

Update on women, peace and security in the Central African Republic October 18th 2018

The Informal Expert Group of the Security Council on Women, Peace and Security discussed the situation in the Central African Republic in November 2017 ([S/2017/1041](#)). This update summarizes relevant developments since then.

New language in decisions by the Security Council

Shortly after the last IEG meeting on CAR, the Security Council adopted **resolution 2387 extending MINUSCA’s mandate until November 15th 2018**. The resolution included **new language on women, peace and security** in the mandate of MINUSCA, namely references to gender-sensitive programming in DDRR and community violence reduction, the Joint Rapid Response Unit established to respond sexual violence, the involvement and representation of women in the work of the Special Criminal Court and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, the need for greater numbers of women in the military, civilian, and police components of the mission, and for the mission “to assist the CAR authorities’ efforts, at national and local levels, for an increased participation of political parties, civil society, and women in the peace process, in cooperation with the African Initiative and other mediation actors.” The full text of the language related to women, peace and security is excerpted in the annex.

On January 30th 2018, the Security Council adopted **resolution 2399 renewing the sanctions regime for CAR for another year. Sexual and gender-based violence remains a stand-alone designation criterion** (“individuals and entities involved in planning, directing, or committing acts involving sexual and gender-based violence in CAR”), and **new language was added** in OP 35: “*Requests* the Panel of Experts to include the necessary **gender expertise**, in line with paragraph 6 of resolution 2242 (2015), and encourages the Panel to integrate **gender as a cross-cutting issue across its investigations and reporting.**”

In the **most recent presidential statement on CAR**, adopted in July of this year, the Security Council expressed its deep concern regarding abuses and violations of human rights, “including those involving sexual and gender-based violence in conflict,” and reaffirmed its support to the African Initiative for Peace and Reconciliation in the CAR and its roadmap but underscored the need to promote the full and effective participation of women in this process.

Other updates (November 2017-October 2018)

In its current format, the **African Initiative for Peace and Reconciliation in CAR**, launched in July 2017, does not provide a role for civil society organizations, women’s groups, or victims, and participation is limited to the Presidency and the 14 armed groups. Women are not represented in the current composition of the eleven-member panel of facilitators nor do they participate as a party to the dialogue. Currently, there is only one woman out of eleven assistants supporting the all-male panel of facilitators, whose members are designated by AU Member States. The importance of women’s participation was emphasized during the visits by DPKO USG Lacroix and the AU Commissioner Chergui in April 2018, by DPKO ASG Keita in June, and a solidarity mission in August organized by UN

Women, the AU, the ICGLR, and the Office of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for the Great Lakes Region.

Women remain key mediators at the community level, assuming leadership roles in mediation and reconciliation efforts, including through informal engagement with members of non-state armed groups, particularly in Bambari, Bangassou, Batangafo, Bocaranga, and Bria. Complementary to the dialogue efforts led by the African Union, MINUSCA is supporting government-led local peace and reconciliation initiatives through **16 local committees** focused on the acceptance of new prefectural authorities, peaceful coexistence of communities, the return of displaced persons and refugees, and the free movement of people and goods. In areas where agreements were reached, implementation and monitoring mechanisms were established under the leadership of local authorities, with the involvement of women, youth and traditional leaders. For example, women were actively involved in the implementation of the peace agreement between 3R and Auto-defense force in Bambari and Bouar. From August 17th to September 7th, UN Women, UNDP, and MINUSCA organized ten workshops in Bangui and 8 provinces of the country, involving 842 participants, including 608 women, who expressed their expectations for the dialogue between the government and the armed groups. The **African Women Leaders Network** has launched a national chapter in the Central African Republic. The **national action plan on 1325** has lapsed, and the Ministry of Gender is working on updating it.

In spite of the adoption of a **gender parity law** seeking 35 percent of female representation in all decision-making bodies, women's representation does not reach that threshold in national politics and many key governance institutions. Here are some examples: 14 percent in the government (5 women out of 34 ministers); 8.5 percent in the National Assembly (12 women out of 140 deputies); 8.3 percent in the High Court of Justice; and 28.5 percent in the National Electoral Authority. On the other hand, women represent 36.8 percent of member of the the High Authority in Charge of Good Governance; 40 percent in the National Mediation Council; and 50 percent in the Constitutional Court.

