



Security Council

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Letter dated 19 December 2023 from the Chair of the Central African Republic configuration of the Peacebuilding Commission addressed to the President of the Security Council

It is my pleasure to share with you, in my capacity as Chair of the Central African Republic configuration of the Peacebuilding Commission, the report of the visit that I undertook to Bangui from 7 to 11 November 2023.

I remain at the disposal of the Security Council to provide further information and clarifications, as may be required. The Commission remains ready to accompany the Central African Republic and to inform the Council on peacebuilding-related developments, as appropriate.

I kindly request that the present letter and its annex be circulated to the members of the Security Council and issued as a document of the Council.

(Signed) Omar **Hilale**

Chair

Central African Republic configuration of the
Peacebuilding Commission



Annex to the letter dated 19 December 2023 from the Chair of the Central African Republic configuration of the Peacebuilding Commission addressed to the President of the Security Council

Visit of the Chair of the Central African Republic configuration of the Peacebuilding Commission to the Central African Republic, 7 to 11 November 2023

1. In my capacity as Chair of the Central African Republic configuration of the Peacebuilding Commission, I visited Bangui from 7 to 11 November 2023. As set out in the terms of reference of the trip, the focus was to get a better overview, since my last visit in 2020, of the inter-linkages between the political, security, economic and humanitarian challenges the country is currently facing, as well as to get an appreciation of the country's efforts to fight impunity and strengthen its rule of law and justice sector. The visit was also aimed at exploring opportunities for the Commission to prioritize its mobilization and advocacy efforts in support of peacebuilding in the Central African Republic, which might include: continued support to the decentralization policy and restoration of State authority in all areas of the country, the organization of local elections and initiation of a paradigm shift from a situation of permanent humanitarian assistance to one of investment in development and incremental economic recovery, in order to foster sustained peace and stability.

2. I was supposed to have an audience with the President of the Central African Republic, Faustin Archange Touadera, as well as a meeting with the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Sylvie Valérie Baipo Temon. Unfortunately, my arrival coincided with their departure to Riyadh, to participate in the Arab-African Summit. However, I met with the Prime Minister, who conveyed the President's appreciation for my visit and for the continued support of the configuration of the Peacebuilding Commission. I also had the opportunity to meet with the Minister of Disarmament, Demobilization, Reintegration and Repatriation and the Follow-up to the Political Agreement for Peace and Reconciliation in the Central African Republic, the President of the National Assembly, the President of the National Electoral Authority, the President of the Special Criminal Court, the Ambassadors of France, the Russian Federation and the United States of America and the representative of the European Union, members of the Forum of Women Parliamentarians, the representatives of the African Development Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF), representatives of civil society, as well as the high-level leadership of the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA) and the United Nations country team. I also undertook two field visits, the first to the PK5 neighborhood in Bangui to visit a project funded by the Peacebuilding Fund, and the second to Bangassou, in Mbomou Prefecture, to meet with local authorities and visit a project on community violence reduction. I also visited the Moroccan contingent deployed as part of MINUSCA at its base in Bangassou. Throughout my visit, I conveyed a strong message of support and solidarity, acknowledging the Commission's continued commitment to supporting the Central African Republic on the path towards peace and stability.

Opportunities and challenges on the peace, security and political fronts

3. My meetings in Bangui provided several interesting insights into the progress achieved in the Central African Republic, especially since my last visit in February 2020. The 2019 Political Agreement for Peace and Reconciliation in the Central African Republic and the Luanda road map continue to guide efforts to build stability. During my exchange with the Minister of Disarmament, Demobilization, Reintegration and Repatriation, I noted that 9 out of the 14 armed groups that signed

the agreement have been dissolved and over 5,000 combatants have been demobilized, with support from MINUSCA and other partners. While additional armed elements have expressed their intention of joining the process, the lack of resources within the Ministry impedes its ability to complete the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration of the remnants of armed elements, including women combatants, as well as to manage the repatriation programme. Other challenges include the persistent activities of armed groups in the western part of the country, where abuses are most prevalent, particularly by the armed group Retour, réclamation et réhabilitation. The Minister stressed that ensuring the sustainability of the disarmament process requires a long-term commitment, including from the international community supporting the efforts of the Central African authorities. I have raised this issue with donors and the MINUSCA leadership, emphasizing that technical and financial aid should be afforded to the Ministry of Disarmament, Demobilization, Reintegration and Repatriation and the Follow-up to the Political Agreement for Peace and Reconciliation in the Central African Republic to enable it to effectively discharge its important mandate. Peace remains fragile in the Central African Republic, but the will and resolve of the national authorities are very much palpable. The international community should rally around the Agreement and provide the necessary political support and financial resources to ensure its successful implementation.

