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Seventy-ninth year

9554th meeting

Wednesday, 21 February 2024, 10 a.m.

New York

Provisional

President: Mrs. Rodrigues-Birkett (Guyana)

Members:

Algeria	Mr. Koudri
China	Mr. Sun Zhiqiang
Ecuador	Mr. Montalvo Sosa
France	Mr. De Rivière
Japan	Mrs. Shino
Malta	Ms. Gatt
Mozambique	Mr. Afonso
Republic of Korea	Mr. Hwang
Russian Federation	Ms. Evstigneeva
Sierra Leone	Mr. Kanu
Slovenia	Ms. Jurečko
Switzerland	Mr. Hauri
United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland . .	Ms. Dix
United States of America	Mr. Wood

Agenda

The situation in the Central African Republic

Report of the Secretary-General on the Central African Republic (S/2024/170)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.05 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in the Central African Republic

Report of the Secretary-General on the Central African Republic (S/2024/170)

The President: In accordance with rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representative of the Central African Republic to participate in this meeting.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite Ms. Valentine Rugwabiza, Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic, to participate in this meeting.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

I wish to draw the attention of Council members to document S/2024/170, which contains the report of the Secretary-General on the Central African Republic.

I now give the floor to Ms. Rugwabiza.

Ms. Rugwabiza: I would like to congratulate Guyana on assuming the presidency of the Security Council for the month of February. I am honoured to present the most recent report (S/2024/170) of the Secretary-General on the Central African Republic and to update members on recent developments in the country and the implementation of the mandate of the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA).

On 6 February, a special session of the Executive Monitoring Committee for the Political Agreement for Peace and Reconciliation in the Central African Republic was convened and chaired by His Excellency President Touadera to mark the fifth anniversary of the signing of the agreement. The session took stock of the overall progress made in the implementation of the mutualized Political Agreement and the Luanda road map and witnessed an important mobilization of national, regional and international stakeholders, including agreement guarantors and facilitators. The session appreciated the support extended by the international

community, while calling for additional support for the implementation of the remaining commitments and continuous support to the decentralization of the peace process.

Speaking on behalf of all facilitators and guarantors, the Economic Community of Central African States Commissioner for Political Affairs, Peace and Security commended the achievements secured through the implementation of the mutualized peace process, including the self-dissolution of nine armed groups, and the retention of former leaders of armed groups in the current Government. In addition, the Commissioner called on remaining original signatories to the Political Agreement to rejoin the peace and political process, while commending the critical support provided by MINUSCA for the effective decentralization of the implementation of the agreement.

A little more than a month ago, on 15 January, a MINUSCA patrol hit an explosive ordnance device while returning from escorting humanitarian workers delivering assistance to Nzakoundou, a village in the western region of the Central African Republic that was recently the epicentre of an attack by suspected elements of the Retour, réclamation et réhabilitation armed group. The explosion killed Steve Emmanuel Atebele, from the Cameroon contingent, and injured five of his companions. Soldier Atebele was 30 years old and a father. I express my condolences and those of the entire staff of MINUSCA to the family of the deceased and to the Government of Cameroon.

The tragic death of this young peacekeeper, which comes against the backdrop of similar incidents in the past few months, must give cause for expediency in the handling of threats posed to peacekeepers by explosive ordnance devices and calls for appropriate responses. It is critically important that we understand the sources and origins of such devices through the application of proper intelligence-gathering and, equally, pursuing cross-border cooperation to stem the tide of the flow of weapons across boundaries into the territory of the Central African Republic. Furthermore, countries in the region need to scale up cooperation towards effective border management and control to stem the proliferation of those weapons.

Explosive ordnance devices and light weapons are not only a threat to the population and peacekeepers, but are equally the most serious constraint to the delivery of humanitarian assistance in the western region, where 50 per cent of the Central African population lives. I

therefore wish to request the Council's support for an urgent, dedicated and truly multidimensional response to this threat, both for the protection of civilians and for the safety and security of our peacekeepers. We need to do the utmost to prevent the spread of those lethal weapons to other regions of the Central African Republic. Such an approach should include investing in situational awareness as well focused cross-border cooperation on the origins and sources of the supply of those weapons. Furthermore, the multidimensional response should entail enhanced predeployment troop preparedness, the adequate training and equipping of contingents deployed, capacity-building for the national defence and security forces and further promoting community awareness and sensitization on the threat.

The Central African Republic is a vast country, with a tropical climate and dense forests and replete with unpassable terrains. The road network in the country covers a mere distance of about 24,000 kilometres, most of which is dirt track with only 3 per cent asphalted. Those tracks are unusable for road transportation during the eight long months of heavy rains each year. Throughout the country, many villages are unreachable and almost cut off year-round. In brief, Central Africa is a landlocked country with no internal connectivity roads. That not only constitutes a major challenge to the mobility of MINUSCA's troops and the national defence and security forces, and therefore to the protection of civilians and the extension of Central African State authority over its territory, but those problems are also further compounded by our Mission's limited transport and logistics capacities to project personnel and support operations. In response to protection of civilian emergencies in some remote areas, the Mission must use all its limited air assets, leaving us ill-equipped to attend to other pressing protection of civilian needs. The lack of a bulk cargo aircraft has limited the Mission's ability to transport critical materials necessary to undertake our field projects to improve accessibility and mobility of MINUSCA's uniformed and civilian personnel.

As we prepare soon to initiate MINUSCA's budget deliberations, we sincerely count on the Council members and all Member States to avail MINUSCA of the requisite transport and logistic means to consolidate and expand MINUSCA's logistical support to the Government of the Central African Republic and the national defence and internal security forces so that they can fulfil their primary responsibility of protecting civilians and exercising sovereignty over their territory.

Indeed, resolution 2709 (2023), through which the Council renewed the mandate of MINUSCA, elevated the Mission's support to the restoration and extension of State authority to a priority task. MINUSCA, in coordination with United Nations agencies, has invested in key areas, including the redeployment of civil servants and other State agents from Bangui to their places of assignment in prefectures and sub-prefectures across the country. MINUSCA has also invested in the construction, refurbishment and equipping of administrative buildings. As of January, 86 per cent of local administrative authorities are present at their posts. MINUSCA provided logistic, security and capacity-building support to the Ministry of Public Service and Administrative Reform and to the Ministry of Territorial Administration, Decentralization and Local Development, reaching a total of more than 5,000 civil servants present in the field, as compared to only 650 in 2013.

I should state that our current mandate has raised expectations for even more. In that context, the Mission will continue to enhance its close cooperation and joint patrols with the Armed Forces of the Central African Republic and internal forces, especially in border areas and conflict hotspots. That is coupled with the urgent need for security sector reform, to which we continue to lend considerable support.

However, the elevation of extension of State authority to a priority task has not been accompanied by additional resources for its implementation, which, if not addressed during the upcoming budget deliberations, could limit our ability to optimally support the additional mandated priority task. Furthermore, the magnitude of security sector reform and restoration of State authority needs cannot be supported by MINUSCA alone. I therefore encourage Member States and partners with relevant expertise and institutional capabilities to support the Central African national defence and security forces and, in doing so, support the Central African Republic's efforts and progress in building a professional army and internal security forces. There is simply no alternative to lasting security and securitization of the Central African population and the preservation of the sovereignty of the Central African territory.

