involving 646 victims, including 66 conflict-related civilian deaths, were documented between July and December 2020. Armed groups were responsible for 340 incidents involving 580 victims. A total of 335 of these incidents, involving 556 victims, were committed by armed groups that are signatories to the Peace Agreement. State officials were responsible for 39 incidents involving 66 victims.

19. The rise in the number of cases and incidents of human rights violations between January and June 2021 is linked to the electoral crisis and the military offensive launched by the Central African defence and security forces, in collaboration with other security forces, with a view to recapturing territories previously controlled by armed groups. Investigations conducted by the Human Rights Division of MINUSCA show that the Central African armed forces, the Central African defence and security forces, and other security personnel were involved in serious violations of human rights and international humanitarian law and that the numbers of incidents and casualties attributed to them were 510 per cent and 571 per cent higher, respectively, than for the period between July and December 2020. The monitoring exercise conducted by the Division shows that, in the last quarter of 2020, 24 incidents of human rights violations, involving 47 victims, were attributed to State officials while, in the first quarter of 2021, 66 incidents, involving 97 victims, were attributed to them.

20. During the reporting period, attacks, reprisals, threats and rumours of attacks by the Coalition des patriotes pour le changement caused thousands of civilians to flee their homes and seek refuge around MINUSCA bases, in the bush, in other parts of the country or in neighbouring countries. As at 31 March 2021, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs and the Commission on Population Movement put the number of internally displaced persons at 738,000, which, in net terms, was 115,000 more than the 623,000 identified as at 31 October 2020. As at 16 April 2021, the Office of the United

Nations High Commissioner for Refugees reported that 117,209 refugees had crossed the borders into Chad, Cameroon, the Congo and the Democratic Republic of the Congo since the start of the electoral crisis.

2. Rights of children

(a) Food insecurity

21. According to data from the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, around 2.3 million people were affected by food insecurity as of April 2021. Of these, more than 632,000 were in an emergency situation (phase 4), representing 13 per cent of the country's population. As of July 2021, monitoring data indicated that 2.6 million people, or 57 per cent of the population, were food insecure – up 13 per cent from April 2021. One million of these people are classified as being in an emergency situation, and more than 250,000 face a high risk of finding themselves in a catastrophic situation and are largely unreachable. In addition, the number of children (80,000) under 5 years of age who are at risk of severe acute malnutrition has reportedly risen by 29 per cent since the end of 2020. The situation is particularly serious for internally displaced persons and those living in conflict-affected areas, where access to food, essential health care, water, sanitation, and nutrition services has been severely restricted and food prices have soared.

22. In the country as a whole, 40 per cent of children under 5 years of age (more than 395,000) are suffering from chronic malnutrition, which is higher than the critical threshold of 30 per cent. In 27 localities in 14 health districts across the country, levels of global acute malnutrition among children under 5 years of age are currently alarmingly high. The most recent humanitarian data show that, on average, more than 2 per cent of children in these areas suffer from severe acute malnutrition.

(b) Recruitment and use of child soldiers in conflict

23. Some candidates have used children as dancers and placard holders during election campaigns, albeit to a lesser extent. The Coalition des patriotes pour le changement and other security officers have more often recruited children in armed clashes to serve as combatants, cooks, messengers, “wives”, porters, guards or to carry out other everyday tasks within their ranks.

24. In the course of conducting checks to determine whether children have been removed from armed groups, the Child Protection Section of the Human Rights Division of MINUSCA found that a total of 65 children (51 boys and 14 girls), aged from 7 to 17 years, had been recruited or used by the Central African armed forces, the Central African defence and security forces, and other security personnel and armed groups involved in the conflict during the reporting period.

25. Other security personnel have mainly used children for everyday chores. On 15 March 2021, in the Ouham-Pendé prefecture, the Human Rights Division of MINUSCA found that seven boys aged from 7 to 12 years had been used to collect firewood and water in exchange for biscuits.

26. In February 2021, in the prefecture of Nana-Mambéré, the Retour, réclamation et réhabilitation/anti-balaka coalition recruited some 30 Fulani boys aged from 14 to 16 years. They were trained to handle weapons at a Retour, réclamation et réhabilitation training base and were seen at bases in Bouar. Children used as combatants were regularly spotted throughout the city in possession of firearms.

27. The Independent Expert finds it regrettable that some armed groups have failed to comply with the agreements entered into with the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, including the Mouvement patriotique pour la Centrafrique (which signed the agreements in 2018), the Front populaire pour la renaissance de la Centrafrique (which signed them in 2019) and the Union pour la paix en Centrafrique (which also signed them in 2019). The Coalition des patriotes pour le changement and other armed groups are continuing to recruit children into their ranks.

3. Conflict-related sexual and gender-based violence, including that committed by United Nations staff

28. During the reporting period, MINUSCA recorded 311 incidents of conflict-related sexual violence, involving at least 228 adult victims and 180 child victims. A total of 254 (81.7 per cent) of these incidents took place between December 2020 and June 2021, when the Coalition des patriotes pour le changement began its offensive, in the prefectures of Nana-Grébizi, Ouham-Pendé, Ouham, Nana-Mambéré, Kémo, Ouaka and Ombella-Mpoko.