4. Indeed, since it was signed, the Agreement has continued to hold. Yet, the limited control of the State over some parts of the territory of the Central African Republic, the persistent activities of armed groups, particularly in the center and east of the country, and the outstanding grievances of the population, which are exacerbated by the extremely low level of human development, require strengthened efforts and investment in the years to come. In my conversations with civil society actors and women parliamentarians, I sensed the frustration of people in remote areas where the State authority is not present. Their living conditions are difficult, particularly because of insecurity and the lack of access to essential basic services, such as infrastructure, health care and education. Unless this population benefits from peace dividends and investments in development, their grievances will remain unaddressed, which will fuel violence. I also heard from women parliamentarians about the challenges they face when campaigning in these areas. Their efforts to ensure women's participation and representation in electoral and political processes are undermined by persistent violence and threats to their security. Given the important role women play in establishing and preserving social cohesion, reconciliation and peace, they must benefit from protection measures at all times, and especially during electoral cycles.

5. My visit to the Central African Republic took place against the backdrop of the promulgation of the new Constitution and the President's invitation to armed groups to reengage in the peace process. I observed, notably during my exchange with members of civil society, that the process leading up to the referendum and the proclamation of a new Constitution had been the source of extensive debate. I commended the successful holding of the referendum in peaceful conditions, which affirms the resolve of the people of the Central African Republic to end the cycle of violence and ensure the country's stability and development. It is regrettable that opposition groups continue to reject discussions of the peace process and call for the boycott of local elections, particularly following the constitutional reform process. I strongly encourage efforts to facilitate a rapprochement between the Government and the opposition. My main message throughout my engagements was to encourage everyone to be forward-looking and sustain the progress achieved thus far towards national reconciliation. I also promoted the need to continue ensuring constructive dialogue and understanding among all actors, by utilizing the existing and open avenues for dialogue enabled by the President's "*main tendue*" (extended hand) approach.

6. I also noted to all my interlocutors, including international partners, donors, members of civil society, women parliamentarians and national authorities, that one of the key parameters at this critical juncture is the capacity to fulfil Central Africans' desire for peace and stability through the successful organization of inclusive, credible, transparent and peaceful local elections. I am convinced that these elections are key to democracy, effective local governance, more legitimate local representativeness and sustainable peace. In my encounters with the Prime Minister, the President of the National Assembly and the President of the National Electoral Authority, I noted a clear and strong resolve to hold the local elections within the established timeline; that is, in October 2024 and January 2025. However, these individuals also highlighted the existing shortfall in the funding for their preparations. I noted that mapping for voter registration and the identification of local polling stations will require considerable investment, especially in areas where the State authorities have little to no access and where security constraints continue to be an impediment. Given that elections are due to be held next year, I strongly believe that this is a pressing issue that requires the rapid mobilization of adequate resources. I once again call on the multilateral and bilateral partners of the Central African Republic, as I did in Bangui, to continue to mobilize in support of the elections, which are central to the establishment of much-needed democracy at the local level, and, more generally, peace in the country. I caution against the risks of further delaying this process, which may lead to an overlap with the next election cycle, which begins in 2025, and with the conduct of the next presidential elections. I also emphasize that support should not be subject to any conditions, including in respect of developments in the political dialogue, while reaffirming that ensuring inclusivity, in any electoral process, is one of the challenges of democracy.

7. During my field visit to Bangassou, I noted that, despite limitations and challenges, there had been significant progress which needs to be sustained and supported. I observed concrete improvement to the security situation, compared with the scale of violence and devastation I witnessed in 2020. Local authorities, with the support of MINUSCA, managed to rebuild and cement peace and security, bringing life back to Bangassou and allowing communities to resume socioeconomic activities and children to return to school. State authority has been fully restored in the area through the support given to the effective implementation of the Political Agreement for Peace and Reconciliation in the Central African Republic and the Luanda road map. Bangassou also benefited from a series of awareness-raising campaigns on social cohesion. These initiatives were piloted by MINUSCA, with the support of Peacebuilding Fund and community violence reduction funds. I had the opportunity to visit a community violence reduction project benefiting women and noted how successfully it helped rebuild social bonds, and how it contributed to promoting intercommunity dialogue by providing socioeconomic opportunities to former members of armed groups, thus motivating others to voluntarily disarm and stop violence. I believe these initiatives need to be strengthened and duplicated throughout the country.