The **Special Criminal Court**, mandated to try war crimes and crimes against humanity, is yet to open investigations following the adoption of its rules of procedure and evidence in May 2018. Three of its 11 magistrates are women (27 percent). The terms of reference of the **Truth, Justice, Compensation, and Reconciliation Commission** have still not been finalized by its steering committee, and the **National Commission on Human Rights** lacks an operating budget.

The **DDRR** process has a mandate to support women combatants and those associated with armed groups, and a specific budget has been allocated to address conflict-related sexual violence concerns. However, women's representation in the committees is minimal (2 out of 36 members) and their participation in pre-DDRR activities, community violence reduction programmes, and a variety of cash-for-work initiatives undertaken by the UN ranges from 6 to 25 percent. In 2017, women represented only 7 percent of the total caseload demobilized with MINUSCA's support.

The midterm report of the **Panel of Experts of the CAR Sanctions Committee**, released in July 2018, reported widespread rapes and sexual assaults in the Bossangoa area as a result of ongoing fighting involving both anti-balaka and ex-Séléka fighters. There are four individuals currently on the sanctions list that have been accused of sexual violence, but they are mostly members of the Lord's Resistance Army, rather than Séléka and anti-balaka commanders at the center of the current crisis. The Chair of the Committee is scheduled to visit CAR in October 2018.

The Independent Expert on the situation of human rights in the Central African Republic recently reported that cases of cruel and inhuman treatment by armed groups on the basis of accusations of **witchcraft** are increasing. For example, on May 5th, anti-Balaka elements under the command of Pino-

Pino are alleged to have killed eight women accused of witchcraft in Béma, in the southwest of the country.

Conflict-related sexual violence increased steadily in severity and scale in 2017, with 240 documented incidents affecting 326 victims (170 women, 141 girls, 13 men, and two boys). Since January 2018, 169 cases have been recorded, committed against 125 women, 82 girls, two men and two boys. In 2017, UNICEF and partners helped secure the release of 3419 children (including more than a thousand girls) from armed groups, with most of the forcibly-recruited girls reporting incidents of sexual abuse. This violence continues to be committed by ex-Séléka and anti-Balaka armed groups, the LRA, and the 3R group, which are present in all regions. The overwhelming majority of reported incidents were gang-rapes. For example, MSF reported that militia fighters raped a large group of women near Kiriwiri, a village in the country's northwest, on February 17th, coinciding with a surge of violence in Bossangoa and surrounding areas. The Gendarmerie of Bossangoa recorded 24 victims of this incident, and this is currently under investigation by the joint rapid response unit, with the support of MINUSCA, UNPOL and UNDP. According to the **2018 SG's report on conflict-related sexual violence**, patterns of sexual violence of an ethnic and sectarian nature, impede the mobility needed for women in CAR to undertake vital economic and livelihood activities, such as gaining access to fields and markets. Children conceived through rape are rarely accepted by society, and unsafe abortion remains a leading cause of maternal mortality. In the face of the virtual collapse of the public health system, most medical and psychosocial support services are provided by non-governmental organizations. Only 36 per cent of registered victims were able to gain access to emergency assistance within 72 hours of the incident.

Since its opening in June 2017, the **joint rapid response unit to combat sexual violence** has handled hundreds of complaints, including more than 200 cases of rape. Unfortunately, none of these cases of rape have resulted in a single indictment or trial. MINUSCA is coordinating the establishment of a national and multifunctional network for the protection of victims. The **women's prison in Bimbo** continues to lack adequate capacity, resources, and oversight to ensure safe, secure and humane conditions of imprisonment. In August 2018, the **UN Team of Experts on the Rule of Law and Sexual Violence in Conflict** visited Bangui to launch a new project aimed at strengthening accountability for conflict-related sexual violence. Additionally, the team will deploy an Expert who will provide advice to the national judicial system, including to the Special Criminal Court, on the investigation and prosecution of CRSV.

