



## Security Council

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### Letter dated 15 June 2021 from the Secretary-General addressed to the President of the Security Council

In paragraph 13 of its resolution [2536 \(2020\)](#), the Security Council requested that I provide a further update on progress achieved by the authorities of the Central African Republic on the key benchmarks established in its presidential statement of 9 April 2019 ([S/PRST/2019/3](#)). The benchmarks serve as a basis for the Council to assess the contribution and relevance of the arms embargo in supporting the relevant aspects of the security sector reform process, the disarmament, demobilization, reintegration and repatriation process, and the management of weapons and ammunition.

Since my letter dated 29 June 2020 ([S/2020/622](#)), the Government of the Central African Republic,<sup>1</sup> neighbouring States and regional organizations<sup>2</sup> have continued to call for the lifting of the arms embargo on the Government. These entities consider that the arms embargo has prevented the arming of the Armed Forces of the Central African Republic while it has favoured the armed groups that the entities have assessed to be better armed than the national armed forces.

Following the letter, the Council further eased the arms embargo measures on the Government. In its resolution [2536 \(2020\)](#), the Council decided that the arms embargo approval process should no longer apply to supplies to the Government of rocket-propelled grenades and ammunition specially designed for those weapons or to the provision of related assistance to the country's security forces, including State civilian law enforcement institutions. Such transfers would only need to be notified in advance to the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution [2127 \(2013\)](#) concerning the Central African Republic. These adjustments are in addition to the five other modifications to the arms embargo measures made by the Council between 30 June 2019 and 30 June 2020.

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<sup>1</sup> On 21 January 2021, during a videoconference meeting of the Security Council, the Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Central African Republic reiterated her country's call for the lifting of the arms embargo.

<sup>2</sup> See the communiqué of the eighteenth session of Heads of State and Government of the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS) dated 27 November 2020 and the final communiqué of the twentieth session of Heads of State and Government of ECCAS dated 26 December 2020, as well as the mini-summit communiqué of the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region dated 29 January 2021, by which the Chairpersons of ECCAS and the Conference were mandated to make the necessary démarches with the Security Council to lift the embargo. In a communiqué dated 20 April 2021, the mini-summit leaders of the Conference reaffirmed the mandate for the Chairpersons of ECCAS and the Conference to request the Council to lift the arms embargo.



The Committee continues to play an essential role in the management of exemption provisions to the arms embargo. Since the imposition of the embargo on 5 December 2013, the Government has submitted a total of 22 exemption requests and 21 notifications. The Committee has received a total of 73 exemption requests and 120 notifications from Member States and international organizations, including the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA), the United Nations Development Programme and the European Union. To date, the Committee has approved all exemption requests submitted under the framework of the arms embargo. This brings the total number of weapons and ammunition approved by or notified to the Committee since 2015 to 18,206 weapons and 29,354,629 rounds of ammunition.<sup>3</sup> The national armed forces are the primary recipient of the weapons and ammunition, followed by the internal security forces (police and gendarmerie). I note that, in its most recent report to the Committee (S/2021/569), the Panel of Experts on the Central African Republic highlighted that certain deliveries of arms and ammunition to the Government might not have conformed to the provisions of the arms embargo, including its exemption provisions.

In the following section, I provide an update on the progress made against the five key benchmarks since my letter dated 29 June 2020. The progress achieved by the national authorities should be assessed in the context of the political and security developments in the country as well as of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic.