8. In conclusion, I noted positive developments on the peace and security front since my last visit. I am convinced, more than ever, that the Central African Republic is at a critical juncture in its trajectory towards building a lasting peace and stability, should the necessary support by the international community be afforded to it. The President's leadership and his strong resolve to lead a paradigm shift for his country by lifting it from a situation of protracted crisis towards recovery and sustained development were apparent in all my encounters, including during my field visits. To maintain this positive trajectory, the Government and the international community will have to redouble their efforts on various fronts in order to maintain the relevance of the Agreement, both in terms of security, which supports the restoration of State authority, and the delivery of basic services to the population to improve their livelihood opportunities. The holding of local elections next year will be an important milestone, which the international community should support in order to reinforce

peacebuilding gains. I intend to make use of the convening role of the Central African Republic configuration of the Peacebuilding Commission in the crucial next months by continuing to share information and raise awareness of developments relating to the electoral process. With regard to the financing of the elections, urgent action is needed, and I intend to reach out to all partners of the Central African Republic to strongly encourage them to contribute to the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) basket fund. After all the investments made for peace in the Central African Republic over the past several years, the international community must not allow a funding gap for these elections to occur, which could exacerbate the risk of relapse.

Humanitarian and economic aspects

9. The Central African Republic still faces a serious and systemic humanitarian crisis. In 2023, 3.4 million people (56 per cent of the population) are still in need of humanitarian assistance and protection. A large portion of the Central African population, particularly in areas outside of urban centres, continues to struggle with violence against civilians and insecurity, which also results in displacement. More than one in five Central Africans are currently displaced either within the country or in neighbouring countries. Access to basic services, such as health and education, and livelihoods, including in the area of agriculture, continues to be severely limited as a result of insecurity and climate factors, such as recent floods. During my meeting with the United Nations country team, I noted support for the President's resolve to shift the country from depending on humanitarian assistance to pursuing economic recovery. The country team noted that the recent improvements and the glimpse of stability could offer an opportunity to work differently. It is important to invest more in peace, humanitarian and development projects. However, the country team also noted major challenges in the areas of economic development and basic infrastructure, governance and human rights. In this context, the role MINUSCA has played in creating a safer and more secure environment in many areas of the country where State authority had been absent has contributed to building back the trust of the population.

10. Similarly, the United Nations country team expressed its gratitude for the support of the Peacebuilding Fund and the investments it had made in various areas. Country team members not only viewed the Fund as a catalytic instrument but also described it as "the most critical tool", which had helped plant the seeds for reconciliation, generate and support inclusive political dialogue and which had acted as an enabler for the socioeconomic empowerment of many youth and women and strengthened State capacity and State services in many parts of the country. I was able to witness first-hand the impact of the Peacebuilding Fund when I visited one of its women-led projects in PK5. I was deeply impressed by the results of the project and moved by the resilience of the women in PK5, who have been instrumental in engineering reconciliation between the communities and helping them, regardless of their religious beliefs, to benefit from socioeconomic development. I was encouraged to see that the Peacebuilding Fund is supporting lasting solutions and that it acts as an enabler for peace and stability. Both members of the country team and MINUSCA leadership have expressed the hope that the Peacebuilding Fund will maintain its level of engagement and investments in order to not only consolidate these achievements but also ensure that upcoming and important processes, such as the local elections, receive support.

11. With respect to the socioeconomic and fiscal situation, the Central African Republic, which has a population of about 6 million, continues to rank at the bottom of the human capital and development indices. Deep and systemic governance issues have not allowed the country to fully exploit and benefit from its resources and redress the situation. Furthermore, when certain donors suspended their budget support, the Central African Republic faced financial challenges at a time when demand for public services

by an already afflicted population was most urgent, and when external shocks, including climate-related factors, were affecting the country. However, the President's efforts to regain the support of the regional and international communities by strengthening political stability in the country have yielded some encouraging results.

12. During my meeting with international financial institutions, the IMF representative noted that, by enacting substantial reforms, the country has made important strides to change the course of its fiscal management. To support those efforts, the IMF Executive Board approved in April 2023 an Extended Credit Facility arrangement worth about \$191.4 million. The programme supported by the Extended Credit Facility is aimed at addressing the country's protracted balance of payments needs, continuing to prioritize spending on basic public services in the areas of health and education and providing a policy framework to advance key reforms. With technical support from IMF, the Central African Republic has been able to improve its fiscal revenues over the past six months. The gross domestic product is expected to grow by 2.5 per cent in 2023, an increase from the 0.4 per cent growth rate in 2022, owing to macroeconomic reforms and advances in the peace process. The programme is part of a coordinated effort by international financial institutions (World Bank, African Development Bank, IMF) aimed at supporting the people of the Central African Republic and averting a worsening of the humanitarian crisis while at the same time helping the country to adopt a long-term vision of growth.