The **humanitarian situation** has not improved and remains very worrying. Armed groups are present in almost 80 percent of the territory of CAR. More than half the population of the country needs humanitarian assistance to survive (2.9 million people, representing 63 percent of the population) and only 36 percent of the funds needed for the Humanitarian Response Plan have been raised. A "Green Line" has been established by humanitarian actors to allow the population to report protection incidents, and to provide referral to health, legal and psychosocial services, and has received 9,300 alerts between January and August 2018, and women and girls are the most affected by protection incidents, especially among the 621,000 internally displaced population. The Central African Republic has the **second highest rate of maternal mortality in the world**, and the **second highest rate of child marriage in the world**, too. In June, the National Committee to Curb Traditional Practices Harmful to the Health of Women and Girls was replaced by a National Technical Committee to Combat Gender-Based Violence, Harmful Traditional Practices, and Child Marriage, broadening its scope. Women's literacy rate only reaches 27 percent (compared to 49 percent for men). The continued insecurity and multiplication of hotspots has led to decreased productivity in the agricultural sector, which disproportionately affects women's economic situation.

An **independent strategic review of MINUSCA** was conducted from June until September 2018. A multidisciplinary team of experts had meetings and consultations with women leaders and women civil society organizations to understand the opportunities and challenges in implementing the women, peace

and security agenda in CAR. The review noted that some of policies implemented by the mission leadership to address **sexual exploitation and abuse** have unintentionally resulted in troops no longer engaging in direct community engagement and outreach.

In this year's budget, the post of **senior gender advisor in MINUSCA** was **reclassified** to a higher level (P5) and placed in the office of the SRSG, after being downgraded last year. Women constitute 25 percent of civilian personnel, 3 percent of the military component, and 8 percent of the police component.

Recommendations

At the meeting of the Informal Experts Group and in subsequent meetings of the Security Council, Council members should request information from the UN on: current plans to ensure better results for women's participation and representation in the 2020-2021 elections; what specific measures link women at local level with the national processes (African Initiative) and local conflict resolution, and would ensure that their concerns and needs are included in a comprehensive peace agreement; what is the existing capacity and expertise on gender equality, women, peace and security, and conflict-related sexual violence in both MINUSCA and the UN Country Team; what specific measures are being taken to ensure a protective environment that enables women's full participation in the peace process and upcoming elections, including to identify and respond to threats, intimidation, and physical attacks targeted at women, such as sexual and gender-based violence; and what is the mission doing to address the lack of progress in implementing the gender parity strategy of the Secretary-General;

In upcoming negotiations for a new resolution about the situation in CAR, including to renew MINUSCA's mandate, the Security Council should retain all the references related to Women, Peace and Security, as detailed in the annex. However, they should strengthen the language to express alarm over the lack of women's representation and influence in national decision-making structures and the African Initiative, dial up the call for women to be included in UN-supported elections, national reconciliation, DDRR, SSR (for example as part of any support to the implementation of the National Strategy on SSR), CVR, transitional justice, implementation and monitoring of the Libreville roadmap and African Initiative, and the National Recovery and Peacebuilding Plan. The Council could also call on the government and the international community to issue a strong and public message directed to the Séléka and anti-Balaka leaders, committing to hold perpetrators of sexual violence accountable, without exception, and reminding them of the consequences of their actions -from ongoing national and international investigations to potential sanctions. The government of CAR should be encouraged to update its National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security.

The IEG co-chairs could request the chair of the sanctions committee to provide an informal update on implementation of resolution 2399.

Other recommendations highlighted in previous meetings of the IEG and still relevant include:

- The government and non-state armed actors to agree on and implement structured, time-bound commitments to prevent and respond to these violations, including the development of a comprehensive national strategy on sexual and gender-based violence.
- Member States to provide sustainable support to the UMIRR and the Special Criminal Court, and the government to provide the means necessary, including a dedicated budget, to facilitate the operations of the joint rapid intervention unit on sexual violence, working in collaboration with the prosecutor of the special criminal court, and prioritizing the provision of adequate provision for victims and witnesses.
- MINUSCA to work with national authorities to start to identify ways of addressing the violations of human rights of individuals accused of witchcraft.