This is an opportunity for me to salute the Government of the Central African Republic for the adoption, at the end of December 2023, of its 10-year national policy for the management of border areas. The execution of the plan calls for border cooperation

between the Central African Republic and neighbouring countries, including through the activation of the border commissions. The commissions play a crucial role in the common fight against insecurity and all forms of illegal activities that are a perennial constraint to the economic development of the Central African Republic.

On 8 December 2023, the Government of the Central African Republic and MINUSCA jointly organized a seminar on strategic communication. The aim of the national seminar was to collectively take stock of achievements and challenges of the past mandate, but also to acquaint the Government and all Central African Republic partners with the contents of the new mandate, as well as the respective roles and responsibilities of the Government, MINUSCA, the United Nations country team and Central African partners in its implementation. The strategic communication initiative, which was the first since the deployment of the Mission, was highly appreciated by the Central African authorities and the diplomatic community in Bangui, as well as local authorities in the region. One of the major outcomes of the prefectural seminars was a general clarion call by women for support that would permit them to play an engaged and active role in the local elections and in the local implementation mechanisms of the Political Agreement for Peace and Reconciliation in their respective localities. I intend to continue using my good offices and to mobilize all of the Mission's resources, the United Nations country team and other bilateral and multilateral partners towards that goal. A more active and meaningful participation by women and youth in the political life of the Central African Republic, especially in the peripheries, is central to their meaningful inclusion in the political and socioeconomic development of their country.

The President: I thank Ms. Rugwabiza for her briefing.

I shall now give the floor to those members of the Council who wish to make statements.

Mr. De Rivière (France) (*spoke in French*): I thank the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for her briefing and reiterate France's full support.

The continuation of the peace process in the Central African Republic is essential to silencing the guns. France welcomes the efforts of the authorities of the Central African Republic. The second meeting of the strategic review for the implementation of the Political Agreement for Peace and Reconciliation in the Central

African Republic and the Luanda road map was held in Bangui in October 2023. That was a step in the right direction. Progress in that area must be amplified.

France welcomes the renewal of the mandate of the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA). We welcome the continuation of its efforts, in conjunction with the Central African authorities, to strengthen the authority of the State throughout the territory. Disarmament, demobilization, reintegration and repatriation efforts must continue, as well as security sector reform. We welcome the results achieved by the Central African authorities, in conjunction with MINUSCA, in the fight against armed groups.

Regarding the ongoing insecurity resulting from the cross-border movement of armed groups, cooperation with countries in the region is essential. France encourages the continuation of the efforts of the Central African Government and the establishment of concrete cooperation in conjunction with regional organizations, as well as with neighbouring States.

Attacks continue to be carried out by armed groups against civilian populations, Central African forces and MINUSCA. France condemns those attacks. We are concerned about the growing threat posed by the use of explosive devices in several regions of the country. We condemn the violations of international humanitarian law and international human rights law, which increased by 30 per cent compared to the previous reporting period, especially those committed by armed groups and Russian mercenaries, including the Wagner Group. Those violations and incidents of conflict-related sexual violence and violence against children must not go unpunished. The humanitarian situation remains precarious, and the increase in the number of refugees and asylum seekers linked to the crisis in the Sudan is likely to exacerbate it. It is vital to ensure full access to aid, which must be commensurate with people's needs.

Dialogue between the Government and the opposition, in a political space that will enable open and peaceful democratic debate, is needed in order to build on the progress that has been made. France urges the authorities of the Central African Republic to guarantee the civil and political rights of all individuals and to counter disinformation campaigns. We also call on the authorities, starting now, to create the conditions

needed for the holding of free, transparent and inclusive local elections.

Mr. Wood (United States of America): I thank Special Representative of the Secretary-General Rugwabiza for her comprehensive briefing. The report (S/2024/170) clearly demonstrates the essential role that the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA) plays in protecting civilians and providing stability for the Central African Republic.

Today I will address three key themes, which are MINUSCA's contributions to peace and security, the need for the Mission to operate free of obstruction and the importance of a political solution to ending the country's ongoing conflict.

First, I want to convey my deep appreciation to MINUSCA, its leadership and its troop- and police-contributing countries for their sacrifices and their commitment to promoting peace in the Central African Republic. I also want to express my sincere condolences to MINUSCA, to Cameroon and to the family of the peacekeeper who lost his life after his convoy struck an explosive device last month. That highlights the importance of the joint efforts of the Central African Government and MINUSCA to mitigate the threat of explosive ordnance. Through MINUSCA's new mandate, the Security Council has prioritized the Mission's work, facilitating the extension of State authority. The United States recognizes that effort as a critical component of a lasting peace and welcomes MINUSCA's contributions to building the defence and security forces' capacity to assume primary responsibility for the security of the Central African Republic. But as the capacity of the Armed Forces of the Central African Republic grows, so too does its responsibility, which is why we are alarmed by reports that the Kremlin-backed Wagner Group and Armed Forces of the Central African Republic burned an entire village to the ground following an operation on 24 December, displacing 750 households.

Such actions are unacceptable and undermine the efforts to extend State authority, protect civilians and invest in stabilization, all of which are priorities of MINUSCA and the Government of the Central African Republic and essential components of peace. We also remain deeply concerned about reports of human rights violations and abuses, as well as instances of conflict-related sexual and gender-based violence. We call on the Central African Government to hold those responsible

to account. Considering that the humanitarian needs in the Central African Republic are great and are only growing, the United States values MINUSCA's facilitation of humanitarian access and calls on all parties to enable the full, safe, rapid, immediate and unhindered delivery of humanitarian aid. Another critical aspect of MINUSCA's work will be supporting the historic local elections in October. Elections are an important step towards decentralization, and I call on the authorities of the Central African Republic to ensure that they are conducted in a transparent, timely and inclusive manner, with the full, equal and meaningful participation of women and youth.

After acknowledging some of MINUSCA's important contributions, I must now address some of the challenges.

First, FACA's obstruction of Mission convoys, often when FACA is conducting joint operations with Wagner personnel, is inconsistent with the Central African Republic's obligation under the status-of-forces agreement to allow MINUSCA full and unrestricted freedom of movement throughout the country. Such obstructions limit the Mission's ability to protect civilians and monitor human rights violations and abuses.

Secondly, the Government of the Central African Republic's restrictions on uncrewed aerial systems severely limit the Mission's ability to maintain awareness within a dynamic security environment, which hampers efforts to counter armed groups and protect civilians. The restrictions also put peacekeepers at increased risk. I call on the authorities of the Central African Republic yet again to lift those restrictions immediately. I find it deeply troubling that I made the same request of the Government during a MINUSCA briefing a year ago (see S/PV.9265). As I said then, lifting restrictions and replacing them with others is not progress and must stop.

Thirdly, the scourge of disinformation contributes to instability, undermines the Mission's work, increases the threat to peacekeepers and reduces the efficacy of peacekeeping. Anyone who knowingly perpetuates falsehoods is complicit in the continuation of violence and insecurity.

Lastly, combating armed groups that refuse to engage in the peace process is important, but no military solution alone can stop the cycle of violence. We call on all parties to resume a political dialogue

within the framework of the peace process, and we emphasize that through its good offices, MINUSCA can and should facilitate such efforts in every way possible. The United States remains a steadfast partner of the people of the Central African Republic and of MINUSCA's troops, police and civilian staff members, who work so diligently to bring them security. It is time to choose the path of peace.

