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National report submitted pursuant to Human Rights Council resolutions 5/1 and 16/21*

Central African Republic

* The present document is being issued without formal editing.



Introduction

1. Pursuant to its third report, considered by the Human Rights Council at its thirty-first session in 2018, the Central African Republic submits the present report under the fourth universal periodic review cycle, in accordance with United Nations General Assembly resolution 60/251 of 15 March 2006 and the general guidelines of the Human Rights Council.

I. Methodology and process for the preparation of the report

A. Report process

2. This report was prepared via a participatory process, coordinated by the Ministry of State for Justice, the Promotion of Human Rights and Good Governance through the national standing committee responsible for preparing reports and monitoring the implementation of recommendations under international human rights instruments, which is composed of representatives of ministerial departments.

B. Methodological approach

3. The report was prepared in the following stages:

- Data and information gathering from all entities responsible for the realization of human rights.
- Preparation of the draft report by the national standing committee responsible for preparing reports and monitoring the implementation of recommendations under international human rights instruments.
- Pre-approval workshop on the draft report, attended by the national standing committee and by sectoral committees.
- Consideration of the report and its adoption by the Cabinet of the Ministry of State for Justice, the Promotion of Human Rights and Good Governance.

II. Status of implementation of previous recommendations

A. Fully implemented recommendations

4. Recommendation 121.104: The Central African Republic has adopted Act No. 22.015 of 20 September 2022 on trafficking in persons. In addition to the Act, the country also adopted a national action plan to combat trafficking in persons for the period 2020–2024. Several civil society organizations have been involved in disseminating the Act and implementing the national action plan throughout the country.

5. Recommendation 121.99: The Central African Republic has adopted new legislation on freedom of the press and freedom of expression contained in Act No. 20.027 of 21 December 2020 on freedom of communication.

6. Recommendations 121.179, 121.183, 121.185: Regarding the formulation of a comprehensive policy and action plan on children's rights, the national human rights policy addresses children's rights through a five-year action plan.

7. Recommendation 121.180: The bill on the protection of children was adopted through Act No. 20.014 of 15 June 2020 on the Child Protection Code.

B. Partially implemented recommendations

8. Recommendation 121.1: Concerning efforts to bring national legislation into full compliance with the country's international human rights obligations, the Government has begun reviewing a number of laws, including the Criminal Code, the Code of Criminal Procedure, the Family Code, the Civil Service Act, the Labour Code and the Forest Code.

9. Recommendations 121.22–27, 121.29–34: The new members of the National Commission on Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms have been appointed and took up their functions in February 2023. The Government is considering allocating State funds to the construction of premises to house all judicial actors, including the National Commission.

10. Concerning human resources, Decree No. 23.247 of 29 October 2023 on the organization and functioning of the National Commission has already been signed. It should be noted that a draft decree enabling the National Commission to recruit sufficient staff to discharge its mandate is being prepared.

11. The needs of the National Commission were addressed at the August 2023 budget conference through the allocation of a sizable budget in the latest finance bill.

12. Recommendation 121.61: The Criminal Code is currently being amended. Once the process is complete, the definition of torture will be in line with the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment.

13. Recommendation 121.20: Regarding the National Policy for the Protection of Children, the Government is in the process of setting up a national committee for the advancement and protection of children, which will be under the direct authority of the Head of Government. The approval of the National Strategic Plan for Housing, as the legal framework for all relevant actions, is pending. The Plan provides for the harmonization of approaches, effort mobilization and the obtainment of indispensable support from technical and financial partners in order to ensure that measures are effective, consistent and sustainable. The Plan also envisages, among other actions:

- The construction of decent housing;
- The provision of serviced lots;
- The implementation of the urban plan.

14. This policy and strategy document, having made housing a national priority, is a major advancement for the country.

15. Recommendations 121.48–49: The disarmament, demobilization, repatriation and reintegration of armed groups to achieve peace and security is ongoing. Financing from the World Bank, the main funder of socioeconomic reintegration, ended in June 2023. Negotiations have been initiated with several partners to carry the process forward. Talks with the Peacebuilding Fund have been successful, while those with the World Bank should come to fruition in January 2024.

16. Recommendations 121.96–97, 121.100: With regard to the protection of human rights defenders, a bill is before the National Assembly for adoption.

17. Recommendation 121.139: The Government has prepared an amendment to the Family Code, setting the minimum age of marriage at 18 years for girls and boys. The relevant bill is before the National Assembly for adoption.

18. In addition, a strategy against child marriage, developed in 2017, is being implemented. Campaigns to raise awareness about harmful customs, such as the early or forced marriage of girls under the age of 18, are conducted regularly through all available channels.

19. Community-based child protection networks have been established by non-governmental organizations (NGOs) with the mandate to report cases of child marriage.

20. In addition, the 4040 helpline has been set up for anyone to report a suspected child marriage to the competent authorities.

