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### Review and implementation of the Concluding Document of the Twelfth Special Session of the General Assembly

## Regional confidence-building measures: activities of the United Nations Standing Advisory Committee on Security Questions in Central Africa

### Report of the Secretary-General

#### *Summary*

During the reporting period, the United Nations Standing Advisory Committee on Security Questions in Central Africa held its fiftieth and fifty-first meetings, in Malabo, from 2 to 4 December 2020, and Bujumbura, Burundi, from 24 to 28 May 2021, respectively. As the secretariat to the Committee, the United Nations Regional Office for Central Africa (UNOCA) supported the organization of those meetings. Owing to the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, the fiftieth meeting of the Committee was held in a hybrid format, with the Bureau and the secretariat present in Malabo and the other participants joining virtually. The visit by the Bureau to the Central African Republic, initially planned for March 2020, took place in April 2021.

The two meetings provided member States with an opportunity to review key developments in the subregion relating to peace and security, discuss responses to ongoing challenges and identify new threats to regional peace and stability. The Committee made recommendations on how to overcome those challenges.

The Committee welcomed the completion of the institutional reform process of the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS). Member States called for strengthening cooperation between international and regional organizations in Central and West Africa, including within the framework of the Lomé Declaration on Peace, Security, Stability and the Fight against Terrorism and Violent Extremism, adopted at the first joint ECCAS-Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) summit of Heads of State and Government, held in July 2018.

At the fiftieth meeting, experts held a thematic debate on the fight against COVID-19 and its impact on peace and security in Central Africa. The Committee adopted a ministerial declaration calling on Member States and international partners to assist the ECCAS Commission in furthering the implementation of the COVID-19

\* [A/76/150](#).



regional response strategy for Central Africa. The Committee also adopted a ministerial declaration on democratic and peaceful elections as a means of strengthening stability and achieving the Sustainable Development Goals in Central Africa. At the fifty-first meeting, experts held a thematic debate on the management of elections in Central Africa. The Committee recommended that Member States, with the support of ECCAS and UNOCA, take all necessary measures to develop a subregional protocol on the management of elections in Central Africa, in accordance with the declaration on democratic and peaceful elections adopted in Malabo.

The Committee remains concerned by the persistence of activities by illegal armed groups in several countries of the subregion, including the use of illicit trafficking in natural resources to fund those groups and the alleged ties between some of those groups and international terrorist networks.

The Committee reaffirmed its commitment to the control of arms in the subregion, including through 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), to which eight members of the Committee are parties.

The Committee recalled the key role played by women in peace and security and reiterated its commitment to promoting the greater participation of women in political and peace processes, including through the adoption and implementation of national action plans pursuant to Security Council resolution [1325 \(2000\)](#).

The fifty-second meeting of the Committee will be held in Libreville in 2021.

## I. Introduction

1. In its resolution [75/79](#) entitled “Regional confidence-building measures: activities of the United Nations Standing Advisory Committee on Security Questions in Central Africa”, the General Assembly welcomed and encouraged the initiative of the States members of the Standing Advisory Committee to further develop collaboration and synergies with the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS), in particular the Commission for Defence and Security, including by means of closed meetings, with a view to promoting the implementation of the regional strategy for combating terrorism and the trafficking in small arms and light weapons in Central Africa adopted by the Committee. The General Assembly invited the Committee and ECCAS to initiate discussions on the relationship between the two entities in the light of the institutional reform of ECCAS.
2. In the same resolution, the General Assembly also expressed its satisfaction to the Secretary-General for his support to the Committee, and its appreciation for the role played by the United Nations Regional Office for Central Africa (UNOCA), in its capacity as secretariat to the Committee, welcomed the outcome of the strategic review of the Office, and strongly encouraged the States members of the Committee and international partners to support the work of UNOCA. The Assembly requested the Secretary-General to continue to provide the assistance needed to ensure the success of the Committee’s regular meetings. It also called upon the Secretary-General to submit to the Assembly, at its seventy-sixth session, a report on the implementation of resolution [75/79](#).
3. The present report is submitted in response to the above request and covers the activities carried out by the Committee from September 2020 to August 2021.

## II. Activities of the Committee

4. During the reporting period, the Committee held two meetings. The fiftieth ministerial meeting of the Committee was held in a hybrid format, with the Bureau and the secretariat present in Malabo and the other participants joining virtually, from 2 to 4 December 2020, and the fifty-first ministerial meeting was held in person in Bujumbura, Burundi, from 24 to 28 May 2021. All States members of the Committee participated in the meetings, namely, Angola, Burundi, Cameroon, the Central African Republic, Chad, the Congo, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Equatorial Guinea, Gabon, Rwanda and Sao Tome and Principe.
5. Representatives of the following entities also participated as observers in the fiftieth and fifty-first ministerial meetings: ECCAS; Central African Economic and Monetary Community; Lake Chad Basin Commission; Multinational Joint Task Force; Interregional Coordination Centre for Maritime Safety and Security in the Gulf of Guinea; Gulf of Guinea Commission; and International Organization of la Francophonie.
6. The following United Nations system entities also participated as observers in the fiftieth and fifty-first meetings: United Nations Regional Centre for Peace and Disarmament in Africa (UNREC); United Nations Subregional Centre for Human Rights and Democracy in Central Africa; United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA); United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO); United Nations Office to the African Union; United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS); Office of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for the Great Lakes Region; United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women); United Nations Environment Programme

(UNEP); United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO); and offices of the Resident Coordinators in Equatorial Guinea and in Burundi.