Mr. Kanu (Sierra Leone): I have the honour to deliver this statement on behalf of the African members of the Security Council plus one (A3+), namely, Algeria, Guyana, Mozambique and my own country, Sierra Leone.

We take note of the report of the Secretary-General (S/2024/170) and thank Special Representative of the Secretary-General Valentine Rugwabiza, Head of the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA), for her informative briefing on the situation in the Central African Republic, and especially for her proactive and effective leadership. We welcome the participation of the representative of the Central African Republic in this meeting.

The Central African Republic is facing multidimensional challenges, for which our support in restoring peace and security across the country is essential. The A3+ recognizes the crucial and commendable role of MINUSCA and the United Nations country team in carrying out their mandate, often in difficult circumstances. We also salute the Mission's troop- and police-contributing countries and the regional organizations that continue to provide the support that the Central African Republic needs during this critical moment, as it moves towards the restoration of constitutional order.

On the political front, the A3+ first notes with concern the disagreements on the part of the political opposition and the leaders of some armed groups with regard to the opening of dialogue by President Touadera and the detention of a member of Parliament by the national defence and security forces, which is likely to undermine inclusive and active political participation. The A3+ encourages continuing the dialogue at the initiative of the President to appeal to political actors from the Central African Republic abroad to return and participate in the country's political and development process. In that regard, the recent Government reshuffle, resulting in the appointment of former opposition leaders, is a positive sign that should be encouraged.

With regard to the security situation in the Central African Republic, the A3+ is appalled by the current security situation, which continues to be volatile, with civilians being subjected to a continued cycle of violence by armed groups, which we condemn in the strongest terms. We also condemn the repeated attacks by armed groups on humanitarian actors, MINUSCA and the Armed Forces of the Central African Republic, which are committed to protecting and restoring the security of the Central African Republic. We condemn in the strongest terms the 15 January attack on MINUSCA in Mbindale using an explosive device, following which one Cameroonian peacekeeper was killed and five others injured. The A3+ expresses its deepest condolences to Cameroon and to the United Nations family as a whole. We wish the injured peacekeepers a speedy and complete recovery.

In addition, the internal security challenges of the Central African Republic — such as cross-border insecurity, illicit trafficking in natural resources and weapons and the continued use of explosive devices and unmanned aircraft — undoubtedly contribute to the volatile security situation in the country. We encourage the authorities of the Central African Republic to collaborate with MINUSCA and to continue promoting the mediation and reconciliation process at the local level, with a view to decentralizing the peace process, resolving conflicts and consolidating the progress achieved. In the face of those threats, we encourage MINUSCA to sustain its current level of mobilization and consolidate the hard-won security gains in cooperation with the Armed Forces of the Central African Republic. However, such an endeavour of course needs to have the support of the international community.

On the peace process, we welcome the progress made in the implementation of the Political Agreement for Peace and Reconciliation in the Central African Republic and the joint road map for peace in the Central African Republic. We also welcome progress in the process of the disarmament, demobilization, reintegration and repatriation of ex-combatants, the reform of the security sector and the restoration of State authority. We call on all political actors in the Central African Republic, including the opposition and civil society, to engage constructively in a spirit of tolerance and dialogue to uphold social cohesion and contribute to the success of the whole peace process.

The A3+ congratulates the Government on the completion of the 10-year action plan to operationalize

the national border management policy, adopted in September 2023, with the support of MINUSCA and international partners. The A3+ welcomes the efforts of the Government in strengthening subregional cooperation and improving the security of the borders of the Central African Republic. In that regard, we commend the work of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict and for her visit to the Central African Republic, where she spoke with national authorities, especially on the implementation of the joint communiqué by the Central African Republic and the United Nations on the prevention of conflict-related sexual violence.

We encourage the authorities of the Central African Republic to collaborate with MINUSCA, to continue strengthening the operational capabilities of the Armed Forces of the Central African Republic in order to effectively respond to new security challenges posed by the continuous increase in asymmetric threats. To that end, we welcome MINUSCA's training and capacity-building initiatives for the defence and security forces in the areas of demining, logistics and human rights. MINUSCA cannot implement such a process alone. Therefore, further international support is required.

Protecting the Central African Republic and its population requires an end to the continuous plunder of its natural resources by armed groups, with the establishment of mechanisms for the traceability and certification of minerals and a reinforcement of cross-border security.

As for the electoral process, the A3+ welcomes the approval of the new electoral code by the National Assembly as an important part of the preparatory process for the upcoming electoral rendezvous in 2025. We would also like to express our appreciation for the existing cooperation between the national defence and internal security forces and their MINUSCA counterparts and encourage the parties to continue this synergy, with a view to operationalizing the integrated election security plan. The criticality of the electoral process cannot be overemphasized, as the outcome of the election would determine the political future of the Central African Republic and open the pathway to sustainable and lasting peace.

We therefore encourage the international development partners and Group of Friends of the Central African Republic to provide the necessary financial and logistical support to the Central African Republic in organizing the election in a transparent,

fair and credible manner. To that end, we call on all political actors, including the opposition and civil society, to engage constructively in strengthening social cohesion, tolerance and dialogue with all components of Central African Republic society, especially women and young people.

In that connection, the A3+ underscores the importance of promoting women's participation in the upcoming elections and calls for the deployment of all needed efforts in that regard. Ensuring the security of the upcoming elections is essential and we therefore call for strengthened cooperation between the Central African Republic's defence and security forces and MINUSCA, with a view to operationalizing the integrated election security plan.

The success of the planned elections relies on the support of the international community. Therefore, we call on all international and regional partners to scale up their support. The actual holding of the elections is eagerly awaited by the people of the Central African Republic, who aspire for lasting peace as well as free, fair and credible elections.

On the humanitarian front, the A3+ notes with concern the increase in human rights violations and the persistence of conflict-related sexual violence and serious violations against children — abduction, recruitment and the use of children — which constitute the majority of serious violations committed by armed groups. We urge the Government to put in place accountability mechanisms or measures to address gross violations of human rights and international humanitarian law.

We welcome the release of 134 children in 2023, noting that that number is significantly lower than those released in the year prior, and call for the immediate release of all children being held captive. In that regard, we commend all efforts towards the prevention of conflict-related sexual violence, as well as national efforts for the promotion of human rights and the protection of children.

We are also concerned about the influx of internally displaced persons and refugees as a result of conflicts in the Central African Republic's neighbouring countries, increased violence against civilians by armed groups and the effects of climate change, which are exacerbating communal tensions. Those developments are all having a disastrous impact on the humanitarian situation in the Central African Republic. In that vein,

we call for the free movement of humanitarian workers to enable them to perform their work without any risks or threat.

In conclusion, the A3+ reiterates its support for MINUSCA. We warmly commend the Special Representative of the Secretary-General and her team for their remarkable contribution to the stabilization of the Central African Republic. We reaffirm our strong solidarity with the Government and the people of the Central African Republic, while reiterating our commitment to supporting the independence, unity, territorial integrity and sovereignty of the Central African Republic.

Mr. Hwang (Republic of Korea): I extend my gratitude to the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Ms. Rugwabiza, for her comprehensive briefing. I also welcome the representative of the Central African Republic to today's meeting.