29. The cases involving the rape of three girls by other security personnel were addressed by a non-governmental organization in Bangui and then reported to the joint rapid response unit to prevent sexual violence against women and children. In the meantime, an investigation has been opened on the instructions of the State prosecutor.

30. The Independent Expert is also concerned about allegations of sexual violence perpetrated by MINUSCA peacekeepers. Since the beginning of 2021, MINUSCA has received reports of 12 cases of sexual exploitation and abuse involving uniformed personnel from different countries, 8 involving military personnel and 4 involving police personnel. In the view of the Independent Expert, the States of origin of the peacekeepers and the persons involved must cooperate with MINUSCA and the justice system in order to shed light on these acts and ensure that the perpetrators receive the appropriate penalties.

31. The Independent Expert has noted that the commitments to combat conflict-related sexual violence made by the signatories of the 2019 Peace Agreement, and the 2019 joint communiqué signed by the representative of the Government of the Central African Republic and the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict, have not been fully honoured. Nor have the recommendations issued by the Human Rights Committee in 2020⁵ or, most importantly, the Child Protection Code adopted in 2020 to prohibit and punish conflict-related violence. In order to ensure access to justice for victims, a comprehensive response must be provided, involving both monitoring operations by the joint rapid response unit to prevent sexual violence against women and children and programmes providing psychological, therapeutic, medical, economic, legal and judicial support. In addition to the measures taken by the Special Criminal Court, judges and prosecutors of the national courts and police forces must be properly trained and deployed to deal with sexual violence from a gender perspective.

C. Efforts to combat impunity

32. The high-level dialogue held during the forty-sixth session of the Human Rights Council was attended by representatives of the Government of the Central African Republic, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, MINUSCA, the African Union and civil society.

33. In preparation for the presidential and legislative elections of 27 December 2020, Constitutional Court decision No. 026/CC/20 of 3 December 2020 on the validity of candidacies struck down a number of candidacies, including that of the leader of an armed group and that of former President François Bozizé, who is the subject of an international arrest warrant issued by the Bangui Tribunal de Grande Instance (court of major jurisdiction) and is also on the sanctions list drawn up by the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 2127 (2013) concerning the Central African Republic. For the general public, the striking down of these candidacies represents a victory against impunity.

34. Following the establishment of the Coalition des patriotes pour le changement and its repeated violent attempts to disrupt the elections, the Central African authorities issued decrees in December 2020 and February 2021 to dismiss from State institutions ministers and advisers belonging to the following armed groups: the Front populaire pour la renaissance de la Centrafrique, led by Nourredine Adam; the Union pour la paix en Centrafrique, led by Ali Darassa; Retour, réclamation et réhabilitation, led by Sidiki Abbas; the Mouvement patriotique pour la Centrafrique, led by Mahamat al-Khatim; Révolution et

⁵ CCPR/C/CAF/CO/3, paras. 13–14.

justice, led by Armel Sayo Ningatoloum; and the Ngaïssona and Mokom wings of the anti-balaka. These decisions are in line with efforts to combat impunity. Although, during the reporting period, the armed groups repeatedly violated the Peace Agreement that they had signed, article 35 of the agreement, on sanctions for violations, has never been implemented.

35. On 24 January 2021, the Central African authorities decided to transfer Mahamat Said Abdel Kani to the International Criminal Court. Abdel Kani is a former Séléka commander who is suspected of having committed offences such as torture, persecution and enforced disappearance in Bangui in 2013. On 27 January 2021, the Independent Expert issued a press release stating that this action sent a strong message in the fight against impunity that justice was an essential pillar of the ongoing peace and reconciliation process and the construction of the rule of law. It is essential that the Central African authorities and those of neighbouring States continue to cooperate with the Court, including in relation to the execution of arrest warrants issued against persons alleged to have violated human rights and international humanitarian law.

36. The trial of Alfred Yekatom and Patrice-Edouard Ngaïssona began on 16 February 2021 at the International Criminal Court. The two anti-balaka leaders are accused of war crimes and crimes against humanity. The efforts made by the public to follow the trial online from Bangui is a sign of the Central African people's thirst for justice.

37. The Independent Expert welcomes the information on the fight against impunity contained in the Secretary-General's report on the Central African Republic, which was submitted to the Security Council in February 2021.⁶ The sanctions list of the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 2127 (2013) concerning the Central African Republic contains the names of the leaders of the Coalition des patriotes pour le changement and its supporters, including former President François Bozizé and Nourredine Adam, added in 2014; Abdoulaye Hissène, added in 2017; and Martin Koumtamadji (alias Abdoulaye Miskine) and Bi Sidi Souleman (alias Sidiki), added in 2020. In line with various Security Council resolutions, including resolution 2552 (2020), which stresses the urgent and imperative need to end impunity and bring perpetrators to justice, the Independent Expert calls on the international community to expedite the adoption of the measures needed to hold identified individuals and entities accountable for their actions.