These include the implementation of the Political Agreement for Peace and Reconciliation in the Central African Republic of 6 February 2019 (see S/2019/145, annex), the exacerbation of political tensions, and the deterioration of the security situation surrounding the presidential and legislative elections with the surge in violence by the armed groups affiliated with the Coalition des patriotes pour le changement, followed by offensive operations conducted by the national armed forces with the assistance of bilaterally deployed and other security personnel.<sup>4</sup>

### **Update on progress achieved on benchmark A**

This benchmark relates to the effective implementation by the Government of the national disarmament, demobilization, reintegration and repatriation programme within sustainable budgetary resources, and in particular the socioeconomic reintegration of former members of armed groups and the integration of vetted former members of armed groups into all uniformed personnel.<sup>5</sup>

The unit responsible for the implementation of the national programme and MINUSCA has been monitoring the corrective measures – approved by the Strategic Committee of Disarmament, Demobilization, Reintegration and Repatriation, Security Sector Reform and National Reconciliation on 20 December 2019 – in order to strictly respect the eligibility criteria for participants in the programme, which include a ratio of 90 per cent for participants entering the programme with weapons of war and 10 per cent for those entering with grenades and ammunition. The ratio requirement has generally been respected in the disarmament and demobilization operations, except in the case of the ad hoc operation in the camp of the Regiment for the Operational Defence of the Territory in Bangui.

<sup>3</sup> This represents an increase of 3,503 weapons and 11,922,629 additional rounds of ammunition since June 2020 (see S/2020/622).

<sup>4</sup> See S/2020/994, S/2021/146 and S/2021/571.

<sup>5</sup> See S/2020/622 for the parameters of the programme, including the number of ex-combatants and children to be disarmed, demobilized and repatriated, and the required budget and funding sources.

Since the official launch of the programme in December 2018, a total of 3,023 combatants (out of an initially projected caseload of 5,000 national combatants established in the national programme document of 2017), including 199 women, have been disarmed and demobilized. As of 1 June 2021, 2,307 weapons of war (individual and collective types of weapons of war), 1,728 grenades and other unexploded ordnance, and 113,802 rounds of ammunition were recorded as collected during this process. Since my previous letter, the operations carried out in the centre-east (in Ndélé, from June to July 2020, and in Bria, Kaga Bandoro and Birao, from September to November 2020) resulted in a total of 1,209 combatants, including 63 women, being disarmed and demobilized. Some 1,133 weapons of war, 244 grenades and other unexploded ordnance, and 26,459 rounds of ammunition were also collected.

The operations in the east were progressing according to the agreed schedule, with a considerable mobilization of efforts by the unit responsible for the implementation of the national programme, but had stalled owing to the outbreak of electoral violence at the end of 2020. After December 2020, disarmament, demobilization, reintegration and repatriation operations continued, with a focus on armed groups not affiliated with the Coalition des patriotes pour le changement. In that context, from February to March 2021, in Bangui, a total of 329 combatants, including 54 women, were disarmed and demobilized, and 250 weapons of war, 222 grenades and other unexploded ordnance, and 16,356 rounds of ammunition were collected. In May 2021, operations were conducted in Kaga Bandoro and Mbrès in the central region, resulting in 162 combatants, including 2 women, being disarmed and demobilized. A total of 140 weapons of war, 3,450 rounds of ammunitions and 23 rockets were also collected.

All demobilized ex-combatants were screened and received the three-month reinsertion allowance with the support of MINUSCA. However, the start of the socioeconomic reintegration activities has been delayed owing to a variety of factors, including the pandemic and challenges in the process for selecting ex-combatants for the national armed forces or joint security units. On 23 December 2020, the Reintegration of Ex-combatants Project<sup>6</sup> was launched in Ndélé with the support of the International Organization for Migration (IOM) as an implementing partner. In this context, 222 ex-combatants (out of 230<sup>7</sup>), including 7 women, are currently enrolled in vocational training. The socioeconomic reintegration programme for ex-combatants in Birao, Bria and Kaga Bandoro is expected to commence in June or July 2021. In addition, IOM and the Agency for Technical Cooperation and Development (an international non-governmental organization) have commenced the implementation of the Project's community support component in areas where the reinsertion and reintegration of ex-combatants were ongoing or planned. IOM has also completed the socioeconomic reintegration activities for 204 ex-combatants in the Paoua region, and the Agency has concluded the project in the Bouar area that supported the socioeconomic reintegration of 476 ex-combatants in the Nana Mambéré region.