21. Recommendations 121.9–10, 121.14, 121.16–17, 121.111, 121.123, 121.136, 121.199: The Government is cooperating with international and regional institutions, including the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA), the United Nations Population Fund, UN-Women, the African Court on Human and Peoples' Rights and the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights.
22. The Central African Republic has benefited from several forms of technical and financial assistance from the MINUSCA human rights division to build the capacity of the committee tasked with preparing reports under international human rights instruments, build institutional capacity for greater ownership of human rights, formulate the national human rights policy document then hold a high-level dialogue and a national approval workshop, and deliver training in related sectors areas, such as the restoration of State authority, security sector reform, disarmament and reintegration of former combatants and reintegration of children involved in conflict.
23. The Government maintains excellent relations with the Human Rights Council, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and the treaty bodies.
24. Recommendations 121.20, 121.65–70, 121.75, 121.93: The Special Criminal Court is already operating and has begun hearing the cases of alleged perpetrators of serious crimes committed during armed conflict in the Central African Republic. Its mandate was renewed for a period of five years through Act No. 23.001 of 9 January 2023, thus demonstrating the State's commitment to making the fight against impunity the backbone of its policy.
25. To facilitate its work, the Court has been provided with an office building as well as a hearing room within the courthouse and, thanks to the Government's advocacy efforts, additional resources have been mobilized for it.
26. Victims have received reparations, which is a first step in fighting impunity.
27. Recommendation 121.73: To strengthen the judicial system's ability to protect vulnerable people in particular, especially children and women, in addition to general legislation (Criminal Code and the Code of Criminal Procedure) and specific legislation (Act No. 06.32 of 15 December 2006 on the protection of women against violence, Act No. 06.005 of 20 June 2006 on reproductive health, Act No. 95.0010 of 22 December 1995 establishing the Juvenile Court and Act No. 20.014 of 15 June 2020 on the Child Protection Code), the Government has created, at the Bangui Regional Court, a specialized department of the public prosecution service for minors and another to deal with trafficking in persons.
28. Recommendation 121.72: As for the process of reconciliation through whole-of-society dialogue, the Government organized a republican dialogue involving all segments of society. The recommendations flowing from this dialogue are currently being implemented.
29. Recommendation 121.102: The Central African Republic has rolled out the national policy on reconciliation and social and community cohesion at the local level through the establishment of 52 local peace and reconciliation committees and has set up a data collection tool to prevent and manage conflicts.
30. Recommendation 121.76: Mobile court hearings are held in almost all jurisdictions, including remote areas where court buildings have been destroyed.
31. Recommendation 121.86: Regarding the full capacitation of and support to the Truth, Justice, Reparation and National Reconciliation Commission, the Government has allocated 200 million CFA francs to the Commission and intends to increase the allocation in the coming years. With the support of technical and financial partners, it has also ensured that the Commission has the premises and logistical supplies it needs to fully discharge its mandate.
32. Recommendation 121.89: The Truth, Justice, Reparation and National Reconciliation Commission, in accordance with its action plan, is working towards ensuring that the right of victims of human rights violations to know the truth and their right to obtain redress or reparation are respected. The Commission is preparing its first public hearing, ahead of which technical and financial partners are building its archiving and documentation capacity.

33. Recommendation 121.80: The Government has established the High Authority for Good Governance, whose mandate is to ensure that State resources from all sectors, including the mining sector, are managed in a rigorous and responsible manner.
34. Recommendation 121.106: With regard to a national employment strategy that would promote gender equality, article 10 of Act No. 09.004 of 29 January 2009 on the Labour Code stipulates that “under equal working conditions, salary... the Act ensures that everyone enjoys equal opportunities and treatment in employment and work without any discrimination whatsoever.”
35. Recommendations 121.117–119: There are several strategic documents addressing the physical and mental health of the family and access to health care for vulnerable groups, such as the National Health Policy 2019–2030, the Third National Plan on Health-Care Development, the policy on free targeted health care (Decree No. 19.037) and the reform of the national health information system. Support in the form of medical supplies, medicines and managerial assistance (preparation of a manual, supply and delivery management tools, provision of training to staff of facility-based pharmacies) is provided to health-care facilities.
36. Recommendation 121.122: In terms of measures to improve the functioning of health-care centres and ensure the availability of medicines, the Government has furnished five hospitals with the equipment and supplies necessary to provide essential medical and surgical care, two referral hospitals in the capital have the equipment and supplies necessary to provide essential gynaecological and obstetrical care and four medicine warehouses have been constructed. As for victims’ access to psychological support, victims have been seen by a specialist.
37. Recommendation 121.162: The Government pays particular attention to women’s rights by combating all forms of discrimination and violence against them, including female genital mutilation and child, early and forced marriage. With regard to discrimination, in addition to the Labour Code, the State has adopted a law on gender parity, thus demonstrating its commitment to promoting gender in the workplace. The International Labour Organization (ILO) Violence and Harassment Convention, 2019 (No. 190) further strengthens the framework promoting this equality.
38. Concerning violence against women, the joint unit for rapid intervention and suppression of sexual violence against women and children is responsible for investigating all cases of violations against women.
39. Regarding the issues of female genital mutilation and child, forced and early marriages, the Government has put in place a national strategy to combat gender-based violence, child marriage and female genital mutilation. A number of actions are being taken to reduce the prevalence of child marriage.
40. Recommendations 121.115, 121.120, 121.125–136, 121.142, 121.189, 121.193–194, 121.200, 121.204: In terms of improving education services to achieve a better standard of living and working to expand literacy programmes, the Government has established literacy centres. These centres, some of which receive NGO support, have been set up in churches and lower primary schools and, in some instances, outdoors. The Government, with support from the United Nations Development Programme, wishes to build four literacy centres in Bangui, Mboko, Boeing and Mbaiki.
41. Furthermore, under the Accelerated Education Programme, the Government has set up 40 centres in eight prefectures (Bangui, Bambari, Berberati, Bria, Kaga-Bandoro, Bossangoa and Paoua) to bring back children who have aged out of the school system and guide them towards vocational training schools and centres.
42. Remedial classes, including during school vacation, are available in 12 prefectures to help children overcome any difficulties they encounter during the school year. To date, over 300 decentralized school management committees have been set up to develop schools, especially with regard to support for parent-teachers.
43. As for improving health-care services, the Central African Republic has made health a priority among its actions for the population. With the support of partners, a number of strategies have been formulated, including:

- The provision of free targeted care in 10 fields to pregnant and breastfeeding women;
- The Third National Plan on Health-Care Development 2019–2030, which is focused on enhancing the population’s health;
- Various strategic plans, including plans to combat tuberculosis, HIV and malaria (with financing from the Global Fund) and a five-year immunization plan (with support from the Gavi Alliance), and community-based surveillance.