38. As part of the universal periodic review, the Central African Republic stated that it was firmly committed to "a policy of zero tolerance for impunity"⁷ and it accepted several recommendations relating to the fight against impunity.⁸ In addition, recommendations made by the Human Rights Committee in March 2020 called on the Central African Republic to ensure that all victims have access to an effective remedy, including before the Special Criminal Court, appropriate compensation, restitution and rehabilitation measures, in accordance with international law, and an effective victim and witness protection scheme, following the example of the practices established by the International Criminal Court.⁹

39. Pursuant to an order issued on 4 May 2021,¹⁰ the Central African authorities established a commission of inquiry to investigate allegations of violations of human rights and international humanitarian law committed by the Central African armed forces, the Central African defence and security forces, the internal security forces and their allies during the operations to recapture the regions held by the Coalition des patriotes pour le changement. The Commission was given three months to conduct its investigations and was required to submit its report to the Minister of Justice, Human Rights, Good Governance and Keeper of the Seals in August 2021. The Independent Expert calls on the authorities to guarantee the independence of the Commission, to provide it with the necessary means to conduct its work, to ensure that legal proceedings are duly initiated against the perpetrators, co-perpetrators, accomplices and commanders responsible for these violations and, where appropriate, to refer the matter to the Special Criminal Court when the documented facts fall within its jurisdiction. In addition, the Independent Expert believes that the military justice system, in

⁶ S/2021/146.

⁷ A/HRC/40/12, para. 73.

⁸ A/HRC/40/12/Add.1.

⁹ CCPR/C/CAF/CO/3, para. 10.

¹⁰ See footnote 4 above.

accordance with the Code of Military Justice and other relevant laws, should be used to prosecute military personnel and members of the defence and security forces who have committed acts punishable under the law.

40. The Special Criminal Court is proceeding with its work but the unsafe conditions in the field are hindering investigations there. The Court, which was established in 2015 and held its first session in 2018, has not yet held any hearings. The Independent Expert remains concerned about the possibility that, as time passes, the evidence gathered might disappear or become unusable or that it might no longer be possible to gather evidence and subsequently use it. The victims are haunted by fears that evidence will disappear or be unusable, or that the perpetrators will not be found, especially since the lack of security prevents investigations from being carried out in areas occupied by armed groups.

41. Several national institutions have a mandate to combat impunity, including the National Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms Commission, the High Authority for Good Governance, the High Council for Communication and the National Mediation Council. The Independent Expert has found that the public is largely unaware of these institutions and their powers, areas of competence and the procedures for submitting complaints to them. If these bodies effectively exercised their mandates, the State's efforts to protect human rights and to fight corruption and impunity might be strengthened. The Independent Expert has requested the authorities to identify what forms of technical assistance these institutions need.

III. Disarmament, demobilization, reintegration and repatriation process

42. Disarmament, demobilization, reintegration and repatriation operations are continuing in the north-east of the Central African Republic, where nearly 3,000 combatants have been disarmed and demobilized, bringing the total number of disarmed combatants to approximately 5,000 over the two stages of the operations.

43. In January 2021, 436 eligible ex-combatants (249 in Birao, 19 in Bria and 168 in Kaga Bando) from the Front populaire pour la renaissance de la Centrafrique, the Mouvement patriotique pour la Centrafrique, the Rassemblement patriotique pour le renouveau de la Centrafrique, the Mouvement des libérateurs centrafricains pour la justice and the Séléka rénovée pour la paix et la justice were selected to undergo socioeconomic reintegration. Background checks identified five ex-combatants who are reported to have committed human rights violations. It was recommended that further checks be conducted.

44. The attacks carried out by the Coalition des patriotes pour le changement since December 2020 have hampered the process, making the country less safe. The Coalition has engaged in acts of destabilization and destruction, causing loss of life and severe economic instability. Nevertheless, operations have continued in Bangui, where more than 200 members of the Séléka rénovée have disarmed, making it possible to liberate the camp belonging to the Regiment for the Operational Defence of the Territory in the PK 11 district, on the northern outskirts of the city. In Bimbo, on the southern outskirts, some 100 combatants belonging to the Union des forces républicaines fondamentales have been disarmed. In the hinterland, however, steps to disarm some armed groups, which had asked to be disarmed, have been suspended owing to ongoing military operations on the ground.

45. Following the disruption of the national disarmament, demobilization, reintegration and repatriation programme by the Coalition des patriotes pour le changement, which has renewed its hostilities and announced its withdrawal from the Peace Agreement, the Central African authorities have assessed the programme with a view to further adapting it. When the assessment is complete, the programme must be reviewed to ensure that it is fully implemented and that its objectives are achieved, including the reintegration of ex-combatants into the defence and security forces and socioeconomic programmes and their recruitment into the special joint security units.