In my letter dated 29 June 2020, I reported that the national disarmament, demobilization, reintegration and repatriation programme was almost fully funded with support from international donors,<sup>8</sup> but that the slower-than-anticipated pace of the programme had had a significant impact on resources. I welcome the decision of the United States of America to extend its grant until 31 March 2022 and to allocate an additional \$500,000 to the programme. I am also grateful to the World Bank for

<sup>6</sup> Funded by the World Bank and implemented by the unit responsible for the implementation of the national programme through its implementing partners the International Organization for Migration and the Agency for Technical Cooperation and Development.

<sup>7</sup> Eight registered but failed to attend.

<sup>8</sup> The Economic Community of Central African States, the World Bank, the United States of America, France, MINUSCA.

expressing its readiness to provide additional funding for the reintegration programme, if needed. I note that the national authorities have also taken measures to address a possible funding gap in relation to the support provided previously by the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS). I reiterate my call upon the international partners of the Central African Republic to support this important programme.

The efficacy of the national programme is contingent upon the full engagement of the armed groups, in accordance with their commitments to the Political Agreement and the eligibility criteria of the programme. Some of the armed groups, however, have attempted to limit the disarmament and demobilization of their combatants to those destined for the joint security units.

The establishment of the joint security units in the three defence zones, if successful, could serve as an important factor in the sustainability of the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration process, as well as a key incentive for the armed groups to remain engaged in the process. However, there have been some setbacks in relation to the operations of the joint security units in the western zone, including reports of the desertions of a significant number of elements with their weapons, issues related to internal cohesion, command and control, insufficient sustainment, and misconduct.<sup>9</sup> The launch of the joint unit in Ndélé is still pending because of delays in the construction of the training site, electoral violence, and incomplete lists of beneficiaries from the armed groups, preventing the disarmament and demobilization of ex-combatants in Ndélé, Birao and Bria who are waiting to join the unit.

As previously reported, in addition to the national disarmament, demobilization, reintegration, and repatriation programme, the Government has also established a community violence reduction programme, which is supported by MINUSCA in operational partnership with the United Nations Office for Project Services and continues to be implemented in Bangui, Bangassou, Bossangoa, Bouar, Bria and Kaga Bandoro. As at 1 June 2021, 3,652 beneficiaries, including 1,525 women, had already taken part in vocational training courses, income-generating activities and community projects.

Furthermore, since July 2020, an additional 63 weapons of war, 1,393 artisanal weapons, 143 rounds of ammunition and 20 unexploded ordnances have been collected.

Since the pilot disarmament, demobilization and reintegration programme started in 2018, under which 232 ex-combatants, including 6 women, were integrated into the national armed forces (see [S/2019/609](#)), there has been further progress on the integration of vetted former armed group members into the national armed forces and internal security forces. On 9 September 2020, the Prime Minister of the Central African Republic issued an order establishing an integration technical committee to operationalize integration-related activities. This led to the identification of 292 ex-combatants, including 15 women, for integration into the national armed forces and internal security forces. On 11 November 2020, these ex-combatants joined the military training centres, the police, and gendarmerie academies. However, the verification of the armed group affiliation of the ex-combatants, as well as of those candidates selected for the newly formed seventh infantry battalion, remains challenging because of the lack of access to the complete list of armed group members. Moreover, MINUSCA estimates that more than 400 ex-combatants are present in the training centres, a figure which exceeds the Government's 10 per cent quota of former armed groups members for integration into the national armed forces and internal security forces.

<sup>9</sup> See [S/2020/994](#), [S/2021/146](#) and [S/2021/571](#).

No progress was registered in the establishment of a commission on the harmonization of ranks to facilitate the reintegration of ex-combatants and the reinsertion of former national armed forces personnel who had joined the armed groups. The decree establishing the joint commission for the harmonization of ranks, as stipulated in the Political Agreement, has yet to be adopted.