7. From 25 to 30 April 2021, the Bureau of the Committee conducted a field mission to the Central African Republic, so as to report to the Committee on the implementation of the Political Agreement for Peace and Reconciliation in the Central African Republic, including in areas where enhanced advocacy for regional and international cooperation and solidarity is needed. The Bureau informed the Committee of opportunities and challenges in the implementation of the disarmament, demobilization, rehabilitation and reintegration programme and efforts to establish provisional security measures foreseen in the Political Agreement to reinforce trust among signatories.

## **A. Review of the geopolitical and security situation in Central Africa**

8. The Committee continued to provide a platform for dialogue at the subregional level, allowing member States to share experiences and identify key areas for collective action. Underpinning these discussions, the ECCAS Commission presented the Committee with a review of the geopolitical and security situation across Central Africa.

9. Since the Committee's previous review, the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic had had important consequences on the political, security and socioeconomic spheres in all member States of the Committee. The Committee noted with encouragement the resilience of most member States in the face of the pandemic, and the encouraging, albeit fragile, signs of economic recovery from the recession experienced in 2020 owing to the dual economic and health crises. In some countries, however, efforts to mitigate the consequences of an already severe economic downturn, aggravated by the cost of managing the pandemic, had resulted in higher levels of public debt.

10. During the reporting period, the region achieved a milestone in the institutional reform of ECCAS and the installation of the Commission in September 2020, opening the way to a more robust and coherent peace and security architecture in Central Africa. The Committee also noted the holding of elections in Cameroon, the Central African Republic, the Congo, Chad and Gabon; the formation of a new cabinet in the Democratic Republic of the Congo following national consultations; the establishment of transitional authorities, outside of the Constitutional framework, in Chad following the passing of the late President, Idriss Déby Itno; as well as national consultations ahead of a national dialogue in the Central African Republic.

11. The Committee also welcomed efforts by subregional organizations, notably the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region (ICGLR) and ECCAS to advance peace and stability efforts in the Central African Republic, through the holding of two ICGLR summits in Luanda, on 29 January and 20 April 2021, and of an extraordinary ECCAS summit in Brazzaville, on 26 December 2020.

12. The Committee expressed its concern regarding the persistence or emergence of situations that represented threats to the stability of the region, including renewed cycles of armed violence in the Central African Republic; terrorism and violent extremism extending beyond the Central African subregion; persistent challenges in the area of small arms and light weapons control; transnational crime and trafficking, the illegal exploitation of natural resources, piracy in the Gulf of Guinea; and the resurgence of mercenary activity in Central Africa.

13. During its fifty-first ministerial meeting, the Committee was briefed on the situations in Chad, the Central African Republic and Equatorial Guinea. The

delegation of Chad updated the Committee on transitional arrangements established following the passing of the late President, Mr. Itno, and the country's commitment to a peaceful and democratic transition. The Central African Republic informed the Committee of the holding of the presidential and legislative elections, despite a deteriorating security context, and thanked regional and international actors for their support to the peace process in the country. Equatorial Guinea expressed its gratitude for the solidarity displayed by the region in the aftermath of the explosions at a military camp in Bata, on 7 March 2021.

14. The Committee noted that overall, Central African countries remained committed to electoral processes set in accordance with pre-established timetables and democratic governance frameworks, based on political consensus and according to national constitutions. The Committee also noted that despite an encouraging management of COVID-19, countries of the subregion maintained restrictive measures that were undermining citizens' basic rights, disproportionately affecting women.

15. The Committee took note of the humanitarian situation in Central Africa, which remained shaped by insecurity and armed conflicts in Cameroon, Chad, the Central African Republic and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, aggravated by COVID-19, and exacerbated by the adverse impact of climate change. The situation had caused additional displacements of civilians, while prompting further violations of international human rights and humanitarian law.

## **B. Disarmament and arms control**

### **Kinshasa Convention and the Arms Trade Treaty**

16. 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) has been ratified by 8 of the 11 member States of the Committee. The Democratic Republic of the Congo had yet to deposit its instrument of ratification, which it had signed and ratified. Burundi and Rwanda had signed but not ratified the Convention.

17. The ECCAS Commission pursued efforts toward the implementation of the Kinshasa Convention by supporting member States in the establishment of their national commissions for the control of small arms and light weapons.