46. In the view of the Independent Expert, the Central African authorities, with the support of the international community, must urgently undertake further disarmament,

demobilization, reintegration and repatriation operations since the success of these operations will largely determine the outcome of efforts to disband armed groups, bring about national reconciliation and restore peace.

IV. Commission on Truth, Justice, Reparation and Reconciliation

47. On 7 April 2020, Act No. 20.009 on the establishment, organization and operation of the Commission on Truth, Justice, Reparation and Reconciliation, provided for in the Peace Agreement, was promulgated. Subsequently, on 2 December 2020, in accordance with Presidential Decree No. 20.270 of 30 July 2020, the Commission's selection committee recommended and selected 11 candidates, including 5 women, to serve as commissioners on the Commission. On 30 December 2020, the President of the Central African Republic signed Decree No. 20.435 confirming the formal appointment of the 11 commissioners recommended by the selection committee to serve on the Commission, which has a four-year mandate that may be renewed for a period not exceeding 24 months. In accordance with the criteria set out in article 9 of Act No. 20.009, the 11 commissioners are drawn from a range of different organizations and sectors, including civil society organizations (one man, one woman), academia (one man), the legal sector (one woman), youth associations (one man), women's associations (two women), victims' associations (one man) and religious associations (two men and one woman). The 11 commissioners were sworn in before the Bangui Court of Appeal on 2 July 2021, marking the launch of this important transitional justice mechanism. The Bureau of the Commission, which has a woman Chair and two Vice-Chairs, was elected on 16 July 2021.

48. The Independent Expert calls on the authorities to guarantee in practice the independence of the Commission on Truth, Justice, Reparation and Reconciliation and to promptly allocate the resources that it needs to function effectively as a decentralized body. It is imperative that a mechanism for providing psychological support to victims be established within the Commission. No amnesty must be granted to perpetrators of serious violations of human rights or international humanitarian law. In 2020, the Human Rights Committee stressed that the establishment of the Commission did not obviate the need for criminal prosecution of the perpetrators of serious human rights violations.¹¹

49. The Commission on Truth, Justice, Reparation and Reconciliation should encourage the public to feel a sense of ownership of the Commission and should draw up rules of procedure and a budget, establish cooperation agreements with the Special Criminal Court and ordinary courts, provide training on human rights investigations to its staff, hold expert workshops to help civil society and victims' organizations to contribute to its work, and organize regional and national public events to raise awareness of that work.

50. The Independent Expert welcomes the fact that the Commission on Truth, Justice, Reparation and Reconciliation is supported by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, the United Nations Development Programme, MINUSCA and the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women) and calls on the international community to provide additional financial support so that the Commission can shed light on serious human rights violations, determine the nature, causes and extent of such violations and ensure non-judicial accountability for acts committed between 1959 and 2019.

V. Special Criminal Court

51. In November 2020, the Central African authorities opened the new buildings that house the Special Criminal Court and appointed all the Central African judges who will be serving at the Court. The Independent Expert commends the efforts made by the special prosecutor's office and the investigating judges to carry out the necessary investigations and inquiries. However, there are signs that the public is becoming impatient. The Court was

¹¹ CCPR/C/CAF/CO/3, para. 10.

established in 2015 and held its first session in 2018. There is an urgent need to learn from the workings of other international courts because, more than five years after the Court was established, no hearings have taken place and victims are haunted by the fear that evidence will disappear or no longer be usable or that the perpetrators will not be found, especially since the lack of security in the areas occupied by armed groups is preventing investigations from being carried out. Furthermore, a mechanism for protecting victims and witnesses and a victim compensation scheme must be put in place. The success of the Court depends on the establishment of a victim and witness protection mechanism, a legal aid system and an assistance and reparation fund for victims. The Independent Expert welcomes the fact that the Court is supported by the European Union, the United Nations Development Programme and the United States of America and encourages the international community to strengthen its support for it.

52. Between 22 October 2018, the date of the inaugural session at which the special prosecutor's office was established, and June 2021:

- (a) Victims filed a total of 122 complaints, some of which could be joined to proceedings that had already been initiated;
- (b) One case was opened in order to initiate a preliminary investigation;
- (c) A total of seven cases were being examined, of which three were at the stage where a preliminary investigation could begin as soon as the health situation related to the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic improved;
- (d) A total of 10 cases were referred to the investigations division;
- (e) A total of seven cases were referred to the ordinary courts.

53. The special prosecutor's office faces a number of challenges, including a lack of logistical resources, the state of insecurity that hinders investigations in places where conflict is still taking place, difficulties in locating witnesses several years after the events, the absence or deterioration of some physical evidence, and the difficulties of receiving complaints in the provinces. The special prosecutor's office is currently implementing a strategy for receiving complaints in the provinces.