The guarantors of the Political Agreement (the African Union and ECCAS) and other international partners continued their efforts to ensure that the armed group signatories to the Agreement continued to adhere thereto. The Consultative Follow-up Committee on Disarmament, Demobilization, Reintegration and Repatriation held its twenty-first session on 24 July 2020, with the participation of MINUSCA and other international partners. At the meeting, the armed groups were represented mainly by junior members who had loose ties to the group leaders and lacked the authority or capacity to help enforce the implementation of priority action points.

### **Update on progress achieved on benchmark B**

In the planning document produced by the Government in 2019 to project its needs for weapons and ammunition storage and management, it estimated that, by 2023, it would need 295 facilities for the storage of 28,826 categories of weapons and at least 9,492,562 rounds of ammunition, as well as 1,180 trained and vetted personnel responsible for their storage and management.

The Government made gradual progress on increasing adequate storage and management capacity and rehabilitating storage facilities. Through the Mine Action Service, MINUSCA handed over the regional ammunition depot in Bouar, which it had built for the national authorities in November 2020. The depot remains unused, however, as the Ministry of Defence has yet to approve the required technical document for its operationalization. The Mine Action Service/MINUSCA has provided temporary storage facilities for the weapons of the joint security units, although the unit in Bouar has been storing weapons in Camp Leclerc of the national armed forces rather than at the temporary storage facility provided by the Mine Action Service/MINUSCA.

In its assistance to the Government, from July 2020 to March 2021, the Mine Action Service/MINUSCA trained 18 national armed forces and internal security forces officers on weapons and ammunition management and explosives ordnance disposal. However, a related Mine Action Service/MINUSCA project to support the national armed forces in destroying obsolete weapons and ammunition has been suspended since August 2020 owing to the seizure by the authorities of imported explosives for the training.<sup>10</sup> MINUSCA police also provided day-to-day monitoring, mentoring and advice to the internal security forces. Since 2014, more than 300 members of the national armed forces and internal security forces have been trained in weapons and ammunition management, but only 8 per cent of the storage facilities are staffed with trained personnel. It is important to utilize trained personnel in these specialized functions, as it would help the country to implement the international standards and good practices related to weapons and ammunition management. Therefore, it is crucial for the national authorities to better define annual training and deployment plans of the national armed forces and internal security forces relative to the number of available storage facilities in order to ensure the effective use of trained personnel.

In my letters dated 26 July 2019 ([S/2019/609](#)) and 29 June 2020, I indicated that the national authorities had decided to adopt a standardized procedure across all defence and internal security forces for the authorization of personnel dedicated to

<sup>10</sup> See [S/2020/622](#), [S/2021/146](#), paragraph 81, and [S/2021/571](#).

the management of weapons and ammunition, which involves a vetting process. To date, the Government has yet to establish such a procedure.

There is also scope for the authorities to establish good practices in weapons and ammunition management, in particular in defining the roles and responsibilities of relevant defence and security staff in the management and control of weapons and ammunition.

### **Update on progress achieved on benchmark C**

This benchmark relates to the finalization by the Government of an arms registration and management protocol for weapons delivered to its national armed forces and internal security forces, and to the establishment of a system of individual receipt of weapons and of a system for applying individual accountability measures in case of the loss, theft or diversion of weapons.

The national authorities have applied the technical guidelines for the verification of weapons and ammunition entering the country notified to or approved by the Committee. The technical guidelines have been in use since 2019 and remain the document of reference until the publication of the decree on transfers, as contemplated in the law on the general regime for conventional weapons and their component parts and ammunition in the Central African Republic,<sup>11</sup> which was promulgated by the President of the Central African Republic, Faustin Archange Touadera, on 7 August 2020. Since my letter dated 29 June 2020, the Government has yet to develop an arms registration and management protocol for weapons delivered to its national armed forces and internal security forces or to establish a system for the individual receipt of weapons and a system for applying individual accountability. Furthermore, the Government has not consistently facilitated access for the Panel of Experts and MINUSCA to the notified and exempted arms and related lethal equipment at the time of their import and before their transfer to the end user.