ANNEX: Relevant excerpts on gender equality in Resolution 2387 (2017) extending MINUSCA's mandate for a year

“Emphasizing that any sustainable solution to the crisis in the CAR should be CAR-owned, including the political process, and should prioritize reconciliation of the Central African people, through an inclusive process that involves men and women of all social, economic, political, religious and ethnic backgrounds, including, those displaced by the crisis,

“Condemning in the strongest terms incitement to ethnic and religious hatred and violence and the multiple violations of international humanitarian law and the widespread human rights violations and abuses, including sexual and gender-based violence, committed notably by both ex-Seleka and anti-Balaka elements, as well as other militia groups, as well as the targeting of civilians from specific communities,

“Welcoming the commitment of the Secretary-General to enforce strictly his zero-tolerance policy on sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA), *noting* the various measures taken by MINUSCA and troop- and police-contributing countries to combat SEA, which has led to a reduction in reported cases, but still *expressing* grave concern over numerous allegations of SEA reportedly committed by peacekeepers in the CAR, as well as by non-United Nations forces, stressing the urgent need for troop- and police-contributing countries and, as appropriate, MINUSCA, to promptly investigate those allegations in a credible and transparent manner and for those responsible for such criminal offences or misconduct to be held to account, and further stressing the need to prevent such exploitation and abuse and to improve how these allegations are addressed in line with resolution 2272 (2016),

“Recalling the need for an inclusive, gender-sensitive and effective disarmament, demobilization and reintegration process, as well as repatriation in the case of foreign fighters, including children formerly associated with armed forces and groups, while respecting the need to fight against impunity, *“Recalling* its resolutions on the protection of civilians in armed conflict, including 2286 (2016) and 1894 (2009); its resolutions on Children and Armed Conflict including 2225 (2015) and its resolutions on Women, Peace and Security including 2106 (2013) and 2242 (2015), and *calling upon* all parties in the CAR to engage with the Special Representative on Children and Armed Conflict and the Special Representative on Sexual Violence in Conflict,

“Expressing its concern that children have continued to be victims of abuses committed by armed elements of the ex-Séléka and anti-Balaka as well as other armed groups including the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA), and that women and girls continue to be violently targeted and victims of sexual and gender-based violence in the CAR,

“10. Recalls the crucial role of civil society in the peace and reconciliation process to ensure that the comprehensive political agreement addresses the root causes of the conflict and *further encourages* the full and effective participation of women in this process;

“12. Encourages the submission by Member States of listing requests to the Committee established by paragraph 57 of resolution 2127 (2013), including detailed evidentiary support for each request, of individuals and entities engaging in or providing support for acts that undermine the peace, stability or security of the CAR, including acts that threaten or impede the political process, or the stabilization and reconciliation process, or that fuel violence;

“14. Calls on the CAR Authorities to implement the National Security Policy and the National Strategy on SSR, in order to put in place professional, ethnically representative and regionally balanced national defence and internal security forces, including through the adoption and implementation of appropriate

vetting procedures of all defence and security personnel, including human rights vetting, as well as measures to absorb elements of armed groups meeting rigorous eligibility and vetting criteria, and requests the Secretary-General to report to the Council on progress taken in this regard as part of his regular reporting cycle;

“27. *Urges* all parties to armed conflict in the CAR, including ex-Séléka and anti-Balaka elements, to end all violations and abuses committed against children, in violation of applicable international law, including those involving their recruitment and use, rape and sexual violence, killing and maiming, abductions and attacks on schools and hospitals and further calls upon the CAR authorities to swiftly investigate alleged violations and abuses in order to hold perpetrators accountable and to ensure that those responsible for such violations and abuses are excluded from the security sector;

“29. *Calls upon* all parties to armed conflict in the CAR, including ex-Séléka and anti-Balaka elements, to end sexual and gender-based violence, and further calls upon the CAR Authorities to swiftly investigate alleged abuses in order to hold perpetrators accountable, and to develop a structured and comprehensive framework to address sexual violence in conflict, in line with resolutions 1960 (2010) and 2106 (2013), to ensure that those responsible for such crimes are excluded from the security sector and prosecuted, and to facilitate immediate access for victims of sexual violence to available services;

“42. *Decides* that the mandate of MINUSCA shall include the following priority tasks:

(a) Protection of civilians

(iii) To provide specific protection for women and children affected by armed conflict, including through the deployment of Child Protection Advisers, Women Protection Advisers and Gender Advisers;

(b) Good offices and support to the peace process, including national reconciliation, social cohesion and transitional justice

(ii) To assist the CAR authorities’ efforts, at national and local levels, for an increased participation of political parties, civil society, and women to the peace process, in cooperation with the African Initiative and other mediation actors;

(iii) To provide good offices and technical expertise in support of efforts to address the root causes of conflict, in particular a greater focus on national reconciliation and local conflict resolution, working with relevant regional and local bodies and religious leaders, while ensuring the full and effective participation of women in line with the CAR action plan on women, peace and security, and drawing upon integrated information and analysis from the United Nations system in-country;