At the outset, I express my deepest condolences to the family of the peacekeeper killed in the attack on the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA) on 15 January.

The Central African Republic is at a critical juncture in its State-building efforts. However, the security situation remains volatile, particularly in border areas, necessitating the extension of State authority to address multifaceted challenges effectively. In the light of these circumstances, I wish to underscore four points.

First, the peace process must progress for the stability of the Central African Republic. We commend the Government's continued ownership and commitment to the Political Agreement for Peace and Reconciliation in the Central African Republic and urge it to pursue dialogue with the armed groups. All armed groups must also lay down their weapons and participate in the peace process without delay.

Furthermore, conducting local elections by October this year is vital for democratic governance and fulfilling the decentralization required for sustainable peace. We note the adoption of a new electoral code last month, which is an essential step for holding elections. We encourage the Government of the Central African Republic, as well as the political opposition, to pursue dialogue and identify confidence-building measures for an inclusive and credible electoral process.

Secondly, the volatile security situation, especially along the borders with the Sudan and Chad, is of deep concern. Porous borders allow cross-border incursions and the recruitment and movement of armed combatants, undermining regional stability from a broader perspective. In that context, we commend and fully support MINUSCA in supporting the extension of State authority through assistance in the deployment of national defence and security forces. The increased use of explosive ordnance is another threat that has been growing recently, jeopardizing security operations and humanitarian access. The Republic of Korea condemns all attacks by armed groups on civilian populations, national security and defence forces and MINUSCA.

Early-warning mechanisms are vital to the prevention of transhumance-related violence. In that regard, we urge the Government of the Central African Republic to lift all restrictions on MINUSCA's uncrewed aerial vehicles and night flights. MINUSCA's capability to assess threats, improve its pre-emptive posture and provide reliable community protection remains critical. It is also important to ensure that the status-of-forces agreement is fully upheld.

Thirdly, the violations and abuses of human rights, conflict-related sexual violence, grave violations against children and violations of international humanitarian law that have been continually perpetrated by all parties must end immediately. It is particularly alarming that the number of human rights violations and abuses increased by 30 per cent in just four months. Nevertheless, it is encouraging to see the assessment in the Secretary-General's report (S/2024/170) that the rule of law and the fight against impunity are slowly being restored.

Fourthly, the humanitarian situation continues to remain dire, with almost half the population of the Central African Republic in need of humanitarian assistance. The influx of refugees from the Sudan is exacerbating the existing tensions. In an effort to support the Central African Republic, the Republic of Korea has contributed nearly \$4 million to the United Nations Development Programme's stabilization programme, through which we hope to enhance stabilization and strengthen social cohesion in the country through the rehabilitation of basic infrastructure and the provision of livelihood support.

In conclusion, the Republic of Korea reaffirms its unwavering support for the Special Representative of

the Secretary-General and MINUSCA in their efforts to stabilize the Central African Republic.

Mrs. Shino (Japan): I would like to express my gratitude to Special Representative Rugwabiza for her briefing and to welcome the presence here of the representative of the Central African Republic.

Let me begin by paying tribute to all personnel of the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA) for their sacrifices in building sustainable peace in the country. Regrettably, we saw another heinous attack using explosive devices last month. The safety of peacekeepers is paramount, and we again strongly condemn any attacks on them.

This month, the 2019 Political Agreement for Peace and Reconciliation in the Central African Republic marked its fifth anniversary. The full implementation of the Political Agreement remains essential to achieving sustainable peace and development. To that end, the promotion of political reconciliation and socioeconomic reintegration, especially at the local level, should be at the centre of stabilization efforts. From that perspective, I would like to stress the following points.

First, only a political solution can bring sustainable stability, and that must remain the priority. It requires inclusive engagement with all stakeholders with the strong ownership of the Government of the Central African Republic. It is encouraging that the Government has continued to make efforts to advance the disarmament, demobilization, repatriation and reintegration (DDRR) process for armed groups. If the members of those groups are to change their course of action, they need enhanced prospects for an alternative life through the involvement of the entire community. In that regard, we support the efforts led by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General to decentralize the DDRR process, which will promote active participation by local stakeholders and reinvigorate mechanisms for the peace process on the ground.

That is closely related to my second point, which is about the local elections planned for the latter half of this year. The presence of elected local leaders is key to local governance reform aimed at building a resilient community into which former combatants are duly reintegrated. Moreover, given the continued presence of anti-Government armed groups, in the longer term local elections will be crucial to encouraging them to lay down their arms and ultimately find

their way in politics. The forthcoming elections can be an opportunity to fundamentally change political dynamics for the betterment of the people's welfare. A fair, open, inclusive and credible election process must be set up to protect the political rights of all and overcome the deep divisions in the country.

Finally, we must continue to promote regional cooperation. The activities of armed groups and illicit flows of weapons, including improvised explosive devices, are concentrated in the border areas. We remain deeply concerned about the continued human rights violations and abuses committed by armed groups, State agents and other security personnel. The dire human security situation has been further compounded by the continued influx of displaced persons from Chad and the Sudan. The State's authority has to be further extended in a sustainable manner to promote the rule of law and the provision of basic social services, with the support of the international community. Japan, in partnership with UN-Women, has been engaged in providing emergency assistance for basic services and helping with a protection mechanism to tackle violence against women and girls in the border areas. Japan remains committed to working with international partners for peace and stability in the Central African Republic.

Ms. Dix (United Kingdom): I thank Special Representative Rugwabiza for her briefing this morning. I would like to make three points.

First, the United Kingdom welcomes the achievements that have come from closer cooperation between the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA) and the Central African Republic authorities, following the Council's reprioritization of the Mission's tasks. The commitments by the Central African Republic to establishing human rights mechanisms, implementing the Political Agreement for Peace and Reconciliation in the Central African Republic and preparing for local elections this year can provide a basis for lasting security and prosperity. It is important for the Central African Republic authorities, with the support of MINUSCA, to deliver on those commitments. The United Kingdom urges the Government to ensure that all parties are included in the peace process and in local elections and to fulfil the decentralization provisions of the Political Agreement. MINUSCA's good-offices role remains central, because ensuring inclusive dialogue at the national and local

levels is the only way to address the root causes of conflict in the Central African Republic.

Secondly, security in the Central African Republic will not come through the wrong partners. The Wagner Group's human rights abuses against civilians threaten to cause prolonged insecurity and undo MINUSCA's achievements. There must be accountability for all human rights abuses, no matter who commits them. To that end, the United Kingdom requests MINUSCA to ensure that its annual human rights reports are shared in a timely manner.

Thirdly, we emphasize that MINUSCA remains central to the pursuit of peace and stability in the Central African Republic, and we pay tribute to the United Nations peacekeepers who have lost their lives in the pursuit of that mission. The effectiveness of MINUSCA depends on strong cooperation with the Government of the Central African Republic, including by ensuring freedom of movement for its uncrewed aerial vehicles. MINUSCA's strategic review should focus on how the Mission can further prepare for a sustainable transition once conditions are met.

The United Kingdom remains committed to working with the Central African Republic authorities to support the people of the country achieve long-term stability and prosperity.

Mr. Sun Zhiqiang (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): I thank Special Representative Rugwabiza for her briefing and welcome the presence of the representative of the Central African Republic at today's meeting.