### **Update on progress achieved on benchmark D**

This benchmark relates to the operationalization of the National Commission to Combat the Proliferation of Small Arms and Light Weapons (Commission nationale de lutte contre la prolifération des armes légères et de petit calibre), which is the primary institution responsible for the implementation of the national action plan on small arms and light weapons.

In the past year, the Commission continued to implement some of the activities set out in the national action plan.<sup>12</sup>

In this regard, in September 2020, within the framework of the Africa Amnesty Month flagship initiative of the African Union,<sup>13</sup> the Commission carried out a one-month project entitled “Silencing the Guns”<sup>14</sup> to raise awareness in the Central African Republic about issues related to small arms and light weapons.

In 2021, the Commission has been allocated 148,000,000 CFA francs (\$276,377) from the national budget to ensure the implementation of the national action plan.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>11</sup> *Loi N° 20.021 sur le régime général des armes classiques, leurs pièces, composantes, ainsi que de leurs munitions en République Centrafricaine.*

<sup>12</sup> The national action plan was adopted at the plenary assembly of the Commission in July 2019 and subsequently endorsed by the President of the Central African Republic.

<sup>13</sup> See <https://au.int/en/africa-amnesty-month> and [www.un.org/press/en/2020/dc3829.doc.htm](https://www.un.org/press/en/2020/dc3829.doc.htm).

<sup>14</sup> See <https://au.int/en/flagships/silencing-guns-2020>.

<sup>15</sup> In 2020, the Commission was allocated 200,000,000 CFA francs (\$373,134).

The allocated amount covers only the operational office costs and the payment of salaries, and not the costs for operational activities outlined in the national action plan.

In my letter dated 29 June 2020, I stressed that the development of weapons marking and tracing capacity was a key element of the national action plan. The Commission has yet to launch the marking process in line with its 2021 priority work plan, starting with State-owned weapons. The Government, through the amnesty project of the African Union, has equipped the Commission with a computer server and electronic registration software for weapons. I encourage the Government to proceed with developing the national marking format or the national plan and standards for the marking and tracing of State-owned weapons. Two marking machines and a number of record-keeping kits were delivered by UNODC in June, and UNODC will hold training on weapons marking for the national armed forces and internal security forces personnel in Bangui in July. In addition, the Executive Secretary of the Commission exchanged ideas with regional States on possible software solutions to improve the storage, accounting and record-keeping of seized firearms at the meeting of the Global Firearms Programme organized by UNODC from 27 to 30 April 2021 in Dakar.

On 8 July 2020, the National Assembly took an important step in passing the law on the general regime for conventional weapons and their component parts and ammunition in the Central African Republic. The law, once implemented, will be an important aspect of the effort to combat illicit arms trafficking in the country and subregion.

It will also facilitate the implementation of the Central African Convention for the Control of Small Arms and Light Weapons, Their Ammunition and all Parts and Components That Can Be Used for their Manufacture, Repair and Assembly (Kinshasa Convention), as well as the Nairobi Protocol for the Prevention, Control and Reduction of Small Arms and Light Weapons in the Great Lakes Region and the Horn of Africa.<sup>16</sup> The international community's support will be crucial in assisting the national authorities to implement the new law. MINUSCA, including the Mine Action Service, and UNODC will continue to support the Central African Republic in this regard.

On 26 February 2021, the President of the Central African Republic established, by decree, a committee for the coordination of mechanisms for the control and management of arms and ammunition in the country. The committee is a technical consultative body that will bring together national structures and institutions with the support of international partners.<sup>17</sup> It will be chaired by the Commission.