44. The Government has also adopted several strategic documents in the area of sexual and reproductive health, including clinical rules and procedures for mothers, newborns, children and adolescents, the emergency plan under the joint initiative to accelerate the reduction of maternal and infant mortality, a referral and cross-referral manual on emergency obstetric and neonatal care, the national programme to combat obstetric fistula, the plan for the elimination of mother-child transmission of HIV, hepatitis and syphilis, and standards of care for contraception services.

45. Awareness-raising efforts in this domain have included the opening of information stands on sexual and reproductive health for adolescents and young people, the design of posters and picture boxes on family planning and gender-based violence and a surgical repair campaign in Bossangoa and Paoua through which 160 survivors of sexual or gender-based violence were able to recover their dignity and be made whole again.

46. Recommendations 121.68, 121.70–71, 121.78, 121.84–85, 121.87, 121.88, 121.90–94, 121.98, 121.104, 121.153–154, 121.160–164, 121.166, 121.168, 121.172, 121.176–178, 121.181, 121.188, 121.191, 121.197, 121.203: Regarding the intensification of efforts to combat impunity so that all persons convicted of human rights violations are brought to justice, the Government has made combating impunity the backbone of its policy. Consequently, several cases of human rights violations have been adjudicated by the national courts.

47. Many hearings were held from 2017 to 2023, chiefly in connection with human rights matters. Through the rehabilitation and equipping of judicial infrastructure, mobile court hearings for criminal cases have been held at the regional courts of Bria, Berberati, Bambari, Bouar, Sibut, Bossangoa, Bossembele, Carnot, Nola, Mbaiki, Bimbo, Bangui and Bangassou and in the cities of Yaloké, Boganda, Damara, Bogangolo and Boda.

48. Every year, the criminal divisions of the appeals courts of Bangui, Bouar and Bambari hear cases of serious human rights violations. The martial court also holds sessions to hear cases of violations committed by members of the defence and security forces.

49. Recommendations 121.36–45: Act No. 22.011 of 27 June 2022 on the abolition of the death penalty has been adopted and promulgated.

50. Recommendation 121.201: In terms of improving the situation of persons with disabilities, the Government is striving to respond as fully as possible to the concerns of these persons.

51. From a legislative standpoint, a quota has been introduced whereby 30 per cent of public service jobs must be reserved for graduates with disabilities.

52. For over 10 years, all new administrative buildings have had to include accessibility features for persons with reduced mobility (ramps, elevators). In partnership with Handicap International, a study was conducted in regions 3, 4 and 6 to identify barriers to the inclusion of persons with disabilities, including those from Indigenous backgrounds, in the various stages of post-conflict recovery with a view to the inclusive development of communities.

53. Recommendation 121.203: Articles 68 and 69 of the Child Protection Code address the protection of children with special needs, including, among others, children with disabilities or albinism.

54. Special protection measures are implemented through the guardianship mechanisms under the Family Code, foster care or any other appropriate care scheme chosen on the basis of the best interests of the child and in accordance with their level of maturity.

55. Recommendation 121.204: The Government, with the support of technical and financial partners, has held events on the occasion of the International Day of Persons with Disabilities to raise awareness of the rights of persons with disabilities, including their right to participate in the country's development.

56. As for improving the access of children with disabilities to all levels of education, Act No. 97.014 of 10 December 1997 on the education system stipulates that primary education is compulsory and free for all school-aged children without discrimination.

57. In practice, parents are not charged any fees when their child enters school, apart from the contribution of CFAF 1,800 and CFAF 2,450 per family depending on education level.

58. The Ministry of State for Education, with support from partners, such as the World Food Programme, the World Bank and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), has put in place a number of school retention programmes, especially for children with disabilities. These are:

- The school feeding programme (of the country's 3,367 public schools, 1,355 have benefited from the programme, or 144,000 children out of a total of 1,237,988 at the primary level;
- The purpose of the Accelerated Education Programme is to bring children who have dropped out back to school and ensure their continued education. The programme is in the pilot phase and currently involves 350 schools in 6 prefectures.

59. Recommendation 121.195: With regard to active measures to prevent the recruitment of children by armed groups, the Government promulgated Act No. 20.014 of 15 June 2020 on the Child Protection Code, which prohibits any enlistment, conscription and use of children by armed forces and groups or the security forces in article 75. Furthermore, the Government and armed groups came to a political peace agreement, which was negotiated in Khartoum and signed in Bangui on 6 February 2019. Another peace initiative, known as the Luanda Road Map, has been undertaken with support from the Heads of State of the Economic Community of Central African States. The goal of these various peace agreements is not only the complete surrender of armed groups but also a definitive end to hostilities so that children cannot risk being used by armed groups.

60. Moreover, the recruitment and use of children by armed forces and groups is a punishable offence under various other laws, including the Criminal Code and the Child Protection Code (art. 179).

61. Under article 179 (b), perpetrators of such acts face a penalty of 10 to 20 years' imprisonment and/or a fine of CFAF 5 million to 20 million.

62. Recommendation 121.80: In terms of strengthening the rule of law and good governance while ensuring strict and responsible management of financial resources from the mining sector, the Central African Republic adopted a new Constitution on 30 August 2023. Article 173 of the new Constitution gives the High Authority for Good Governance additional power to properly manage the exploitation of natural resources.

63. Recommendation 121.104: Concerning article 151 of the Criminal Code and the prosecution of all acts of human trafficking, the Government has established a committee under the Office of the President to coordinate anti-trafficking efforts with support from the focal points in various ministerial departments. The task of the committee is to implement the national anti-trafficking policy in accordance with the national plan adopted in 2022. The legislature adopted and promulgated Act No. 22.015 of 20 September 2022 on trafficking in persons. At the national level, three cases of trafficking in persons are before the regional courts of Bangui and Bimbo.