54. Since the establishment of the investigations division, the following progress and challenges have been noted:

- (a) A total of 10 cases are currently under judicial investigation, 4 of which have been removed from the Bangui Tribunal de Grande Instance (court of major jurisdiction) for lack of jurisdiction and 6 of which have been the subject of an application to open an investigation, submitted by the special prosecutor of the Special Criminal Court;
- (b) The international investigating judge left the country in 2019 and the number of examining judges is insufficient;
- (c) Five new international judges have been recruited (two from Switzerland, one from Belgium, one from Burkina Faso and one from Madagascar);
- (d) In August 2020, five national judges were sworn in;
- (e) Two international judges were sworn in on 25 March 2021 while a further three were sworn in on 8 June 2021.

55. The Special Criminal Court faces the following challenges in relation to the conduct of hearings:

- (a) The COVID-19 pandemic has delayed judicial activities;
- (b) The appointment of national judges of assize and appeals courts has been delayed (affecting recent appointments);
- (c) A courtroom is being built to enable witnesses to be heard via videoconference.

VI. Humanitarian situation

56. In April 2021, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees estimated that 164,381 additional persons have been internally displaced within the Central African Republic since the start of the election crisis in December 2020, bringing the total number to 738,279. As a result of the crisis, 117,209 refugees have fled the country to Cameroon, Chad, the Congo and the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

57. According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, the number of persons who have become refugees or been internally displaced as a direct result of the electoral crisis can be added to the 1.3 million Central Africans who were already in this situation, bringing the total number of internally displaced persons and refugees to more than 1.5 million, or around a third of the country's population.

58. The Central African Republic remains one of the most dangerous places in the world for humanitarian workers to operate. Between January and June 2021, 267 incidents were recorded, compared to 192 during the same period in 2020. One humanitarian worker lost his life and 13 others were injured. The Independent Expert strongly condemns all attacks against humanitarian workers and their operations and calls on armed groups to refrain from obstructing humanitarian assistance.

VII. Young people, general education, technical and agricultural education, and vocational training

A. Young people severely affected by the conflict situation

59. In 2021, 1.7 million of the 5.6 million inhabitants of the Central African Republic, or 31 per cent of the population, are between the ages of 10 and 24 years. Young people under the age of 18 make up half the population. A total number of 1,168,377 young people are enrolled in primary school (6 to 11 years of age) while 165,288 are enrolled in middle school or secondary school (12 to 18 years of age).¹² The proportion of children completing middle school and technical and vocational education was 14 per cent in 2018 and 12 per cent in 2019, according to data from the statistical yearbook of the Ministry of Education.

60. Many children and young people have been enlisted and used in hostilities and many others have been left without family or support. Some have become the heads of their households overnight while still others have been forced to move to camps or have become refugees.

61. Along with certain other social sectors, education has been severely affected by the crisis for a number of years. The abuses carried out by armed groups have spared neither children nor young people and have adversely affected their physical integrity and freedom of movement in conflict zones. Children's schooling has been disrupted repeatedly in these areas as a result of direct attacks on civilians, acts of violence, the looting of homes, the occupation of schools for use as bases by combatants, the destruction of schools and school equipment (including textbooks, supplies, furniture, which is used as firewood, and classroom roofs), threats to teachers and attacks on humanitarian workers.

B. Occupation and attacking of schools

62. During the reporting period, the Central African armed forces, other security personnel, and armed groups were responsible for attacking or occupying 70 schools, of which 25 were looted. The prefectures of Mambéré-Kadéï, Ouaka, Ouham, Nana-Mambéré, Mbomou, Ouham-Pendé and Ombella-Mpoko were the main areas affected by these incidents. The Human Rights Division of MINUSCA found that, between December 2020 and April 2021, armed groups affiliated with the Coalition des patriotes pour le changement

¹² Central African Republic, *Annuaire statistique MEN 2018–2019*, p. 28, table 3.2.

were responsible for 38 incidents in which 34 schools were attacked or occupied (that is, half the total number of incidents), preventing access to education for thousands of children.

63. During the elections, members of the Coalition des patriotes pour le changement attacked 14 schools serving as polling stations or centres in several localities and destroyed their equipment and school supplies in order to prevent voting from taking place. On 27 December 2020, for instance, anti-balaka and members of Retour, réclamation et réhabilitation attacked a school used as a polling centre in the Mambéré-Kadéï prefecture, burning the ballot boxes and election materials in classrooms used as polling stations before breaking down the doors and ransacking six offices belonging to the heads of school groups.

C. Mapping of destroyed, damaged or occupied schools

64. According to information received by the Independent Expert in February 2021, the rise in the number of acts of abuse committed against civilians has resulted, inter alia, in the forced closure of some 302 schools, 31 of which have been occupied or attacked. These occupations are spread over 6 of the 16 prefectures, affecting two schools in Ouham-Pendé, three schools in Lobaye, three schools in Ouaka (two of which have been liberated), three schools in Ouham (all of which have been liberated), four schools in Nana-Mambéré and one school in Mambéré-Kadéï. These violations deprive Central African children of their basic rights, including the right to education, the right to study in a safe and secure learning environment, and the right to develop the skills they will need to build a better future for themselves and their communities.