18. To date, five ECCAS member States had fully established their national commissions (Angola, Burundi, Central African Republic, Democratic Republic of the Congo and Rwanda). Three States had taken legal action either to establish national focal points pending their transformation into national commissions (the Congo and Chad) or to authorize the establishment of such commissions (Equatorial Guinea). Two States had initiated the process, without a legal commitment (Gabon, Cameroon).

19. Gabon had requested technical assistance from the ECCAS Commission to set up its national small arms control commission; work had been carried out jointly with ECCAS in this context. For its part, Equatorial Guinea had adopted a presidential decree establishing a national commission to combat the proliferation of small arms and light weapons. Sao Tome and Principe had set up a provisional commission, which should lead to the establishment of a national commission against the proliferation of small arms and light weapons.

20. In the context of the implementation of the Arms Trade Treaty, the ECCAS Commission informed the Committee that among of the nine signatory countries that are members of ECCAS, four countries had ratified the treaty (Chad, Central African Republic, Cameroon and Sao Tome and Principe). The implementation of the Kinshasa Convention and the Arms Trade Treaty in Central Africa was expected to

contribute to the control of the illicit trade and proliferation of small arms and light weapons and to improve human security in the region.

#### **Update on the activities of the Office for Disarmament Affairs**

21. The United Nations Regional Centre for Peace and Disarmament in Africa (UNREC) briefed the Committee on its activities in support of initiatives of the Office for Disarmament Affairs. Following a request for assistance from the national authorities of Equatorial Guinea, UNREC led a mission of the SaferGuard quick-response mechanism, in the aftermath of the explosions in March 2021 at a military camp in Bata. The mechanism provides ammunition management support to interested States in accordance with the International Ammunition Technical Guidelines. The mission team visited the site of the explosion and assisted the Government in assessing the cause of the accident as well as identifying and reducing the risks of further explosions and the potential environmental impacts. At the briefing, UNREC noted the importance of Central African States upgrading their arms stockpile management systems, so as to prevent the recurrence of such incidents in the region.

22. The Regional Centre further briefed the Committee on a new small arms and light weapons fund, entitled the Saving Lives Entity fund, a United Nations funding facility dedicated to supporting Member States in tackling armed violence and illicit small arms and light weapons as part of a comprehensive approach to sustainable security and development from a human security perspective. UNREC participated in a scoping mission for the fund to Cameroon, which aimed to assess the context related to small arms and light weapons in the country, with a view to identifying areas in which the country team and national stakeholders can play a role in supporting the Government in efforts to address the challenge of illicit small arms. The mission met with Government officials, civil society organizations and the country team.

23. The Regional Centre also briefed the Committee on the implementation of a project on small arms control and gender, which currently benefits three ECCAS member States, namely, Cameroon, the Central African Republic and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The briefing also covered partnerships to strengthen coordination with ECCAS, UNOCA, the Intergovernmental Authority on Development, the Southern African Development Community, the East African Community and the African Commission on Nuclear Energy.

24. The Regional Centre informed participants that the Office for Disarmament Affairs, in partnership with the African Union Commission, initiated a project to support African Union member States in the implementation of Africa Amnesty Month as part of the larger African Union flagship initiative of Silencing the Guns in Africa by 2030. The project supported seven African States, including Cameroon, the Central African Republic and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, in creating a passage for citizens to voluntarily hand over illegally held small arms and their ammunition and increase the awareness of local communities regarding the negative impact of the illicit proliferation of small arms.

25. The Office for Disarmament Affairs also provided financial and technical assistance through the United Nations Trust Facility Supporting Conventional Arms Regulation in the subregion. The Facility supports small arms-focused, short-term quick-impact projects, in partnership with local civil society organizations, and has funded 20 projects for Central African States since its inception in 2013. A regional workshop on data collection for Sustainable Development Goal target 16.4 on the significant reduction in illicit arms flows was held from 29 June to 1 July in Yaoundé, with the participation of nine ECCAS member States.

## **C. Armed violence and terrorism in Central Africa**

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

26. The ECCAS Commission briefed the Committee on the regional strategy for the prevention of and fight against terrorism. The strategy was adopted by the ECCAS Conference of Heads of State and Government at its eighteenth ordinary session, held in Libreville on 27 November 2020. The strategy aims to combat terrorism by pooling existing initiatives in the region, while building on the counter-terrorism framework established by the United Nations and the African Union.

27. Under its priority action plan for 2021, ECCAS will submit a report on the terrorist threat in Central Africa, convene a regional workshop on the dissemination of the strategy and a regional meeting that will inform the design and adoption of a five-year implementation plan for the strategy.

28. The regional strategy will be implemented at three levels. At the level of the Community, ECCAS will set up a strategy implementation unit, a standing committee on police and judicial cooperation in Central Africa and a regional centre for the study and coordination of the fight against terrorism in Central Africa. At the bilateral level, member States are encouraged to establish bilateral cooperation partnerships and, at the national level, they are encouraged to develop an integrated cooperation and institutional framework to deal with terrorism issues.