Recently, the political and security situation in the Central African Republic has been continuously improving. We have all witnessed the achievements of the Government of the Central African Republic in advancing the peace process, maintaining national security and promoting development and reconstruction, among other achievements. The international community should help the Central African Republic to consolidate the current positive momentum and to inject new impetus into its peace and development.

I would like to make three points.

First, we should continue to support the political and peace process in the Central African Republic. Recently, the Government of the Central African Republic has been actively promoting the implementation of the peace agreement and has been engaged in dialogue, leading to several advancements, with some armed

groups announcing their adherence to the peace agreement. China calls on the armed groups that have not yet disarmed to immediately cease hostilities and start the disarmament process as soon as possible. China supports the relevant regional organizations in continuously and constructively supporting the Central African Republic's peace process. As the Government of the Central African Republic is preparing for local elections, the international community should provide the necessary financial and technical support to ensure the smooth holding of the elections. We have noted that some Council members referred to the report on the human rights situation in the Central African Republic released by the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA) in December 2023. China is of the view that the human rights work should be objectively evaluated based on the reality of the Central African Republic, and that human rights should not be used as a tool to interfere in the internal affairs of the country concerned.

Secondly, we should continue our support to the Central African Republic for maintaining security. The overall improvement in the security situation in the Central African Republic would not have been possible without the joint efforts of the Government, MINUSCA and the international community. At the same time, some armed groups are still carrying out attacks outside Bangui, thereby jeopardizing the safety of civilians and peacekeepers. MINUSCA should continue to enhance its capacity to protect civilians as mandated by the Security Council and support the Armed Forces of the Central African Republic in assuming more security responsibilities. We should also pay close attention to the spillover effect of the situation in the Sudan and Chad on the Central African Republic and support countries in the region in strengthening border control, curbing the cross-border flow of armed individuals and safeguarding common security in the region. The Government of the Central African Republic has repeatedly expressed the hope that the Security Council would completely lift the arms embargo. China supports the Council in proceeding with further action until the embargo is completely lifted.

Thirdly, we should continue to support development and reconstruction in the Central African Republic. The Secretary-General's report (S/2024/170) stresses that promoting socioeconomic development is essential for the country's sustainable peace. China calls for greater support from the international community in such areas

as infrastructure, agricultural development, education and health to help the Central African Republic to enhance its organic capacity for development and to create a favourable environment for a lasting peace in the country.

Since taking office, Special Representative Rugwabiza has led MINUSCA's tremendous efforts in supporting the peace process, decentralization and the protection of civilians. China will continue to support the Special Representative's work. It should be noted that, almost 10 years into MINUSCA's deployment in the Central African Republic, its peacekeeping mandate, staffing level and size have been continually expanded. The Government of the Central African Republic called for the adjustment of MINUSCA's mandate in the light of the reality in the country and called for the development of a reasonable road map for the withdrawal of the Mission. It is China's view that, in accordance with the actual situation and needs of the Central African Republic, the Council should optimize and streamline MINUSCA's mandate and rationalize its staffing level and size. The ongoing independent strategic assessment of MINUSCA should pay real attention to those important issues.

Mr. Montalvo Sosa (Ecuador) (*spoke in Spanish*): I thank Special Representative Valentine Rugwabiza for her report. I acknowledge the presence in the Chamber of the representative of the Central African Republic.

While the results set out in the report for this period (S/2024/170) indicate progress in deepening the Political Agreement for Peace and Reconciliation in the Central African Republic, the security situation remains volatile. We encourage continued efforts to implement the joint road map in the Central African Republic, along with the participation of the guarantor countries, Angola and Rwanda, in the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region. In order to ensure the positive outcome of all political efforts, State presence must be reinforced and expanded throughout the territory of the Central African Republic, taking into account above all aspects related to development, politics, human rights and humanitarian assistance. The finalization of the action plan is encouraging. It will operationalize the border management policy, and we hope that cooperation with neighbouring countries will remain, particularly with Chad. Such cooperation can generate key initiatives that benefit the civilian population. This is all in line with what Special Representative Rugwabiza said.

Peace and development are mutually reinforcing, which is why we urge international financial institutions to continue to keep the necessary lines open to help the Central African Republic to recover from external shocks and to continue to work towards the country's development — for example, by investing in infrastructure. The work of the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA) to combat hate speech and disinformation promotes tolerance and expands the civil space, which are necessary for local, presidential and legislative elections. We hope that that will be taken into account during the upcoming processes in October and in future processes. Initiatives in strategic communications are also important in that area. The inclusion of gender quotas in the new electoral code is a positive development, and, along those lines, MINUSCA's work to raise awareness on promoting the meaningful participation of women in local elections is essential and must be bolstered.

The data contained in the report of the Secretary-General regarding a 30 per cent increase in cases of serious violations of human rights are alarming, particularly in relation to the use of sexual violence and abuse against minors. Combating impunity is central to achieving genuine reconciliation. We underscore the work carried out by the Special Criminal Court, which tries war crimes and crimes against humanity. The joint work of MINUSCA, the United Nations country office, the United Nations Development Programme and other United Nations agencies, such as the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, bolster early-warning efforts regarding possible areas of violence and those in greatest humanitarian need. That joint work must continue in order to tend to the needs of the population of the Central African Republic and those of the displaced persons who are arriving in the country after fleeing the conflict in the Sudan. MINUSCA must continue to implement necessary measures to prevent, combat and eliminate any misconduct by its staff or affiliates, particularly in relation to sexual exploitation and abuse.

Finally, Ecuador supports MINUSCA's work and its active cooperation with the Government of the Central African Republic, which we hope will continue to call for dialogue and facilitate the fulfilment of peace operations in appropriate security conditions and with better results for the population.

Ms. Gatt (Malta): I thank Special Representative of the Secretary-General Rugwabiza for her comprehensive briefing.

At the outset, we also pay tribute to the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA) peacekeepers who were recently killed or injured on duty.

The renewal of MINUSCA's mandate in November 2023 prompted a collective agreement to reassess priorities within the Mission's mandate, including the support for the extension of State authority. Malta welcomes the recent collaborative efforts made in that regard, including the deployment of civil servants by the Government of the Central African Republic in regions assisted by MINUSCA and the initiation of ambitious programmes by the World Bank. Achieving lasting peace and stability in the Central African Republic is our shared objective, and maintaining an inclusive political space is an essential precondition for that.

As the dry season continues, armed group activities have risen, together with transhumance movements and related clashes. We condemn the armed groups' activities and are deeply concerned about the violations they have committed, which include kidnappings aimed at regaining control of mining sites. We are alarmed by the 30 per cent increase in human rights violations and abuses during the reporting period. Malta commends MINUSCA's efforts to engage with militias to prevent the recruitment and use of children as well as other grave violations, and we fully support initiatives designed to prevent sexual and gender-based violence, including forced marriage and sexual slavery. We also commend the Government's completion of its 10-year action plan to operationalize its national border-management policy, which is a significant milestone in limiting international illegal trafficking movements and encouraging the authorities to continue engaging constructively in good-neighbourly relations.

We should also address the effects of the conflict in the Sudan on the Central African Republic. The influx of refugees is exacerbating the burdens on local communities. Coupled with the security risks facing humanitarian aid workers, that makes us deeply worried about the increasingly tense situation affecting the precarious tri-border region. Given that nearly half of the population requires some form of humanitarian assistance, with needs exacerbated by the adverse effects of climate change and food insecurity, we want

to emphasize how important it is to ensure adequate resources for the aid response.