13. The United Nations country team members and donors with whom I met also welcomed the recent progress and encouraged the redoubling of support for the Central African Republic to enact a longer-term vision of gradual economic and fiscal recovery and, ultimately, sustainable development. In this regard, the construction of a bridge between the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Central African Republic, funded by the European Union, is viewed as a potential source of economic growth. In my view, a study to anticipate investments associated with this project should be carried out with the support of international financial institutions. This vision for the Central African Republic aligns with the President's determination to end the need for protracted humanitarian assistance.

14. I intend to pursue my advocacy for effective and sustained investment in the socioeconomic development of the Central African Republic, including during an upcoming trip to Washington, D.C., to meet with representatives of international financial institutions, and in my meetings with donors.

Rule of law and justice

15. Strengthening the rule of law and the justice system, which is a prerequisite for peace and lasting reconciliation, is among the priorities of the Central African Republic configuration of the Peacebuilding Commission. In my meeting with the President of the Special Criminal Court and his team, I was apprised of their work and the Court's recent judgments. While the Court has several cases in the investigation stage, it rendered its first judgment in October 2022, convicting three members of the armed group Retour, réclamation et réhabilitation of war crimes and crimes against humanity. Although the Court continues to pursue its activities, major financial gaps persist. This funding shortage is hindering the ability of the Court to effectively and promptly carry out its work. Other challenges include retaining and replacing international magistrates and improving the capacity and functioning of national justice and correctional institutions outside Bangui. The President of the Court stressed that the issue of retaining and replacing international magistrates remains critical, as their presence is required by law and they are needed to carry out the Court's judicial activities. Furthermore, the President noted that gaps in essential elements of the judicial chain fuel the public's lack of trust and its criticism of the justice system. The Court has attempted to respond to some of those concerns by expanding its communication activities to showcase its judgments and by establishing a reparation fund for victims.

Despite being an important tool to strengthen trust in the justice system, the reparation fund has not generated traction among donors. The Court's annual budget is mostly covered by MINUSCA, the United States and the European Union. I call on the international community to support the Court and its work, staff and international magistrates, including by providing funding. The gains already achieved in the rule of law sector should be sustained and consolidated in order to ensure that the Central African Republic remains on the path towards peace and justice.

Final observations

16. The Central African Republic is currently at a critical crossroads, with many promising prospects for achieving lasting peace. Despite the risks, challenges, and gaps in capacity and resources, I remain hopeful, as the Government has maintained its commitment to sustainable peace and reconciliation and its determination to deliver on behalf of its people throughout the territory. All segments of society understand the importance of looking forward to the future and writing a new chapter for the country. This requires a concerted and unified approach among the partners of the Central African Republic in support of its efforts to ensure security and justice and offer better livelihood opportunities to its people.

17. It is therefore critical that all actors – financial institutions, donors and the United Nations system alike – redouble their engagement by coalescing around a unified strategy in support of the Central African Republic by creating synergies and coordination. Translating the aspirations of the Central African people for better livelihoods, peace, stability and development into reality is within reach and this opportunity should not be missed. At this critical point, our first and foremost priority should be to come together to provide unified support, as requested by the Central African authorities, for the successful conduct of inclusive, credible, transparent and peaceful local elections in October 2024. We also need to find ways to address Central Africans' urgent need for better livelihoods, so they can benefit from peace and development dividends. Unless we all come together to support the Central African Republic to achieve these two priorities, we will risk losing the important gains of recent years, shifting from breakthrough to breakdown. The international community cannot afford another relapse in the Central African Republic and should increasingly invest in peace, development and humanitarian projects. I also strongly believe that the success of the local elections will strengthen democracy and will be key to stabilizing the country. I therefore urge all Member States to consider contributing to the UNDP basket fund as a matter of urgency to facilitate a smooth preparation process.

18. At no point in my visit were doubts expressed about the importance of the contribution of MINUSCA. The Government reiterated its support for the Mission, and all of my interlocutors highlighted that it is critical that MINUSCA continue to fulfil its mandate. My visit also allowed me to observe the catalytic role of the Peacebuilding Fund. While the projects it finances are not large in scale, they have a tangible impact and play a decisive role in reconciling communities and creating socioeconomic opportunities.

19. I wish to reiterate my appreciation to the Government of the Central African Republic and other stakeholders, and to the Permanent Mission of the Central African Republic to the United Nations in New York, for their excellent collaboration and the support they offered for the preparation and conduct of my trip to Bangui. I also want to commend and thank the Peacebuilding Support Office and MINUSCA for their continued support throughout my mission and for assisting me in discharging my role as Chair of the Central African Republic configuration of the Peacebuilding Commission. The Commission should continue to support the laudable efforts of the Peacebuilding Support Office and MINUSCA, as their mandates remain more important than ever at this critical juncture for the country.