### **Boko Haram**

29. The secretariat of the Lake Chad Basin Commission briefed the Committee on the implementation of the Regional Stabilization, Recovery and Resilience Strategy for Areas affected by Boko Haram in the Lake Chad Basin Region, adopted in August 2018 and endorsed by the Peace and Security Council of the African Union in December 2018. Territorial action plans were being developed in the eight territories covered by the regional strategy. The territorial action plans integrate a civil-military action dimension and the establishment of regional and transnational facilitators.

30. The Multinational Joint Task Force briefed the Committee on progress in the fight against the various factions of Boko Haram. The situation in the Task Force area of operations was described as relatively calm and under control despite unpredictable terrorist attacks against civilian communities and defence and security forces stationed in the region. According to the Task Force, the new engagement dynamics that they and the armed forces of the troop-contributing countries had implemented have weakened terrorist movements, reducing them to small groups entrenched in the islands of Lake Chad and the Mandara Mountains enclaves. The Task Force further noted that those dynamics have contributed to neutralizing the groups' main leaders, destroying their bases, seizing their weapons, dismantling their logistical and financial networks and weakening their ideological appeal.

31. The United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS) informed the Committee of the joint mission conducted with UNOCA in the Lake Chad Basin (Cameroon, Chad, Niger and Nigeria) between February and April 2021, to assess dynamics related to Boko Haram factions in the area.

## **D. Poaching, the use of mercenaries and transnational organized crime**

32. The Committee identified cross-border criminality and the resurgence of mercenary activity in Central Africa as challenges to peace and stability in the region.

That situation compounded the existing security challenges facing the region, including the illicit circulation of small arms and light weapons.

33. In its report following the field visit to the Central African Republic, the Bureau of the Committee emphasized that the country's porous borders, combined with the poor management of border areas, risk undermining the sustainability of the disarmament, demobilization, rehabilitation and reintegration programme in the country. Given the state of insecurity in the border areas, the Bureau recommended strengthening cooperation with neighbouring countries and cross-border security governance.

34. The Bureau equally found that joint bilateral commissions between the Central African Republic and neighbouring countries should be revitalized and that, in addition to the three that were already in place (Cameroon, Chad, the Congo), bilateral commissions should also be created with the Sudan and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, while decisions taken in the framework of those joint commissions should be implemented.

35. The Committee noted that the implementation of the cooperation agreement on cross-border security signed by the Governments of Equatorial Guinea and Cameroon was progressing well. A joint commission of Angola and the Congo on maritime border issues met on 13 May 2021 in Pointe-Noire, the Congo, to discuss the delimitation of the maritime border between the two countries.

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

36. The Interregional Coordination Centre for Maritime Safety and Security in the Gulf of Guinea briefed the Committee on maritime security trends in the Gulf of Guinea. The Centre noted a deterioration in maritime safety in the Central African maritime domain during the first quarter of 2021. Security incidents were predominantly taking place in the joint development zone between Sao Tome and Principe and Nigeria.

37. Jointly with Nigeria, the Centre had established a maritime collaboration forum, an initiative aimed at enhancing maritime domain awareness and information-sharing, which will bring together representatives of the relevant national and multinational maritime coordination centres, the navies of West and Central African States of the Gulf of Guinea, alongside international navies deploying ships in the Gulf of Guinea and the maritime industry. The Centre noted the importance of ensuring that European Union member States closely coordinate with the Centre when deploying vessels in the Gulf of Guinea under the European Union coordinated maritime presence operational concept.

38. The Committee took note of the status quo in the operationalization of maritime zones since its fiftieth meeting and of the budget constraints facing the Centre, which were hampering the conduct and implementation of its activities. The Centre recommended the activation of the outstanding maritime zones; the need to sustain the information-sharing platform of the Yaoundé Architecture regional information system (known as YARIS); and the convening of the high-level meeting of ECCAS, ECOWAS and the Gulf of Guinea Commission. The Centre also appealed to the ECCAS Commission to ensure the regular disbursement of its contribution to the Centre's budget.

39. The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) provided an update on trends and an overview of its activities in support of ECCAS and its member States in the area of maritime security. UNODC called on member States of the Committee to strengthen their national coordination structures and harmonize their legal



frameworks, noting that there was only one Central African country with a comprehensive legal framework to address piracy.

40. The Committee took note of the information provided by the delegation of Equatorial Guinea on the Regional Forum on Maritime Piracy in Central Africa, an initiative which had been announced at its fiftieth meeting. The Committee reaffirmed the importance of the Forum and stressed the need to convene it when conditions permitted. It recalled that the project should be implemented with the support of the United Nations, the African Union and relevant regional organizations including ECCAS, the Interregional Coordination Centre and the regional naval school in Tica, near Bata, the second largest city in Equatorial Guinea.