MINUSCA's freedom of movement and action remain a vital component of its mandate. Despite the renewed coordination between the Mission and the authorities, the restriction on its use of drones is unacceptable and poses a deliberate threat to the safety and security of peacekeepers. Uncrewed aerial vehicles are important for patrolling areas in advance of MINUSCA patrols. We want to take this opportunity to urge the Secretariat to circulate, in a timely manner, the human rights report to be published later this year. That aligns with resolution 2709 (2023) and ensures that Council members are aware of all the necessary elements before engaging in negotiations.

In conclusion, we continue to support the Central African Republic's renewed efforts to engage in political dialogue. We encourage the authorities to maintain that momentum, prioritizing inclusive local elections and expanding the necessary civic space. We commend the adoption of gender quotas and other efforts to increase the meaningful participation of women. Those efforts, alongside continued cooperation with MINUSCA, are fundamental pillars for the extension of State authority and consequently the long-lasting stabilization of the country.

Ms. Jurečko (Slovenia): I would like to start by thanking the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for the Central African Republic, Ms. Valentine Rugwabiza, for her informative briefing today. Furthermore, I want to express Slovenia's full support and appreciation to the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA) and its troop- and police-contributing countries for their invaluable contributions to peace in the Central African Republic. I would also like to express our sincere condolences to the family of the peacekeeper from Cameroon who was killed in a recent attack, and to wish a speedy recovery to the peacekeepers who were injured in that tragic event. I would like to touch on three points in my remarks today.

First, Slovenia welcomes the revitalization of the peace process. However, we remain concerned about the persistently volatile security situation and the high number of civilian casualties, including an alarming increase in the number of reported grave violations against children. We call on all the remaining armed groups to return to the Political Agreement for Peace

and Reconciliation in the Central African Republic and the Luanda road map, and we encourage the Central African Republic to continue its outreach to all armed groups, with the goal of ensuring their disarmament, demobilization, repatriation and reintegration.

For the peace process to succeed, it must be accompanied by an inclusive and genuine political dialogue with all political actors and segments of society within the Central African Republic, including the full, equal and meaningful participation of women and young people at all levels of the dialogue. Ending impunity and ensuring respect for human rights are integral parts of building trust and durable peace, and in that respect, we note the work of the Special Criminal Court and other judiciary processes, which also have MINUSCA's support. Inclusive and sustainable economic development and much-needed investments are possible only in a climate of long-term and sustainable peace and security. Achieving gender equality and women's socioeconomic empowerment must be central to those efforts.

Secondly, Slovenia welcomes the commitment of the Government of the Central African Republic to organizing local elections this year. Free and fair elections can contribute significantly to reducing intercommunal tensions and enhancing stability. In that regard, we urge the Central African Republic to ensure the credibility of the electoral process, including by preventing the spread of misinformation and ensuring the full, equal, meaningful and safe participation of women in electoral, decision-making and other political processes. The international community can play an important role in assisting the Central African Republic in holding elections as planned. We also encourage the Government to ensure that elected local authorities have tools and financial means that are sufficient to discharging their mandates and improving the lives of their constituents.

Finally, we call on the Central African Republic to honour the commitments outlined in the status-of-forces agreement and immediately lift any restrictions that limit the prompt and effective use of uncrewed aerial vehicles (UAVs) by MINUSCA at any time of day. MINUSCA must enjoy full, unrestricted freedom of movement, with unhindered and immediate access throughout the territory of the Central African Republic, including by air and at night. Its unrestricted use of UAVs is not a matter of mere operational efficiency but

also significantly affects the safety and security of the peacekeepers on the ground.

We commend the progress achieved in certain aspects of the peace process, and despite the ongoing challenges, we remain optimistic that the cycle of violence can be broken and that the Central African Republic can progress towards a more peaceful and prosperous future. We stand ready to support it on that path.

Mr. Hauri (Switzerland) (*spoke in French*): I thank Special Representative Rugwabiza for her briefing and welcome the participation of the representative of the Central African Republic in this meeting. I would like to express my sincere condolences to the families and troop-contributing countries that have suffered casualties, especially Cameroon.

The Political Agreement for Peace and Reconciliation in the Central African Republic, signed five years ago, has led to significant progress in terms of stability, security and peace in the country, despite the persistent challenges. We believe that in order to consolidate those gains and continue on a path towards lasting and inclusive peace in the country, it will be important to take the following three steps.

First, the efforts to implement the Political Agreement in full must be supported and strengthened. Switzerland welcomed the strategic review of the Agreement and urges the Government and the remaining active armed groups to firmly commit to it and to initiate constructive dialogue, including at the provincial level. It is vital to ensure the successful and sustainable disarmament, demobilization and reintegration of former combatants in order to encourage other armed actors to join the process. We also welcome the President of the Central African Republic's announcement that inclusive, transparent, democratic and peaceful local elections will be held. They represent a crucial step towards decentralizing the peace process and firmly enshrining democracy.

Secondly, the progress made on the security and humanitarian fronts must be further consolidated. Switzerland welcomes the efforts of the Government and the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA) to extend State authority throughout the country. For the first time in several years, the State's authority is in effect in certain provinces. We welcome the reduction in emergency humanitarian needs, which

enables a greater focus on sustainable development. However, the situation remains fragile and volatile in certain areas. The increase in the activities of armed groups during the current dry season, particularly in border areas, is a threat to civilians' safety. Their protection must remain a priority. That is all the more important given that the effects of climate change are increasing instability in the region. In that context, Switzerland reiterates the importance of authorizing the use of reconnaissance tools, such as drones, by MINUSCA for the implementation of its mandate to protect civilians and above all to ensure the safety of its personnel, especially the peacekeepers. That represents a collective responsibility to the contributing countries and the Mission's personnel.

Thirdly, respect for human rights and access to justice are fundamental pillars of national reconciliation and indispensable to lasting peace. Freedom of expression and freedom of the media are important requirements for an informed, participatory and democratic society. In that respect, we urge the Central African authorities and media to ensure the dissemination of quality information and to combat disinformation. Furthermore, while welcoming the adoption of the national human rights policy, we encourage the authorities to continue their efforts to combat impunity. The opening of a second case by the Special Criminal Court and the holding of several criminal trials by national courts are positive steps forward. Similarly, to meet the population's aspirations for truth, which is a fundamental step towards lasting reconciliation, it is essential that the Truth, Justice, Reparation and Reconciliation Commission be made operational.

In conclusion, Switzerland remains committed to the quest for peace and justice in the Central African Republic. It calls on all armed groups to lay down their arms and on all Central African actors to commit themselves to an inclusive and peaceful democratic dialogue.

Ms. Evstigneeva (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): We thank Special Representative Valentine Rugwabiza for her briefing. We welcome the participation of the representative of the Central African Republic in this meeting.

We note with satisfaction that the situation in the Central African Republic continues to improve. With the support of the international community, represented by the United Nations and bilateral partners, including

Russia, the Central African authorities have managed to overcome the most difficult phase of the fight against armed groups.