65. Samboli School and Bafatoro School are occupied to this day by the Central African armed forces and their Russian allies. Despite the alert sent to the task force responsible for the monitoring and reporting mechanism, and the appeal made by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), these schools have still not been liberated. Currently, more than 1,695 students, including 521 girls, are being denied their right to education.

D. Challenges related to general education, technical and agricultural education, and vocational training

66. The considerable and varied challenges related to general education, technical and agricultural education, and vocational training include the volatile security situation in almost all regions of the country and the dilapidated state of some social and vocational training centres, classrooms and infrastructure in several regions. In addition to the severe lack of human resources in the fields of social and vocational training and education, credit and financing is impossible to obtain and political will is lacking. The construction of school infrastructure, including classrooms, and the provision of teaching and learning materials would make it possible to close the gender gap in schooling. The absence of short-term or medium-term national programmes in all fields of study is a hindrance, as is the lack of time to provide training in certain areas, the high cost of training caused by the prohibitive cost of training supplies and equipment, the limited range of fields of study, the shortage of openings for young people who have completed their technical and vocational training, and the low level of involvement of the State's technical services in the organization of technical and agricultural education, vocational training and, crucially, the provision of support.

67. The Government of the Central African Republic has developed the Education Sector Plan (2020–2029), which is accompanied by a three-year budgeted action plan, a results framework and a risk matrix. It has also developed the Strategic Plan of the Ministry of Higher Education (2018–2021) and the National Policy on Scientific Research and Technological Innovation (2020–2030). However, the resources for implementing them remain limited. Unless substantial contributions are made by technical and financial partners, the objectives will not be achieved.

68. An analysis of the contributions received following the Independent Expert's call for contributions in April 2021 shows that general education, technical and agricultural education, and vocational training must be made a national priority, as they provide a powerful lever for restoring the State's authority throughout the country and correcting

existing disparities. The provision of general education, technical and agricultural education, and training promotes the enrolment and retention of children in the school and vocational training systems, facilitates the socioeconomic reintegration of young people as a deterrent to their recruitment and use by armed groups, and enables them to develop as entrepreneurs.

VIII. Conclusions and recommendations

A. Conclusions

69. The solution to the conflict lies primarily in political and social dialogue. The emerging national republican dialogue is an essential lever for constructing the defences of peace and reconciliation. It is an important catalyst for the process of truth, justice, reconciliation and reparation and the establishment of guarantees of non-repetition. It must be genuine and inclusive in order to restore trust among Central Africans.

70. The fight against impunity remains a priority. It has been, and continues to be, a key objective and aspiration of the Central African population. Impunity is likely to encourage armed groups, particularly the Coalition des patriotes pour le changement, to sow the seeds of inter-ethnic conflict, disrupt the organization of the next local elections, obstruct the efforts of State officials and service providers to restore State authority and maintain a parallel economic system by erecting road barriers and collecting illegal taxes. There is reason to fear that, as armed groups lose influence and military strength, they will engage in massive human rights violations against civilians.

71. The Coalition des patriotes pour le changement and other armed groups continue to threaten the peace, security and tranquillity of the population, thereby creating a fertile ground for violations of human rights and international humanitarian law. Most of the leaders of these groups are on the sanctions list of the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 2127 (2013) concerning the Central African Republic. Urgent measures must be taken to hold them accountable for their actions.

72. The Central African armed forces, the Central African defence and security forces and the internal security forces are also responsible for multiple violations of human rights and international humanitarian law. Military justice must be brought to bear on the persons accused of these violations.

73. Central Africans appreciate the support provided by the Russian instructors, especially their support for the Central African armed forces, the Central African defence and security forces and the internal security forces in recapturing territories occupied by armed groups. However, it is unacceptable that their operations should be carried out outside the law. The authorities should ensure that Russian instructors act in accordance with international human rights and international humanitarian law. As a matter of urgency, the Central African authorities must elucidate the nature of their relationship with the Russian instructors under international law.

74. The 2021 local elections provide an opportunity to apply the law on decentralization¹³ adopted in 2020 to ensure effective local governance throughout the country. Day-to-day local responses are required to address the devastating effects of successive conflicts. A security plan and an agreed timetable should be established for the elections as soon as possible. These should provide for a review of the electoral roll and the return of displaced persons to their places of residence so that they can register to vote.

75. The disarmament, demobilization, reintegration and repatriation process needs fresh impetus.

¹³ Central African Republic, Act No. 20.008 of 7 April 2020 on the organization and operation of local government authorities.

76. Young people in the Central African Republic, who have endured years of conflict, require general education, technical education and vocational training in order to recover and develop their full potential. Education must urgently be prioritized on the Government's agenda.

77. In the view of the Independent Expert, the Central African Republic would benefit from a national human rights and good governance programme.

78. The operationalization of the Commission on Truth, Justice, Reparation and Reconciliation marks a decisive step towards reconciliation, peace and the establishment of guarantees of non-repetition. This mission, which focuses on the aftermath and consequences of past and present conflicts, needs strong and committed investment from the international community if it is to succeed.