64. Recommendation 121.188: Regarding the measures taken to prevent members of armed groups responsible for serious human rights abuses from being integrated into the armed forces and police, the ministry responsible for disarmament, demobilization and reintegration and the Political Agreement for Peace and Reconciliation in the Central African Republic, together with partners, always vets all aspiring members coming from armed groups. Moreover, the new Constitution adopted on 30 August 2023 prohibits members of armed groups from joining the defence forces and police.

65. Recommendations 121.205–207: The Government has taken appropriate measures to improve the standard of living of the country’s population, in particular that of groups affected by the various crises.

66. For example, it has repatriated refugees from the Central African Republic who were living in countries of asylum and has assisted internally displaced persons living in camps, settlements or host communities to return home. With the support of humanitarian organizations, it has established temporary transit centres to provide psychological assistance to refugee and displaced women who have been victims of or witnesses to atrocities during conflict.

67. Similarly, it has established an early warning system in communities to identify boys and girls who are at risk of being recruited or raped. Parents must take precautions from the earliest signs of crisis to protect their children from recruitment and kidnapping.

68. With support from the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, the Government has rolled out a project to support returnees. The organization running the project has a contract to provide protection to refugees from the Central African Republic who have expressed a desire to return to the country. Some 20,000 people have thus been repatriated since 2017, with operations ongoing.

69. After their arrival, the Government, with support from technical and financial partners, maps the needs of returnees in various areas (e.g. water, sanitation and hygiene, accommodation, rehabilitation of infrastructure, income-generating activities, education and health care).

70. Internally displaced persons who wish to return home are entitled to the same treatment as repatriated persons. There are three sustainable options, namely, return, relocation (resettlement and reintegration) and local integration. In camps for displaced persons, the Government and its partners work together to promote respect for the human rights of internally displaced persons, including those with disabilities, for instance by setting up a playground and school for children, a clinic, a counselling centre for victims of gender-based violence, water, sanitation and hygiene facilities and security, as well as by providing food and non-food aid.

71. As part of socioeconomic recovery efforts, the Government, through a project to support communities affected by displacement, has taken measures for vulnerable communities, including:

- Cash transfers: 33,000 households (16,800 in Bangui, 8,200 in Bouar and 8,000 in Bria) will receive a quarterly cash transfer of CFAF 25,000 for a period of two years. Beneficiaries also receive mobile telephones with an Orange or Telecel SIM card;
- In Bambari, a bus station and a municipal park have been constructed, the livestock veterinary centre has been rehabilitated and 3 km of road have been paved;
- In Bangassou, 50 boreholes have been drilled, a youth centre and secondary school have been built and 40 lamp posts have been installed;
- In Kaga-Bandoro, the Serebanda Bridge has been constructed and 40 solar panels have been installed;
- In Bangui, the Rue Madou has been paved and lit with solar-powered lamp posts.

72. Recommendation 121.51: As for the dismantling and suppression of mercenaries and foreign armed actors in the country, the Government, under the quadripartite agreement signed with the Democratic Republic of the Congo, South Sudan and Uganda in June 2023, in Kampala, is in the process of returning all members of the Lord’s Resistance Army to Uganda.

73. Recommendation 121.112: The Government, with support from donors, has been working tirelessly to improve road infrastructure. For example, it has embarked on:

- The paving of the road between Bouar and Baoro;
- The rehabilitation of the segments between Baoro and Bossemtele and between Bossemtele and Yaloké;

- The rehabilitation of the road between Bangui and Bossembele and between Bossembele and Yaloké;
- The rehabilitation of over 500 km of paved roads in Bangui.

74. The Government is currently considering undertaking, with World Bank funding, the rehabilitation of the Kaga-Bandoro, Ndélé-Ouadda, Ouanda Djallé-Birao, Baoro-Carnot-Berberati and Gamboula corridors.

75. Thanks to financing from the African Development Bank, the Corridor 13 project to connect Pointe-Noire, Brazzaville, Bangui and N'Djamena, of which the first phase will consist in the construction of the segment between Bangui and Ouesso (Congo), is expected to be launched by the end of 2023.

76. A project to build a road connecting Bangui and the Sudan, with financing from the World Bank, is under consideration.

77. Recommendation 121.64: With regard to improving conditions of detention and the prison system in general, the Government has rehabilitated some facilities and has undertaken emergency works to enhance security.

78. For instance, the short-stay prisons in Bambari, Bangassou, Bangui, Bimbo, Berberati, Nola, Bossangoa (and gendarmerie cells), Bria (and police custody cells), Bossembele, Kaga Bandoro, Mbaiki, Paoua and Sibut have been rehabilitated.

79. Furthermore, a high-security detention centre in line with international standards was built in 2020 in Camp de Roux, where 97 inmates were being held as of 6 April 2021.

80. A national strategy for the social reintegration of detainees, approved in 2019, is under way and has allowed 175 detainees to receive three months' training in literacy, sewing, knitting, hairdressing, vegetable farming and soap making.

81. In Bangui, 47 detainees, including 7 women, have received three months of training in carpentry, plumbing and the manufacture of solar-powered cookers. In November 2021, more than 25 detainees received six months of training in the making of liquid soap.

82. A national policy on health care in prisons was formulated and adopted in 2018. A joint committee for the management of health-care services in prisons was established in 2021.

83. In the area of nutrition, ad hoc initiatives have been launched by NGOs, in collaboration with the Government. For example, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) provides support to individuals suffering from malnutrition by preparing meals containing 3,000 daily calories. More than 580 detainees with malnutrition at Ngaragba central prison in Bangui have benefited from this assistance.