However, the most intransigent, large and combat-capable groups are not giving up the armed struggle for power. Attacks on foreign nationals by illegal armed groups are of particular concern. We express our condolences to our Chinese colleagues in connection with the deaths and capture of their compatriots as a result of a number of attacks by militants on natural resource extraction facilities. We are also concerned that new types of lethal weapons are appearing in the arsenal of the opponents of the legitimate Central African authorities. In particular, there have been reports of their use of unmanned aircraft. As a result of a strike carried out by those means in the village of Kaga Bandoro on 10 December 2023, a number of Russian experts were killed and wounded. We are also concerned about the use of improvised explosive devices and mines by armed groups.

It is important to stress that security threats come mainly from areas bordering neighbouring countries, in particular Chad, the Sudan and Cameroon. That is why, at this stage, it is important to support the Central Africans in their efforts to ensure border security. We call for increased international assistance to Bangui in order to curb the cross-border movements of illegal armed groups and their supply of weapons. We welcome the efforts of the Central African authorities to strengthen coordination and specialized cooperation with States in the region.

The situation on the external perimeter of the Central African Republic also affects the humanitarian situation in the country. We are witnessing an increase in humanitarian needs in connection with the internal conflict in the Sudan and growing instability in a number of regions of Chad. Caring for refugees from neighbouring countries increases the burden on the State budget of the Central African Republic. In that regard, in addition to stopping the politicization and instrumentalization of external assistance, it is necessary to fully fund the United Nations humanitarian appeal for the Central African Republic for 2024.

We welcome the commitment of the Central African authorities to the further implementation of the Political Agreement for Peace and Reconciliation in the Central African Republic and the Luanda road map. We note the practical steps taken in that direction. Thanks to consistent efforts, 9 of the 14 signatory groups to

the Political Agreement have now been disbanded. Thousands of former fighters have laid down their arms and are undergoing disarmament, demobilization and reintegration process. We call on those who continue to fight against the Government to abandon violent methods and to engage in meaningful dialogue with Bangui.

We wish the Central African authorities success in holding the municipal elections planned for this year. That is an important milestone on the path back to a peaceful life. We concur with the Secretary-General's appeal to assist Bangui in every possible way in order to attract donor resources to fully fund the trust fund for electoral support.

We support the work of the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic and its leadership. The Mission remains an important factor in ensuring security and an element of overall efforts to counter armed groups and protect civilians. We thank the troops of the troop-contributing countries for their commitment to their duty. We express our condolences to the Government of Cameroon and to the family of the Cameroonian peacekeeper who died on 15 January. We wish a speedy recovery to the wounded.

We are convinced that the full implementation of the peacekeepers' mandate will be possible only if we maintain a rapport and good mutual understanding with the authorities of the host country. We call for the settlement of any disagreements through constructive bilateral dialogue. In the forthcoming work on the strategic review of the Mission, we believe that it is essential to consult with Bangui and, above all, to focus on the priorities of the host State.

In conclusion, I would like to note that the situation in the Central African Republic is steadily improving. Many challenges and problems remain, but progress is evident, and most importantly the country's people and leadership are focused on the struggle for peace and prosperity.

Much has been achieved thanks to the support of our country, which provided assistance at a difficult time in accordance with the norms of international law and with the knowledge of the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 2127 (2013) concerning the Central African Republic. Against that backdrop, the position of some members of the Security Council, primarily the United States, which portrays

everything in sombre tones, is regrettable. They refuse to recognize Bangui's successes and use any excuse to criticize it. That is the case with all States where Washington fails to achieve its goals. However, with regard to other situations in which there are serious, large-scale violations, we do not hear such assessments. Yesterday we heard Washington unabashedly covering up for its allies. The Central African Republic is a sovereign State, and it is free to choose with whom to cooperate.

We will continue to provide comprehensive support to our Central African friends in establishing peace and security in the country. We hope that nothing will prevent that positive momentum.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of the Central African Republic.

Mr. Nzessiou (Central African Republic) (*spoke in French*): I would like to thank you, Madam President, once again for organizing this meeting on the Central African Republic.

I make this statement on behalf of Ms. Sylvie Valérie Baipo Temon, Minister for Foreign Affairs, Francophonie and Central Africans Abroad of the Central African Republic.

"Please accept, Madam President, the heartfelt congratulations of the Central African Republic on your assumption of the presidency of the Council for the month of February and on its term of office on the Security Council, which began last month. We also congratulate all the new non-permanent members. The Central African Republic hopes that their respective commitment and dynamism will contribute effectively to the work of the Council and enable it to fulfil its primary mission of restoring peace and security in the world, which, unfortunately, is looking more and more like a pipe dream.

"I would also like to thank the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Ms. Valentine Rugwabiza, for presenting the report of the Secretary-General (S/2024/170), and I take this opportunity to commend her once again on her leadership, which has made possible not only the normalization of relations between the Central African Republic and MINUSCA, but also the achievement of substantial progress on the implementation of its mandate. The Central African Republic remains convinced that the independent

evaluation of MINUSCA that will be carried out will provide an additional opportunity, after 10 years of the Mission's presence in the country, to enhance the Mission's efficiency and effectiveness in the service of a return to stability and lasting peace in the Central African Republic.

"I would therefore like to welcome the Secretary-General's appointment of Mr. Edmond Mulet as the person responsible for carrying out that assessment. However, I would like to express a reservation about the team that has been assembled around him. The Central African Republic would like to reaffirm, once again, its commitment to the independent nature of this assessment. It therefore considers that the staff of United Nations agencies, of MINUSCA or of those entities cannot be judge and jury in this process. We hope that the necessary adjustments will be made in order to avoid bringing the entire exercise into disrepute from the outset.

"In February, the Central African Republic adopted its humanitarian response plan for 2024, with the support of its MINUSCA partners. Financial mobilization for the 2023 plan was less than optimal for the purpose of effectively and sustainably tackling that issue, which is compounded by repeated terrorist attacks by armed groups and the consequences of armed conflicts in neighbouring countries and internationally. In that difficult environment, I would like to pay tribute to the combined efforts of MINUSCA, bilateral partners, national and international non-governmental organizations and various donors working alongside the Central African authorities. Those efforts have brought about a significant decline in the number of people in emergency situations. That decline, which is also due to the improved security situation and the implementation of some development programmes, helps to bolster the strategy of supporting the restoration of State authority throughout the country. That strategy must continue and be reinforced in order to support the deployment of our defence and security forces and administrative, health, education and judicial personnel, with a view to consolidating the gains made.

"We are aware that restoring State authority will not, in and of itself, suffice to consolidate peace and security. That is why the Central African Republic is also focusing on socioeconomic

recovery as a means of stability. The new national development plan, whose formulation is under way, along with the various policies that are being implemented — in particular the digital transformation of the Government, strengthening the education system, digitization of the economic and financial sectors with a view to greater mobilization of national resources, and the adoption of an anti-corruption law — are all assets that will enable us to make progress towards that objective. Unfortunately, the Central African Republic still faces enormous added constraints in the form of coercive measures imposed on it through sanctions under the Kimberley Process, the arms embargo and the endless weaponization of international financial institutions, which deprives the country of the resources it needs in its quest to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals — to the point that the universally recognized principle of leaving no one behind has, to the people of the Central African Republic, increasingly come to resemble a figment of the imagination.