## **F. Implementation of the women and peace and security agenda in Central Africa**

41. The ECCAS Commission briefed the Committee on the implementation of Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) in Central Africa and provided an update on the progress and challenges in the implementation of the women and peace and security agenda in the subregion, considering new trends and emerging challenges in the context of COVID-19.

42. The Committee noted that progress had been made in the development of national action plans for the implementation of resolution 1325 (2000). Seven member States had national action plans (Angola, Burundi, Cameroon, the Congo, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Gabon and Rwanda). The process was under way in Equatorial Guinea, Sao Tome and Principe, the Central African Republic and Chad. In April 2021, ECCAS and UNOCA visited Equatorial Guinea and Sao Tome and Principe to support the development of their national action plans.

43. The Committee welcomed the efforts made with regards to the four pillars of resolution 1325 (2000), namely, the role of women in conflict prevention; their participation in peacebuilding; the protection of their rights during and after conflict; and their specific needs during repatriation, resettlement and in terms of rehabilitation, reintegration and post-conflict reconstruction. In the area of prevention, the Committee noted the continued support of ECCAS and the United Nations in empowering women leaders in mediation, community dialogues and conflict resolution at the local level. On participation, the Committee noted recent reforms aimed at promoting gender balance in electoral processes. On protection, ECCAS countries had dedicated expertise and resources to programmes that had lowered rates of gender-based violence. The Committee noted that women were contributing significantly to the economic recovery but were still facing discrimination in terms of access to economic resources.

44. The Committee took note that challenges persisted regarding the dissemination and ownership of resolution 1325 (2000). Meanwhile, the participation and representation of women in early warning, conflict prevention and resolution processes and mechanisms remained low. The Committee also noted obstacles for women and girls with respect to access to justice and related services, as well as pervasive violence against women and girls.

45. The Committee encouraged member States to set up a special gender fund to support the implementation of their national action plans. It further encouraged those member States that had not yet put in place national action plans to continue their efforts in that regard. The Committee also encouraged member States to designate gender focal points so as to enable better follow-up in the elaboration and implementation of national action plans.

46. UN-Women recommended that member States establish quotas to ensure women's representation in electoral processes, develop electoral laws that promote the participation of women, support women's and youth movements, build women's capacity and fight against stereotypes.

## **G. Human rights**

47. The Subregional Centre for Human Rights and Democracy in Central Africa briefed the Committee on the human rights situation in Central Africa.

48. The Regional Centre identified the insecurity in North Kivu Province, Democratic Republic of the Congo, the conflict in the North-West and South-West Regions of Cameroon, as well as prison overcrowding in the context of COVID-19, as serious challenges to human rights in the region. The Regional Centre called on member States to develop prison policies adapted to the context. The Regional Centre presented its activities under the following five pillars: (a) strengthening the rule of law and accountability for human rights violations; (b) increasing equality and combating discrimination; (c) strengthening the integration of human rights into efforts to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals; (d) early warning, prevention and protection of human rights in situations of conflict and insecurity; and (e) strengthening the cooperation of States with international mechanisms for the promotion and protection of human rights. The Regional Centre encouraged States to ratify the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance, the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families and the Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment.

49. The Regional Centre further stressed the importance of national human rights institutions for the promotion and protection of human rights. Only 3 of the 10 member States covered by the Centre had human rights institutions in place that complied with the principles relating to the status of national institutions for the promotion and protection of human rights (the Paris Principles). The Regional Centre acknowledged the efforts made by States to harmonize their legal and institutional frameworks to meet international standards. It noted delays in the submission of reports to some human rights treaty bodies and further encouraged member States to ensure the regular submission of reports to the treaty bodies and the implementation of recommendations; to develop a national strategy to combat hate speech; to provide national human rights institutions with the proper means to fulfil their mandates; and to ratify international and regional human rights instruments.

## **H. Management of elections in Central Africa**

50. At the fifty-first meeting, experts held a thematic debate on the management of elections in Central Africa. The debate followed up on the adoption by the Committee at its fiftieth meeting, in December 2020, of a ministerial declaration on democratic and peaceful elections as a means of strengthening stability and achieving the Sustainable Development Goals in Central Africa (see annex I).

51. The ECCAS Commission made a presentation on the management of electoral processes in Central Africa and informed the Committee of missions conducted in support of electoral processes in the region and plans to pursue electoral assistance activities between 2021 and 2025, as the countries of the subregion will be entering a period of various electoral cycles.

52. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) informed participants that it had trained journalists on peaceful election media coverage in Cameroon in 2020 and in the Congo in 2021. Those activities, conducted in collaboration with UNOCA and the Subregional Centre for Human Rights and Democracy in Central Africa, aimed to promote peaceful electoral processes.

53. The Committee noted that effective electoral processes could strengthen democratic gains, while poorly managed processes would do the reverse. It recalled the declaration on democratic and peaceful elections adopted at its fiftieth meeting, in Malabo, calling on member States to take positive measures to strengthen the management of electoral processes in Central Africa.