84. Concerning the legal limit on police custody, the Government, through the Ministry of State for Justice, has instructed the public prosecution service and the police to respect the relevant provisions.

85. Recommendations 121.151–152, 121.147–148: Concerning measures to eradicate female genital mutilation and to raise awareness of this harmful practice among the different ethnic groups, the Government has appointed focal points and set up prefecture and sub-prefecture committees to combat harmful practices countrywide. Awareness-raising activities are carried out every year on 6 February; for example, there are film showings for community leaders and the main people involved in the practice of female genital mutilation.

86. Recommendation 121.107: The Central African Republic is essentially an agricultural country. Farmers represent 90 per cent of the population, with livestock farming accounting for some 15 per cent of gross domestic product (GDP) and 45 per cent of the agriculture GDP.

87. Therefore, to appropriately respond to major development issues and challenges and set up a new strategy to combat poverty, the Government has adopted the National Agricultural Investment and Food and Nutrition Security Programme, the Rural Development, Agriculture and Food Security Strategy and the National Recovery and Peacebuilding Plan.

88. Recommendation 121.110: The Government, with support from NGOs and other technical and financial partners working in emergency situations, such as Deutsche Welthungerhilfe, has defined a strategy linking humanitarian action, resilience, development and social cohesion.

89. Projects under this strategy are designed to provide short-term support to vulnerable groups, including internally displaced persons, returnees and host communities, in dealing with emergency situations while fostering longer-term economic development through institutional capacity-building for sustainable assistance to communities.

90. Recommendations 121.126–127: Regarding the rebuilding and protection of schools and the improvement of school infrastructure, the Government, with support from partners, has rehabilitated or built a number of education facilities. It has formulated a plan for the construction of regional development centres, leading to the building of 10 new such establishments. The following results have also been achieved:

- 172 hangars and temporary learning and child protection spaces have been built;
- 9,236 classrooms have been rehabilitated or constructed at 3,141 lower primary schools;
- 854 classrooms have been rehabilitated or constructed at upper primary schools.

91. In terms of securing learning spaces, protection measures related to the prevention of sexual abuse and exploitation have been taken at over 250 schools.

92. As for the protection of schools, article 180 of the Child Protection Code prohibits all attacks against and occupation of schools and hospitals and the blocking of humanitarian aid as they undermine the best interests of the child.

93. Regarding the recruitment of trained teaching staff, the Ministry's 2017 sectoral plan provides for the training of 16,000 teachers by 2030. With the expansion of the regional pedagogical centres, efforts are under way to train 2,000 teachers per year, or 100 per pedagogical centre. A new round of recruitment for 2,000 teachers is planned for early April 2023 and will be automatically followed by a second round. Moreover, with support from UNICEF, 5,000 teachers received training in the provision of psychosocial assistance.

94. Recommendation 121.116: Regarding the recommendation to increase health expenditure, see the table below.

Percentage of the State budget allocated to the Ministry of Health

<i>Year</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
2019	10.57%
2020	12.01%
2021	14.34%
2022	12.79%
2023	12.79%

95. Concerning women's and girl's access to health care, the Government has adopted a number of documents in the area of sexual and reproductive health, including clinical rules and procedures for mothers, newborns, children and adolescents, the emergency plan under the joint initiative to accelerate the reduction of maternal and infant mortality, a referral and cross-referral manual on emergency obstetric and neonatal care, the national programme to combat obstetric fistula, the plan for the elimination of mother-child transmission of HIV, hepatitis and syphilis, and standards of care for contraception services.

96. Awareness-raising efforts in this domain have included the opening of information stands on sexual and reproductive health for adolescents and young people, the design of posters and picture boxes on family planning and gender-based violence and a surgical repair campaign in Bossangoa and Paoua through which 160 survivors of sexual or gender-based violence were able to recover their dignity and be made whole again.

97. Recommendation 121.90: With regard to the creation of a vetting mechanism for all security forces to handle any cases of human rights abuses and the provision of thorough training on compliance with and promotion of human rights, the Government adopted Act No. 17.012 of 24 March 2017 on the Code of Military Justice. The Act complements the defence and security forces' vetting system by strengthening respect for human rights and, thus, improving conduct. Furthermore, the President signed a decree on the organization and functioning of the General Military Inspectorate, which has the power to oversee the defence and security forces.

98. In 2018, the Ministry of National Defence, with the support of partners (MINUSCA and ICRC), launched a training programme on international humanitarian law and international human rights law for persons subject to the Code of Military Justice. Several awareness-raising activities on the need to respect human rights in times of conflict have been carried out among the defence and security forces.

99. With a view to improving the working conditions of justice officials and facilitating victims' access to justice, the military courts in Bangui were recently provided with a building that had been rehabilitated by MINUSCA. The other military courts in Bouar and Bambari will also benefit from the building renovation project.

100. Recommendations 121.74, 121.57, 121.46: In the light of the complex security situation, the Government affirms its comprehensive vision for a human-based approach to national security, including the updating of all national legal and strategic instruments.

101. The 2018–2023 Military Planning Act, which was published on 11 September 2017 and contains the Internal Security Forces Resizing Plan, which provides for a five-year project to increase the size of the national security forces. A number of post-conflict initiatives, such as the National Security Policy and the National Security Sector Reform Strategy, have been developed to further social peace and the building of national cohesion.

102. Recommendation 121.50: To prioritize the implementation of security sector reform and the National Programme for Disarmament, Demobilization, Repatriation and Reintegration, the Government, in accordance with the road map developed by the national committee for the coordination of security sector reform, held a round table in December 2021. The event was inclusive and led to the renewal of an approach to human security that fulfilled all the people's needs and aspirations and to a recommendation that the National Security Policy be reviewed.