79. Needs in the area of humanitarian assistance are growing exponentially. Food insecurity is a matter of concern. Financial support for humanitarian operations should be strengthened.

80. Geopolitical and geostrategic considerations should not slow down or suspend the international community's efforts to provide technical and financial support to transitional justice institutions, security and justice sector reforms, the reconciliation process or the education system, as doing so would risk depriving the population of the benefits of direct-impact projects involving sanitation, access to drinking water, basic health care (including during the COVID-19 pandemic), the rebuilding of damaged roads, bridges and other basic infrastructure, income-generating activities, and education and vocational training for young people, among other things. All operational actors on the ground, the United Nations country team and civil society call on the international community not to flag in its efforts to provide multifaceted support to the Central African Republic and to keep the country at the heart of the United Nations agenda so that it receives enhanced technical and financial support.

B. Recommendations

81. In view of the situation described above, the Independent Expert recommends that the Government take the following specific measures:

(a) Mobilize the country's active forces and deploy the necessary resources to support general education, technical and agricultural education, and vocational training, and address the challenges that prevent young people from developing their potential through training or entrepreneurship;

(b) Ensure that the country's recovery process includes measures to strengthen general education, technical and agricultural education, and vocational training by focusing on the construction and rehabilitation of infrastructure and facilities, the development of courses in line with needs, and the introduction of a system for supporting young people who have been trained to start or run a business;

(c) Establish better mechanisms for protecting buildings and infrastructure used for educational and vocational training and liberate those which are currently occupied by armed groups or by the Central African armed forces, the Central African defence and security forces or the internal security forces;

(d) Take specific measures to give effect to the Child Protection Code adopted in 2020 on the prohibition and punishment of the recruitment and use of children in hostilities and the prohibition of forced and early marriage;

(e) Continue and consolidate the restoration of State authority in the different prefectures of the country by deploying security forces and civilian officials and expediting the disarmament, demobilization, reintegration and repatriation process and the reform of the security sector;

(f) Provide the necessary means for the proper functioning of mechanisms for combating impunity, including the special commission of inquiry responsible for

investigating recent violations of human rights and international humanitarian law committed throughout the country;

(g) Ensure that the Commission on Truth, Justice, Reparation and Reconciliation can function independently and provide it, without delay, with the resources needed for its operations in the hinterland; also, ensure that no amnesty is granted to perpetrators of serious violations of human rights and international humanitarian law;

(h) Continue the reform of the security and justice sectors by strengthening the training, equipment and deployment of the Central African defence and security forces, the internal security forces, judges, prosecutors and other actors needed to protect civilians and ensure access to justice for victims of human rights violations;

(i) Undertake a thorough reform of the justice system;

(j) Strengthen institutions involved in vocational training in order to prepare young people for socioeconomic reintegration;

(k) Intensify subregional cooperation efforts and dialogue with neighbouring countries to address common challenges, including those related to livestock migration, security (including compliance with the arms embargo), and humanitarian issues;

(l) Make combatting conflict-related sexual and gender-based violence and supporting and rehabilitating victims a national priority by appointing a high representative or leading public figure to champion the cause, in line with the Government's commitments;

(m) Promptly implement Decree No. 21.148 of 30 June 2021, as amended by Decree No. 21.163 of 16 July 2021, on the organization of the inclusive national republican dialogue, which is of vital importance;

(n) Conduct prompt, independent and impartial investigations to identify the persons responsible for alleged violations of human rights and international humanitarian law committed by the Central African armed forces, the Central African defence and security forces or the internal security forces and their allies, including Russian instructors, during the operations to recapture the territories occupied by the Coalition des patriotes pour le changement and other armed groups, irrespective of the rank and status of the military personnel who committed or instigated the violations, devoting particular attention to the victims of the violations;

(o) Reorganize the military courts in accordance with the Code of Military Justice in order to try military personnel for violations of human rights and international humanitarian law.

82. The Independent Expert recommends that the Coalition des patriotes pour le changement and other armed groups take the following measures:

(a) Recommit to the Peace Agreement (for those armed groups that have withdrawn from it) as a framework for political discussion and consensus and participate fully in the emerging national republican dialogue;

(b) Immediately cease hostilities and attacks against civilians, peacekeepers and humanitarian organizations and end violations of human rights and international humanitarian law;

(c) Immediately vacate all illegally occupied public infrastructure (such as schools, health centres, courts and town halls) and refrain from violating the rights of State officials as they are gradually redeployed;

(d) Refrain from disrupting the organization of the forthcoming local elections;

(e) Comply with calls for an immediate ceasefire throughout the country;

(f) Participate, without restriction, in the disarmament, demobilization, reintegration and repatriation programme, as provided for in the Peace Agreement,

and honour their commitments regarding the discharge, demobilization and reintegration of the children serving in their ranks;

(g) Cease the illegal exploitation of natural resources in the areas that they still occupy and stop setting up roadblocks and collecting taxes;

(h) Contribute to the restoration of State authority throughout the country by cooperating fully with the various activities undertaken by the Commission on Truth, Justice, Reparation and Reconciliation.