54. The Committee reflected on opportunities and challenges in the area of elections, drawing from member States' experiences in the conduct of electoral processes, including: the self-financing of elections by member States in order to reduce dependence on external funding; the use of legal and peaceful means to challenge election results; the impact of financial constraints and insecurity on the holding of elections according to constitutional time frames; the participation of women and youth in electoral processes; the promotion of peaceful communication in electoral processes; and the role of political will and planning in enabling successful elections.

55. The Committee recommended that member States, with the support of ECCAS and UNOCA, take all necessary measures to develop a subregional protocol on the management of elections in Central Africa, in accordance with the declaration on democratic and peaceful elections adopted in Malabo.

## **I. Impact of the pandemic on peace and security in Central Africa**

56. At the fiftieth meeting, experts held a thematic debate on the fight against COVID-19 and its impact on peacebuilding and security in Central Africa.

57. The ECCAS Commission made a presentation on the COVID-19 regional response strategy for Central Africa, adopted in July 2020 at the seventeenth ordinary session of the Conference of ECCAS Heads of State and Government, and on the impact of the pandemic on peacebuilding and security in Central Africa. It further made proposals for joint action to mitigate the socioeconomic and security impact in the border areas. During the discussions, member States called for the effective implementation of the regional strategy.

58. The Committee adopted a ministerial declaration, known as the Malabo Declaration on the impact of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) on peace and support for the implementation of the COVID-19 regional response strategy for Central Africa (see annex II). The declaration calls upon member States of the Committee and international partners to assist the ECCAS Commission in furthering the implementation of the regional strategy.

## **J. Cooperation with international and regional organizations, with the support of United Nations system entities**

59. At the fiftieth meeting of the Committee, the ECCAS Commission presented an update on its institutional reform process, which culminated in the installation of the Commission as a new executive body mandated to preserve peace and security in Central Africa and advance regional integration, in a context marked by various governance and cross-border security challenges.

60. The pandemic emerged as another key domain in which cooperation at all levels needed to be promoted. In this context, the Committee called on the ECCAS Commission, in partnership with UNOCA, other partners of the United Nations system and the African Union, to strengthen its engagement with and assistance to the Committee in support of member states' efforts to fight COVID-19 and mitigate its impact on peace and security in Central Africa.

61. The Committee also took note of calls for ECCAS and ECOWAS to pursue their commitment to the implementation of the Lomé Declaration on Peace, Security, Stability and the Fight against Terrorism and Violent Extremism, which remained a key framework for cooperation between the two regional economic communities. Along the same lines, the Committee stressed the importance of regional cooperation on maritime security in the Gulf of Guinea, calling upon ECCAS, the United Nations, the African Union and the Interregional Coordination Centre for Maritime Safety and Security in the Gulf of Guinea to support the convening of a Regional Forum on Maritime Piracy in Central Africa.

62. The Political Agreement for Peace and Reconciliation in the Central African Republic remained high on the agenda of the Committee as another key area of cooperation with international and regional organizations, including United Nations system entities, which have reaffirmed their commitment to support a peaceful resolution of the crisis in the country.

### **III. Administrative and financial matters**

63. The Committee reviewed the status of voluntary contributions to its trust fund as well as the status of contributions made by member States since the adoption of the Libreville Declaration of 2009.

64. The Committee reiterated its appeal to member States to make their contributions, recalling that the yearly contribution in the minimum amount of \$10,000 per member State was binding upon them, and urged them to honour their financial commitments.

65. The Committee also considered the measures for revitalizing the Committee, adopted at its forty-fourth meeting, held in Yaoundé, as well as the recommendations of the forty-ninth meeting, held in Luanda, aimed at promoting the sustainability of the Committee's activities.

### **IV. Conclusions and recommendations**

66. **The United Nations Standing Advisory Committee on Security Questions in Central Africa continues to demonstrate its value as a platform for subregional dialogue and cooperation on critical issues of peace and stability. As highlighted by the Committee, the Central African subregion continues to face significant ongoing and emerging challenges in terms of stability. I welcome the commitment of the States of the subregion to overcoming these challenges, as evidenced by the openness of discussions during the fiftieth and fifty-first meetings of the Committee.**

67. **The COVID-19 pandemic has had far-reaching consequences for the political and socioeconomic stability of the region. I am encouraged by the resilience of the member States of the Committee in the face of this unprecedented crisis and their efforts to mitigate its impact. I welcome the Committee's renewed commitment to supporting ECCAS in advancing its COVID-19 regional response strategy for Central Africa.**

68. Despite being an important dividend of peace, elections continue to be a source of tension in Central Africa. As the region enters another electoral cycle, the adoption of a subregional regulation on elections would be useful in harnessing the potential of peaceful and democratic electoral governance. I therefore welcome the Committee's recommendation that member States take affirmative steps towards adopting a subregional protocol on elections. The United Nations reiterates its commitment to support member States in establishing this subregional mechanism.