103. Recommendations 121.5–6: The Central African Republic has been a party to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities since 11 October 2016.

104. Recommendation 121.7: The Central African Republic is in the process of ratifying the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime, to which it acceded on 4 September 2004.

105. Recommendation 121.11: In terms of ensuring that national candidates to United Nations human rights treaty body elections are selected through an open and merit-based process, there is a department in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs responsible for the advancement and integration of nationals of the Central African Republic. The Ministry of Justice, which is responsible for the promotion of human rights, has begun to identify and take stock of bodies with posts to which candidates from the Central African Republic might be appointed. The most qualified candidates will be identified whenever the need arises.

106. Recommendation 121.12: With regard to strengthening the State's administrative and legal capacities and all other mechanisms aimed at facilitating national cohesion and reconciliation, the Government promulgated the new Constitution on 30 August 2023. The new Constitution further strengthens the legal capacities of State institutions in all fields. In addition, with support from partners (e.g. MINUSCA, the European Union and the Embassies of France and the United States of America), the administrative capacities of ministerial departments and institutions are continually strengthened.

107. Recommendations 121.191, 121.193–194, 121.196–199, 121.200: With regard to preventing the recruitment and use of child soldiers, putting an end to the practice and ensure that demobilized child soldiers are reintegrated and enjoy access to education, the aim of the

Bangui peace agreement of 6 February 2019 and the Luanda Road Map is not only the complete surrender of armed groups but also a definitive return to peace and the cessation of hostilities and the recruitment and use of child soldiers.

108. Moreover, these acts are offences under the Criminal Code and the Child Protection Code (art. 179) that carry the penalty of 10 to 20 years' imprisonment and/or a fine of CFAF 5 million to 20 million.

109. A UNICEF-funded programme to prevent the recruitment of children and support the reintegration of children involved with armed forces and groups has been operating since 2014, in collaboration with NGOs. Some 17,038 of these children, including 4,517 girls, were removed from their situation and provided with assistance through the programme between 2014 and 2021.

110. A national strategy on the prevention of the most serious violations of children's rights during times of conflict, containing a number of areas for priority action, was developed and published in 2021 and 2022.

111. Recommendation 121.186: Corporal punishment is formally prohibited under the Act of 10 December 1997 on the education system as well as the internal regulations of each establishment. Only reprimands commensurate with a child's misbehaviour are permitted.

112. Recommendation 121.184: The Central African Republic has ratified the ILO Minimum Age Convention, 1973 (No. 138), whose article 2 (3) establishes that: "The minimum age specified in pursuance of paragraph 1 of this Article shall not be less than the age of completion of compulsory schooling and, in any case, shall not be less than 15 years."

113. Regarding efforts to eliminate the worst forms of child labour, especially in the agriculture and mining sectors, it is worth noting that the right to education for all is a constitutional obligation (Constitution of 30 August 2023), as well as a national priority.

114. Pursuant to Decree No. 20.077 of 13 March 2020, a national strategic committee to combat trafficking in persons, which has a section dedicated to the worst forms of child labour, has been established under the direct authority of the President. Capacity-building among stakeholders and awareness-raising among economic and social actors have been conducted to deter the commission of offences against children.

115. The Government has:

- Promulgated Act No. 21.003 of 1 September 2021 authorizing the ratification of the ILO Violence and Harassment Convention, 2019 (No. 190) and organized a number of awareness-raising campaigns;
- Adopted a national strategy to combat gender-based violence, child marriage and female genital mutilation, as well as a strategy to combat child marriage.

116. The Act on trafficking in persons and the Child Protection Code are part of efforts in this domain.

117. Recommendation 121.13: Efforts are continuously being made to spread a culture of human rights and build institutional capacity in human rights fields, as illustrated by the development of the national human rights policy.

118. In addition, workshops to raise awareness about human rights, reconciliation and culture are frequently held for human rights actors in government and civil society. In 2021, MINUSCA provided support to the Ministry of Justice in holding 12 workshops at secondary schools in Bangui. In 2022, MINUSCA provided support to civil society organizations in raising awareness among pupils and students about these topics.

119. Recommendations 121.181–182, 121.187, 121.159, 121.153–154, 121.161, 121.177–178, 121.79: Regarding investigations into all violations of children's rights perpetrated by the belligerent parties, the public prosecution service has opened investigations into and adjudicated a number of cases. The joint rapid response unit to prevent sexual violence against women and children registered 14,689 complaints between 2018 and 2022. As a result, 300 reports were referred to the prosecution services in Bangui, Bimbo and Mbaiki and 160 cases were adjudicated.

120. From 2019 to 2022, the criminal division of the Bangui Court of Appeal ruled on 19 cases of child rape, including 11 cases adjudicated in open court. Several cases are in the investigation stage before the lower courts.

121. Concerning the formulation of a national action plan to protect children against sexual violence, the Government, pursuant to Decree No. 21.308 of 25 November 2021, set up a strategic committee under the Office of the President responsible for matters of conflict-related sexual and gender-based violence. The strategic committee, with support from partners, developed an action plan containing a number of prevention activities, including participation in the 16 Days of Activism against Gender-based Violence campaign and the mapping of NGOs involved in combating gender-based violence.

122. Recommendation 121.15: In terms of efforts to restore State authority across all its territory, the Government has adopted the second national strategy on security sector reform for the period 2022–2027, which takes into account human security imperatives with a focus on democratic governance, institutional capacity-building and enhanced living and working conditions for security sector personnel. Other relevant texts include the National Defence Plan, currently being revised pursuant to Act No. 21.001 on administrative districts, and the Act on military programming.

123. Recommendation 121.16: Steps have been taken to ascertain the needs for technical assistance in order to seek increased assistance from the country's bilateral and multilateral partners.