#### **Update on progress achieved on benchmark E**

The draft protocol on the collection, destruction, or transfer to the national armed forces and internal security forces of surplus, unregistered or illicitly held weapons and ammunition seized by the authorities is ready and is being prepared for approval by the committee for the coordination of mechanisms for the control and management of arms and ammunition. As I stated in my letter dated 29 June 2020,

<sup>16</sup> The Central African Republic is a party to the Kinshasa Convention and the Nairobi Protocol.

<sup>17</sup> The main duties of the committee will consist of the application of best practices to monitor and manage weapons and ammunition and other related material in accordance with international small arms monitoring standards and the International Ammunition Technical Guidelines; the promotion of training operators and related agents in weapons and ammunition management, and physical security and stockpile management; the implementation of permanent operational procedures for the collection, seizure, confiscation and disposal of weapons and ammunition; the supervision of marking and registration operations and the creation of (sectoral) databases for the destruction of obsolete weapons, ammunition and explosives; the preparation of periodic reports on the management of weapons and ammunition and other related material; and the contribution to country reports on weapons and ammunition monitoring and management in the Central African Republic.



administrative practices have been put in place, including in the context of judicial proceedings, to manage the seizure, collection, destruction or transfer of weapons. In the case of seizures by the national armed forces, the administrative procedure includes the transmission of a report to the Chief of Defence Staff, followed by the registration of the weapons at the central armoury before they are returned to the unit that seized them and placed under the responsibility of the armourer.

At the regional level, in July 2020, Cameroon and the Central African Republic held their second session of the subcommittee on defence and security and the subcommittee on borders. The discussions were focused on cross-border criminality, including trafficking in arms and wildlife products.

The two countries have also committed to strengthening bilateral cooperation through increased information-sharing and through capacity-building of the border control agencies. With regard to cooperation with the Congo, the Central African Republic has planned to deploy a mixed technical mission along their shared border to facilitate its delimitation and demarcation as soon as the COVID-19 situation allows. Further to the increase of armed incidents at the border between the Central African Republic and Chad in May, both Governments issued a joint communiqué dated 1 June in which they committed to reinforcing their bilateral cooperation in accordance with the conclusions of the most recent joint mixed commission held in N'Djamena in 2019. In the context of the tripartite force composed of the armed forces of the Central African Republic, Chad and the Sudan, the Central African Republic maintained a deployment of approximately 100 members of the national armed forces in Am Dafok, the Sudan, to enhance security in the tri-border area.

In addition, the National Commission to Combat the Proliferation of Small Arms and Light Weapons continued to work with UNODC to strengthen the legislative framework for combating the illicit trafficking of weapons in the country.

## **Conclusion**

The Government has continued to make some progress in the implementation of the benchmarks, with the support of MINUSCA and other regional and international partners.

Further progress is needed, in particular in implementing the national disarmament, demobilization, reintegration and repatriation programme and in operating an effective weapons and ammunition management system. The continued collaboration of the Government with MINUSCA and its international partners will be critical to further progress in accordance with the relevant national strategic frameworks. The effective implementation of the programme will require the implementation of the Political Agreement by all signatories. It is critical that the armed groups fulfil their commitments in the Agreement and fully participate in the programme. In this regard, I once again urge all parties in the Central African Republic to heed my call for a global ceasefire and return to full implementation of the Agreement.

To date, the responsiveness of the Security Council in adjusting the arms embargo was an important affirmation of the progress achieved by the Government. In this respect, I encourage the national authorities to remain committed to abiding by the requirements of the arms embargo and implementing the established key benchmarks. The Committee established pursuant to resolution [2127 \(2013\)](#) concerning the Central African Republic and the Panel of Experts have important roles to play in identifying and designating those who violate the embargo. In this connection, I note that, in August 2020, the Committee placed an individual involved in arms trafficking on its sanctions list. I urge the Government and its neighbouring States to continue their regional cooperation in order to counter cross-border arms trafficking.