69. I am deeply concerned by the continued activities of illegal armed groups and by terrorism and violent extremism in the subregion, particularly in the Lake Chad basin, and by maritime insecurity in the Gulf of Guinea, which constitute serious threats to civilians and affect the stability of the region. Of concern is the cross-border criminality and the resurgence of mercenary activity in Central Africa, aggravated by the continued illicit circulation of small arms and light weapons. I call upon member States to collaborate urgently to address these issues in bilateral and multilateral forums, including also through operationalizing the Kinshasa Convention.

70. I am encouraged by the successful completion of the presidential and legislative elections in the Central African Republic. In addition, the upcoming national dialogue, if fully inclusive, could contribute to the revitalization of the Political Agreement for Peace and Reconciliation. I also welcome the Committee's continued support of efforts to achieve stability in the Central African Republic. I remain deeply concerned, however, about the continuation of violence and attacks by armed groups that were parties to the Agreement, as well as human rights violations and abuses by all parties. I remain concerned by insecurity in some border areas and encourage the Central African Republic and its neighbours to foster cross-border security cooperation in support of the implementation of the Agreement, including through the full implementation and/or establishment of bilateral joint commissions.

71. I take note of the solidarity expressed by the Committee with the Chadian authorities and people, following the sudden death of the late President, Mr. Itno. I encourage all stakeholders to support national and regional efforts to ensure a peaceful democratic transition in Chad towards lasting peace, prosperity and stability in the country and the region.

72. The lack of funding of regional mechanisms for peace and security has remained a challenge for the region and for its efforts to sustain regional peace and stability. I call upon member States to regularly pay their voluntary contributions to the Committee's trust fund. I equally encourage member States to renew their political and financial commitment to the Interregional Coordination Centre for Maritime Safety and Security in the Gulf of Guinea. I thank UNOCA and UNOWAS for their continued efforts aimed at reinforcing interregional cooperation between Central and West Africa towards the implementation of the Lomé Declaration.

73. I am grateful to the Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs, UNOCA and my Special Representative for providing the Committee with efficient technical, administrative and logistical backstopping. I also commend other United Nations system entities, peacekeeping operations and special political missions for their specialized contributions to the work of the Committee. I look forward to the deliberations and conclusions of the Committee at its fifty-second meeting, to be hosted by Gabon.

## Annex I

[Original: French]

## **Declaration on democratic and peaceful elections as a means of strengthening stability and achieving the Sustainable Development Goals in Central Africa**

*We, the ministers and heads of delegation of the States members of the United Nations Standing Advisory Committee on Security Questions in Central Africa, gathered via videoconference on the occasion of the fiftieth ministerial meeting organized by the Republic of Equatorial Guinea:*

*Reaffirming* our faith in democracy as a form of government and in periodic, inclusive, free, transparent and peaceful elections as the only legitimate means of devolving political power;

*Condemning* any attempt to seize power by force as well as any negation of the will of the people as freely expressed through the holding of elections that have been organized in accordance with the laws in force and whose results have been declared by the competent authorities;

*Reiterating* our commitment to the Sustainable Development Goals, in particular Goal 16 on promoting peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, providing access to justice for all and building effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels;

*Referring* to the African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance;

*Recalling* the relevant Security Council resolutions, including resolution [1325 \(2000\)](#) of 31 October 2000 on women, peace and security as well as resolutions [2250 \(2015\)](#) of 9 December 2015 and [2419 \(2018\)](#) of 6 June 2018 on youth and peace and security;

*Recognizing* that electoral processes in member States have an impact on peace, security and sustainable development in Central Africa;

*Drawing on* lessons from past electoral processes in Central Africa and deploring the fact that they have, on occasion, been marred by violence;

*Noting* that elections are scheduled to take place in all member States of the Committee between 2020 and 2023, and determined to ensure that those elections contribute to consolidating democratic gains, bolstering peace, security and stability, and establishing good governance in Central Africa;

1. *Reaffirm* the commitment of our States to hold periodic, democratic and peaceful elections within the constitutional and legal time frames and in accordance with international standards;
2. *Commit* to taking appropriate measures to enhance the participation of women and youth in electoral processes, as candidates, voters and members of electoral management bodies;
3. *Commit* to establishing permanent national mechanisms for consultation and dialogue among all stakeholders in electoral processes in order to promote transparent, inclusive and peaceful elections and the acceptance of their results by all actors;
4. *Encourage* the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS) to adopt regional principles and standards for democratic elections in Central Africa, drawing on the commitments made in that regard by our States, particularly within

the framework of the United Nations, the African Union and other international and regional organizations;

5. *Request* the ECCAS Commission to set up a platform for election management bodies in Central Africa in order to share good practices;