(iv) To support efforts of the CAR authorities to address transitional justice as part of the peace and reconciliation process, and marginalization and local grievances, including through dialogue with the armed groups, civil society leaders including women and youth representatives, and by assisting national, prefectural and local authorities to foster confidence among communities;

“43. *Further authorises* MINUSCA to pursue the following tasks of its mandate, bearing in mind that these tasks as well as those in paragraph 42 above are mutually reinforcing:

(b) Security Sector Reform

(iv) To support the Government of the CAR in developing an incentive structure for training of police and gendarmerie and for the selection, recruitment, vetting and training of police and gendarmerie elements, with the support of donors and the United Nations country team, taking into account the need to recruit women, and in full compliance with the United Nations human rights due diligence policy;

(c) Disarmament, Demobilization, Reintegration and Repatriation

(i) To support the CAR Authorities in developing and implementing an inclusive and progressive programme for the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration and, in case of foreign elements, repatriation, of members of armed groups, based on the Principles of disarmament, demobilization, reintegration repatriation and integration into the Uniformed Corps, signed at the Bangui Forum on

10 May 2015, while paying specific attention to the needs of children associated with armed forces and groups and the need to prevent re-recruitment, including through the implementation of the disarmament, demobilization, reintegration repatriation pilot project and the implementation of other disarmament, demobilization, reintegration repatriation projects, including gender-sensitive programmes, with the aim to disarm, demobilize and reintegrate as well as, in coordination with EUTM, the United Nations Country Teams and other relevant partners, to integrate eligible and vetted armed groups elements in security forces, as an incentive to armed groups to remain engaged in the political process and in preparation for the national disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration programme;

(ii) To support the CAR Authorities and relevant civil society organizations in developing and implementing CVR programmes, including gender-sensitive programmes, for members of armed groups non-eligible for participation in the national disarmament, demobilization, reintegration and repatriation programme, in cooperation with development partners and together with communities of return in line with the priorities highlighted in the RCPCA;

(d) Promotion and protection of human rights

(ii) To monitor, help investigate and ensure reporting on violations and abuses committed against children and women, including rape and other forms of sexual violence in armed conflict, in connection with the Joint Rapid Response Unit within the gendarmerie and the police established to respond to sexual violence (UMIRR);

(e) Support for national and international justice, the fight against impunity, and the rule of law

(xi) Without prejudice to the primary responsibility of the CAR Authorities, to support the restoration and maintenance of public safety and the rule of law, including through apprehending and handing over to the CAR Authorities, consistent with international law, those in the country responsible for crimes involving serious human rights violations and abuses and serious violations of international humanitarian law, including sexual violence in conflict, so that they can be brought to justice, and through cooperation with States of the region, as well as the ICC in cases of crimes falling within its jurisdiction;

“51. *Requests* MINUSCA to take fully into account gender mainstreaming as a cross-cutting issue throughout its mandate and to assist the CAR Authorities in ensuring the full and effective participation, involvement and representation of women in all spheres and at all levels, including in stabilization activities, transitional justice, the work of the SCC and of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, security sector reform, disarmament, demobilization and reintegration, and disarmament, demobilization, reintegration and repatriation processes, as well as in the national political dialogue and electoral processes, through, inter alia, the provision of gender advisers, *further requests* enhanced reporting by MINUSCA to the Council on this issue, and *encourages* the UN Secretariat, in collaboration with Member States, to engage greater numbers of women in the military, police and civilian components of the mission with full respect for the principle of equitable geographical distribution, in conformity with article 101, paragraph 3, of the United Nations Charter;

“52. *Recalls* its Presidential Statement [S/PRST/2015/22](#) and its resolution 2272 (2016) and requests the Secretary-General to take all necessary measures to ensure full compliance of MINUSCA with the United Nations zero tolerance policy on sexual exploitation and abuse and to ensure that all personnel of the mission are vetted for history of sexual misconduct in the service with the United Nations and to keep the Council informed through his reports to the Council about the Mission’s progress in this regard, including by reporting on the start, agreed deadlines and outcomes of 2272 reviews, and urges troop- and police-contributing countries to take appropriate preventative action including predeployment awareness training, and to ensure full accountability in cases of such conduct involving their personnel;