124. The following entities require capacity-building:

- The judicial system, transitional justice mechanisms and the National Commission on Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms;
- The national committee for the drafting of reports under international human rights instruments;
- The Ministry of State for Justice, the Promotion of Human Rights and Good Governance to develop an action plan for the implementation of any recommendations following this fourth national report and reports to the treaty bodies.

125. Technical and financial assistance are needed to:

- Facilitate the implementation of the national human rights policy;
- Facilitate the dissemination of the implementation of the fourth national report and the implementation of the recommendations which will follow;
- Support the roll-out of the national human rights policy;
- Support the national committee for the drafting of reports under international human rights instruments;
- Support awareness-raising and training initiatives on human rights throughout the country;
- Support the implementation of the sectoral policy on justice, as well as the action plan for the implementation of any recommendations flowing from the fourth national report.

126. Recommendation 121.17: Regarding the participation of international and regional partners in capacity-building activities aimed at improving the human rights situation, the Government, with support from MINUSCA, conducts capacity-building activities for the national committee for the drafting of reports under international human rights instruments, as well as civil society actors working on human rights.

127. Recommendation 121.18: With regard to efforts to implement national policies and legislation on human rights, the Central African Republic:

- Strives to meet its reporting obligations toward the treaty bodies;
- Has adopted a national human rights policy.

128. Recommendation 121.28: With regard to the investigation capacity of the National Commission on Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, article 7 of the Act establishing the National Commission stipulates that the body has the power to receive all complaints and reports of violations of human rights and fundamental freedoms and to carry out all necessary investigations, inquiries and procedures in such cases. This year, in keeping with its mandate, the National Commission has received 21 complaints and 30 reports.

129. Recommendation 121.137: As for concerted efforts to improve and strengthen the mechanisms put in place to combat harmful sociocultural practices against women and children, the Government has set up mechanisms such as a national committee to combat gender-based violence, harmful practices and child marriage, prefecture and sub-prefecture committees, including borough-level committees, as well as a community-based early-warning network.

130. Recommendation 121.138: In terms of achieving gender equality by ensuring effective implementation of the Gender Parity Act, the Government has strengthened the capacity of administrative and local authorities and has designated gender focal points in every department. The Observatory for Parity is being established.

131. Recommendation 121.140: Concerning equal rights and opportunities for women, the Government has formulated and rolled out a national policy on gender equality and equity, has examined laws for discriminatory provisions and has revised the Family Code.

132. A new law on sexual harassment is currently being drafted.

133. Recommendations 121.141, 121.150, 121.160: With regard to actions taken to combat gender-based violence, especially violence against women, the Government has developed and implemented a national strategy to combat gender-based violence. The strategy outlines the following areas of action: prevention, improvement of the legal framework, comprehensive assistance for victims and coordination of actions.

134. Recommendation 121.142: As for increasing efforts in favour of gender equality and combating discrimination against women by addressing issues such as sexual violence, early and forced marriages, women's participation in public administration and their access to education, the Government has adopted a national policy on gender equality and equity, has put in place capacity-building activities for women and has mainstreamed gender in sector-specific projects and programmes.

135. Recommendation 121.143: To guarantee the participation and inclusion of women, youth, members of civil society and traditional and religious leaders in the peace negotiations, the Government has developed and rolled out the second national action plan on Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) on women and peace and security that is focused on prevention, protection, participation, economic recovery and emerging threats.

136. Recommendation 121.144: With regard to measures to increase the presence of women in the decision-making process, the Government adopted the Gender Parity Act. A strategic document on gender and elections, which envisages several actions, is also being implemented.

137. Recommendation 121.146: Ongoing efforts to promote the rights of women are addressed in a number of laws, including the Criminal Code, the Reproductive Health Act, the Family Code (under revision) and the Bill on Sexual Harassment.

138. Recommendation 121.149: Concerning the adoption of legal provisions criminalizing marital rape, it should be noted that this topic is covered in the Criminal Code.

139. Recommendations 121.155–156: Regarding the implementation of and ongoing funding for the national action plan for the implementation of Security Council resolution 1325 (2000), the Government has incorporated the national action plan into the 2024 programme budget. Furthermore, there is a national coordination committee for gender, gender-based violence, and women and peace and security, as well as a national child protection committee that considers all these aspects.

140. Recommendation 121.158: The Government ensures the provision of a comprehensive service package in cases of gender-based violence, including psychosocial, medical, legal and socioeconomic assistance.

141. Recommendation 121.109: In terms of prioritizing programmes to address poverty, particularly affecting women and children, the Government has put in place a strategy to empower women and girls countrywide.

142. Recommendation 121.35: A department has been set up under the Ministry of State for Justice, the Promotion of Human Rights and Good Governance to promote the rights of minorities in keeping with Decree No. 22.155 on the organization and functioning of the Ministry of State. The department's mandate is to strengthen relationships with government authorities and national and international public or private entities working to promote the rights of vulnerable persons and minorities.

143. As for allowing access to places of detention, including to civil society organizations, the Ministry of State for Justice grants authorizations to civil society organizations. In July 2023, a human rights monitoring mission was conducted in prisons and temporary detention centres.

144. Recommendations 121.47, 121.21: Regarding efforts to cease hostilities and strengthen disarmament, demobilization, repatriation and reintegration of armed groups to strengthen the rule of law, justice and recovery, the Government has spared no effort to bring hostilities to an end and step up disarmament, demobilization, repatriation and reintegration. For instance, the Luanda Road Map and the Political Agreement for Peace and Reconciliation in the Central African Republic, signed in Bangui on 6 February 2018, have been merged for the most appropriate response.

C. Recommendations in the process of implementation

145. Recommendations 121.62–63: Regarding the establishment of a national preventive mechanism in accordance with obligations under the Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture, the Government is considering revising the Act establishing the National Commission on Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms in order to assign it the mandate of national preventive mechanism.