83. The Independent Expert recommends that MINUSCA take the following measures:

(a) Continue to document the obstacles to effective access to general education, technical and agricultural education, and vocational training, and mobilize the necessary resources to ensure that the Central African authorities receive appropriate technical and financial support in implementing and evaluating the Education Sector Plan (2020–2029) and other relevant programmes;

(b) Give priority to strengthening the capacity of national institutions by supporting the strategy of transferring expertise and knowledge from its technical support and assistance services to State officials and services as they are gradually trained and deployed;

(c) Continue and step up efforts to build the capacity of civil society organizations, including those for journalists, women and young people;

(d) Mobilize the resources of the United Nations system, including the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), to support the Government in implementing recently adopted laws and the recommendations made in the context of the universal periodic review and by the treaty bodies and the Independent Expert;

(e) Strengthen the implementation of its zero-tolerance policy on preventing sexual violence by conducting awareness-raising campaigns, receiving and investigating reports promptly, applying the appropriate penalties, facilitating access to justice for victims, cooperating with MINUSCA, taking exemplary action to punish perpetrators of sexual violence when they are identified, and informing States that contribute troops to MINUSCA that these troops must receive training on sexual violence prior to deployment.

84. The Independent Expert recommends that the guarantors and facilitators of the Political Agreement for Peace and Reconciliation in the Central African Republic take the following measures:

(a) Take steps to revive the Peace Agreement, which has been undermined by the bellicose stance of the Coalition des patriotes pour le changement, and ensure that participation is extended to political parties and civil society organizations, including those working for young people and women's rights;

(b) Provide details of the penalties provided for in the Peace Agreement as deterrents;

(c) Ensure that the inclusive national republican dialogue, which has been described as a national framework for political consensus, is held;

(d) Comply with the decisions of the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 2127 (2013) concerning the Central African Republic in respect of the joint implementation of article 35 of the Peace Agreement, which relates to penalties for violating the Agreement.

85. The Independent Expert recommends that the international community take the following measures:

(a) Continue and intensify long-term technical and financial support for general education, technical and agricultural education, and vocational training in

order to help implement the relevant strategic plans developed by the Central African authorities;

(b) Support the Government's efforts to set up a medium and long-term national programme for technical and agricultural education and vocational training and its efforts to finance vocational training programmes;

(c) Support the Commission on Truth, Justice, Reparation and Reconciliation in ensuring that the various forms of reparation are made, including in relation to the rehabilitation and reparation fund for victims;

(d) Direct more of its technical support towards strengthening national institutions whose mandate includes the protection of human rights, good economic and social democratic governance, and the fight against impunity and corruption;

(e) Increase the financial support for operations carried out by humanitarian organizations, including those aimed at combating the threat of food insecurity faced by the population, especially children;

(f) Continue to provide and increase assistance to expedite the disarmament, demobilization, reintegration and repatriation process and the effective integration of ex-combatants into the special joint security units or into socioeconomic programmes;

(g) Strengthen support for humanitarian action in the different camps for internally displaced persons in the country in order to guarantee the provision of adequate humanitarian assistance, including measures to protect against COVID-19;

(h) Continue to support the reform of the security and justice sectors by supporting the training, deployment and equipment of the Central African armed forces, the internal security forces and State officials working in the areas of security and justice within local governments;

(i) Increase support for the implementation of the transitional justice strategy, including by providing increased technical assistance for the effective operationalization of the mechanisms for monitoring the implementation of the Peace Agreement (the special joint security units, the national implementation committee, the prefectural implementation committees and the executive monitoring committee) and the effective functioning of the Commission on Truth, Justice, Reparation and Reconciliation and the Special Criminal Court;

(j) Support the Special Criminal Court by facilitating the operationalization of the support service for defenders and victims, the support and protection unit for victims and witnesses, and the setting up of a compensation fund for victims;

(k) Strengthen access to justice for victims of sexual violence through comprehensive programmes that include legal, judicial, psychological, therapeutic, social and economic elements;

(l) Safeguard the democratic space by promoting the training of civil society organizations, including those for journalists, women and young people, and ensuring their participation in the peace process, the elections and the country's recovery;

(m) Continue to provide technical and financial assistance in the area of human rights in order to build the capacity of State institutions whose remits include combating impunity and corruption, promoting and monitoring good governance, and protecting and overseeing human rights;

(n) Where necessary, continue to implement measures to prevent, report and punish acts of sexual exploitation and sexual violence committed by international forces, in accordance with the zero-tolerance policy;

(o) Continue efforts to support operations to remove children from armed groups, including by funding social and economic reintegration programmes;

(p) Encourage and support the organization of a subregional conference on cross-border issues, while continuing to support joint commissions with neighbouring countries;

(q) **Support the organization of the next local elections and encourage the firm establishment of local governance mechanisms so that more appropriate local responses can be provided to local problems.**