6. *Invite* ECCAS and the United Nations Regional Office for Central Africa (UNOCA) to take measures to facilitate the sharing of experience and good practices among our States on electoral issues and as part of the effort to strengthen the culture of democracy and respect for the constitutional order, including by establishing platforms for exchange and facilitating missions of stakeholders in the electoral process in the various Central African States;

7. *Encourage* States that have not yet done so to ratify and fully implement the African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance;

8. *Request* ECCAS and the United Nations Regional Office for Central Africa (UNOCA) to undertake a study on the causes, factors and manifestations of violence and electoral crises in our countries and to recommend appropriate regional and national measures to guarantee that peaceful elections are held in Central Africa;

9. *Express* our support for peaceful elections in the Central African Republic, call on our States to provide support to this effect and appeal to the Central African stakeholders to promote peaceful elections, respect election outcomes and settle any disputes through legal frameworks;

10. *Request* the ECCAS Commission and UNOCA to report regularly on the implementation of this declaration, starting with the fifty-first ministerial meeting of the Committee.

Done at Malabo on 4 December 2020

## Annex II

[Original: French]

**Malabo Declaration on the impact of the coronavirus disease pandemic (COVID-19) on peace and support for the implementation of the COVID-19 regional response strategy for Central Africa**

*We, the ministers and heads of delegation of the States members of the United Nations Standing Advisory Committee on Security Questions in Central Africa, gathered via videoconference on the occasion of the fiftieth ministerial meeting organized by the Republic of Equatorial Guinea:*

*Reiterating* our commitment to the Sustainable Development Goals, in particular Goal 3 on ensuring healthy lives and promoting well-being for all at all ages, and Goal 16 on promoting peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, providing access to justice for all and building effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels, especially in the current context of the unprecedented global health crisis caused by the coronavirus disease (COVID-19);

*Deploing* the socioeconomic repercussions and implications of COVID-19 on the populations of Central Africa, particularly on the most vulnerable groups, including women, young people, persons with disabilities and displaced persons;

*Recognizing also* the pandemic's significant impact on peace, security and sustainable development in Central Africa, as well as the upheaval it has caused in the daily lives of citizens and in the regular functioning of institutions, including those responsible for conducting electoral processes;

*Noting with concern* the constraints observed in rural and remote areas without adequate health coverage and in regions where, in addition, armed conflicts make it difficult, if not altogether impossible, to conduct prevention and awareness-raising campaigns for the population; and to provide humanitarian and health assistance to those affected by this scourge, which spares no one, whether belligerents, civilians or political leaders;

*Recalling* the Declaration of the seventy-third World Health Assembly, held on 18 and 19 May 2020, which set the course for combating COVID-19 and addressing global health priorities;

1. *Reiterate* our support for the appeal issued by the Secretary-General of the United Nations on 23 March 2020 for an immediate ceasefire and for all relevant stakeholders to silence their weapons, not only to support the fight against COVID-19, but also to create opportunities to deliver life-saving assistance to the victims of conflicts and to pave the way for the peaceful resolution of conflicts through diplomacy and dialogue;

2. *Note with satisfaction* that Member States have made the fight against this pandemic a priority and that they are determined to make a concerted effort to combat it;

3. *Recall*, in that regard, the adoption on 30 July 2020 by the Conference of Heads of State and Government of the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS) of a regional response strategy that focuses on preventing the spread of the virus; managing cases and limiting the death rate; mitigating the social, economic and security effects associated with COVID-19 and preventing cross-border transmission;



4. *Reiterate* that it is important for the aforementioned strategy to incorporate the specific needs and roles of women and young people, including by contributing to the implementation of Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) on women and peace and security and Security Council resolution 2250 (2015) on youth and peace and security;

5. *Encourage* the member States of the Committee and international partners to support the ECCAS Commission in order to contribute to the effective implementation of the COVID-19 regional response strategy, paying particular attention to aspects related to the management of cross-border health crises, and taking into account our shared resolve to accelerate regional integration as well as the need to continue to promote human rights and the protection of women and girls, including in the context of the free movement of goods and persons;

6. *Invite* the member States of the Committee to improve their coordination and take advantage of the bilateral and multilateral assistance mechanisms in order to benefit from support for the implementation of national, subregional and regional plans, programmes and projects to combat the COVID-19 pandemic;

7. *Request* the ECCAS Commission, in collaboration with the United Nations Regional Office for Central Africa (UNOCA), in cooperation with other partners from the United Nations system, the African Union, civil society and the private sector, to strengthen their engagement with and support for the Committee in its efforts to combat the pandemic and contain its effects on peace and security in Central Africa, and to provide an update thereon at the fifty-first ministerial meeting of the Committee;

8. *Call on* the United Nations to seek continued and increased support from the international financial institutions in order to provide urgent support for the efforts of member States to combat the COVID-19 pandemic, which has affected all the countries of Central Africa.

Done at Malabo on 4 December 2020

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