III. Progress and difficulties since the submission of the third national report

146. Since submitting its third national report to the Human Rights Council in 2018, the Central African Republic has seen progress in the realization of human rights but has also encountered difficulties.

A. Progress achieved

1. Institutional progress

147. Since 2018, a number of institutions responsible for human rights have been established or have seen their powers expanded. For example:

- The mandate of the Ministry of State for Justice, the Promotion of Human Rights and Good Governance to formulate and coordinate the implementation of government policy on the protection and promotion of human rights was strengthened through Decree No. 22.155 of 1 June 2022 on the establishment of the Ministry of State.
- The National Elections Authority was established through Act No. 20.022 of 7 July 2022 on the composition, organization, and functioning of the Authority.
- Local authorities were established pursuant to Act No. 20.008 of 7 April 2020 on the organization and functioning of local authorities.

- The Truth, Justice, Reparation and National Reconciliation Commission was set up through Act No. 20.009 of 7 April 2020 on the establishment, organization and functioning of the Commission.
- The institutional basis of the National Commission on Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms was strengthened by Decree No. 23.247 of 29 October 2023 on the organization and functioning of the National Commission.
- The Special Criminal Court is now operational.

2. Legislative progress

148. At the legislative level, progress has been made on all areas of human rights, including civil, political, social and cultural rights, the rights of specific groups and solidarity rights. Advances include:

- (a) In terms of ratifications:
 - The ILO Violence and Harassment Convention, 2019 (No. 190), in 2022;
 - The Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Establishment of an African Court on Human and Peoples' Rights, in 2023.
- (b) In terms of the adoption of legislation:
 - The Constitution of 30 August 2023, which enshrines civil, political, social and cultural rights, the rights of specific groups and solidarity or collective rights in title II on human rights, fundamental freedoms and the duties of citizens and the State;
 - Act No. 22.015 of 20 September 2022 on trafficking in persons;
 - Act No. 20.027 of 21 December 2020 on freedom of communication;
 - Act No. 20.015 of 11 June 2020 on political parties and the status of the opposition;
 - Act No. 20.005 of 14 January 2020 on the legal aid;
 - Act No. 19.002 of 16 January 2019 on non-governmental organizations;
 - Act No. 19.0011 of 20 August 2019 on the Electoral Code;
 - Act No. 23.009 of 7 July 2023 on the prevention and punishment of corruption and related offences;
 - Act No. 20.014 of 15 June 2020 on the Child Protection Code;
 - Act No. 21.011 of 26 November 2021 on asset disclosure;
 - Act No. 21.001 on administrative districts;
 - Act No. 22.011 of 27 June 2022 on the abolition of the death penalty.

3. Progress on human rights policy measures

149. Since the submission of the previous national report, the Central African Republic has adopted a national policy document on human rights (2023). Various ministerial departments dealing with human rights issues have also adopted sector-specific policies, including the justice policy, the National Health Policy 2019–2030, the Third National Plan on Health-Care Development, the Education Plan 2020–2029, the national strategy to combat gender-based violence, child marriage and female genital mutilation for the period 2019–2023 and the second national action plan on Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) on women and peace and security.

150. In addition to these policy documents, the National Recovery and Peacebuilding Plan 2021–2023 and the Central African Republic Vision 2050 also focus on human rights issues.

B. Challenges and constraints

151. The Central African Republic has faced considerable difficulties and constraints since the submission of the previous national report. Those cited in the previous report have not been entirely resolved. Moreover, additional challenges and constraints have arisen, hampering the effective implementation and realization of all human rights for the benefit of the population nationwide.

152. These include:

- Almost constant insecurity, especially in the interior of the country;
- Barriers to access to justice;
- Harmful cultural pressures;
- Poor dissemination of human rights instruments;
- Lack of awareness of instruments and mechanisms for the promotion and protection of human rights;
- Limited State funds to support human rights efforts across the country;
- Strong reliance on external funding;
- Difficulty accessing certain localities owing to severely damaged roads;
- The high illiteracy rate among the population;
- The high level of poverty;
- The fact of being landlocked.

C. The country's key needs in terms of capacity-building and technical and financial assistance

153. The conflicts and crises in the country since 2013 and the rise of Coalition des patriotes pour le changement armed groups in 2020 have had a negative impact on the development of the country in general, particularly the rights of the population. Almost all national infrastructure has been destroyed. In view of the numerous challenges and constraints faced by the country, it is now imperative that it be assisted and supported by the international community.

1. Capacity-building needs

- Capacity-building in the justice system, transitional justice mechanisms and the National Commission on Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms in order to enable them to contribute effectively to the process of reconciliation and national cohesion;
- Capacity-building for the members of the committee for the drafting of reports under international human rights instruments;
- Capacity-building for the Ministry of State for Justice, the Promotion of Human Rights and Good Governance in the development of the action plan for the implementation of any recommendations following the third national report and those of other treaty bodies.

2. Technical and financial assistance needs

- Facilitating broad dissemination and publication of the national human rights policy;
- Facilitating broad dissemination and publication of the fourth national report and the recommendations which will follow;
- Financially supporting the roll-out of the national human rights policy;

- Supporting the national standing committee responsible for preparing reports and monitoring the implementation of recommendations under international human rights instruments;
- Supporting awareness-raising and training initiatives on human rights throughout the country;
- Supporting the implementation of the sectoral policy on justice, as well as the action plan for the implementation of any recommendations flowing from the fourth national report.

Conclusion

154. The present report reviewed the progress made and described the challenges facing the Central African Republic with regard to the realization of human rights. Through this document, the Central African Republic reaffirms its support for the universal periodic review and reiterates its readiness to receive recommendations that will enable it to improve the human rights situation in the country.