"Consolidating peace and security in the Central African Republic is also testament to the unwavering determination of His Excellency Mr. Faustin Archange Touadera, President of the Republic and Head of State and Government, to implement the joint process of the Political Agreement for Peace and Reconciliation and the Luanda road map. The special session of the Executive Monitoring Committee of the Political Agreement for Peace and Reconciliation, held in Bangui on 6 February to mark the fifth anniversary of its implementation, highlighted the willingness of the parties involved to meet their commitments. That willingness, coupled with the outstretched hand extended to armed groups wishing to return to the process and the President's renewed call for political dialogue with the opposition, attest to his determination to settle inter-Central African disputes through dialogue, provided the other parties are acting in good faith.

"Consolidating peace and security in the Central African Republic also means keeping the commitment to organize local elections, a product of the recommendations of the 2016 grassroots dialogue, and therefore the aspiration of the Central African people, but also a product of the Political Agreement for Peace and Reconciliation, of which it is one of the key commitments. It is a real priority

and a lever for not only restoring public authority but also supporting the decentralization of the political and peace process that we all want. The Government's declared commitment to contribute \$4.5 million, despite budgetary constraints, bears witness to the determination of the President of the Republic and the Government to bring that process to a successful conclusion.

"I would like to take this opportunity to thank MINUSCA for its awareness-raising work alongside the Central African authorities to encourage and promote the involvement of women in this process. That work is crucial, as it will make possible the full implementation of the new electoral code, which provides for a zebra-list system — that is, one man, one woman or vice versa — in line with the national policy on parity. It should also be reiterated that the Government, under the supreme leadership of His Excellency President Touadera, President of the Republic and Head of State, has never ceased to involve Central Africans from all walks of life in all electoral processes, with a view to achieving peaceful, transparent and credible results. We therefore call on the Central African Republic's various partners to support that process, as a guarantee of lasting stability.

"Consolidating peace and security in the Central African Republic also means promoting justice and the rule of law. The Central African Republic thanks the delegations that raised that issue but also regrets the double standards applied by certain Council members. Wherever flagrant and serious violations of human rights and international humanitarian law occur, some take a vow of silence. But when it comes to the Central African Republic, suddenly they all find their voice. Such selective indignation is unlikely to foster mutual understanding on those vital issues of shared conviction.

"Nevertheless, the Central African Republic would like to inform the Council that, since the adoption of its national human rights policy, it has begun the implementation thereof through its five-year action plan, which is centred on activities in the area of civil and political rights; social, economic and cultural rights; and the right to peace and security, development and a healthy environment. That national policy provides for a collaborative mechanism to move towards ratifying

international human rights instruments to which the Central African Republic is not yet party, via the reports of a dedicated committee that is already operational. In addition, the Government is continuing to implement its plan for the justice sector, which consists of increasing the supply of, and facilitating access to, justice by, among other things, increasing the functionality and operationalization of jurisdictions in the hinterland, despite some security and material challenges; the adoption of laws on the protection of victims and witnesses; and the adoption and enactment of the law on legal aid for victims.

"In addition to the criminal hearings held by the appeal courts and the Court Martial, which have made it possible to try a significant number of cases of crimes against women and children, the Government has put in place a national strategy to combat gender-based and conflict-related sexual violence. From 15 to 17 November 2023, a round table on combating impunity for crimes of conflict-related sexual violence in the Central African Republic was organized in Bangui, with the participation and very active support of the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict. The aim of that inclusive round table was to discuss the implementation of national priorities in terms of the judicial response to conflict-related sexual violence in the Central African Republic, as well as to address the various possible responses in terms of victim services, in particular the issue of reparation and legal aid.

"The recommendations resulting from the round table will be presented on 26 February at a meeting at the Permanent Mission of Japan, with the support of the Office of the Special Representative, both of whom I would like to thank for their commitment to the Central African Republic. I therefore invite all Council members to attend that meeting, which will provide an opportunity for open dialogue on that issue with the Minister of State for Justice, the Promotion of Human Rights and Good Governance, Keeper of the Seals, and the Minister for Humanitarian Action.

"Strengthening peace and security in the Central African Republic means, first and foremost, addressing the security challenges posed by the terrorist groups of the Coalition des patriotes

pour le changement. Despite being weakened, they continue to carry out terrorist activities, attacking civilians, humanitarian actors, MINUSCA and the various positions of our defence and security forces, using means that raise an increasing number of questions, in particular with regard to the growing use of anti-personnel mines, drones and the occupation of various positions along the borders.

“On 3 February, after Central African airspace was violated on multiple occasions by unidentified drone overflights that caused significant damage by dropping explosives on our defence and security forces’ positions, as well as on the civilian population, the Government took steps by suspending drone flights. On 21 February, a meeting between MINUSCA’s Force Commander and the Chief of Staff of the armed forces enabled the Ministry of Defence to issue a circular granting an exemption from this measure to the defence and security forces and MINUSCA.

“In addition, the Central African Republic has chosen to strengthen its cooperation with its neighbours in the area of security and to continue regular bilateral dialogues, particularly with Chad, South Sudan, the Republic of Congo and Cameroon. In that regard, the implementation of the 10-year action plan to implement the national border-management policy is important and deserves support, along with the national strategy for re-engaging armed groups in the peace process.

“Given the complexity of the evolving situation in the Central African Republic, the Security Council cannot act as a stumbling block that could leave us even more vulnerable. In that regard, I am referring to the notification by a permanent member of the Security Council made on 14 November 2023 concerning the transport of military equipment to the Central African Republic for operations that the Government knows nothing about. That notification, without prior consultation with the Central African authorities, raises questions about what State sovereignty means to the Council and to the Council member in question in particular. The Central African Republic condemns these practices from another era, and in the continued absence of a satisfactory response, would like the Committee established pursuant to resolution 2127 (2013) concerning the Central African Republic to

assess what would justify that notification without consulting the Central African Republic. We would also like to know the Committee’s rules of procedure regarding verification of the notifications submitted to it. Its credibility is at stake.

“In addition, there are persistent reports from American sources that the Central African authorities confiscated the passports of five American nationals working on behalf of MINUSCA at Bangui airport. According to the same sources, Americans in the Central African Republic are being poorly treated. Here in this Chamber, I want to state that the Central African Republic is a State of legality and one that respects legal instruments. At no time did MINUSCA inform the Central African authorities of the presence of five American subjects on our country’s territory, despite the relevant provisions of the headquarters agreement, and that is why their passports were briefly confiscated. Moreover, during the audience that I granted to the United States Ambassador in Bangui on 22 January, we looked at this issue together and cleared up the misunderstandings, and she confirmed that in her statement during a private radio channel broadcast on 19 February. In short, the real problem here is the fact that entry into the Central African Republic is contingent on obtaining visas, which many countries do not observe. That is why I organized a large meeting on 8 February with all the diplomatic missions in the Central African Republic, at which we gave precise guidance on the conditions for the issuance of entry visas. This is about preserving the security of the Central African Republic.

“In conclusion, I would like to reiterate the Central African Republic’s willingness to work with all who want to support it in overcoming its numerous challenges. We know that we can count on the unfailing support in that process of the Security Council and MINUSCA, which, like modern Argonauts, are helping us find our golden fleece — peace.”

The President: There are no more names inscribed on the list of speakers. I now invite Council members to informal consultations to continue our discussion on the subject.

The meeting rose at 11.35 a.m.