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

Report of the Secretary-General

Summary

During the period under review, the United Nations Standing Advisory Committee on Security Questions in Central Africa held two ministerial meetings.

At the twenty-fourth and twenty-fifth ministerial meetings held in Kigali from 25 to 29 September 2006, and São Tomé from 14 to 18 May 2007, respectively, the Committee continued its tradition of reviewing, inter alia, the geopolitical and security situation in some States members. Despite some progress and what it hoped was the beginning of a positive trend in the subregion, the Committee nevertheless noted that armed clashes were still continuing in some areas and that the humanitarian and human rights situation unfortunately still gave cause for concern.

The Committee also expressed its deep concern at the impact of the Darfur crisis on regional security. It took note of the influx of refugees and threats to the stability, security and territorial integrity of the Sudan's neighbours, especially Chad and the Central African Republic.

At the São Tomé meeting, States members of the Committee demonstrated their support for the efforts by the Office for Disarmament Affairs to revitalize the Committee's work by adopting concrete measures.

The Committee concluded its consideration of the agenda item on cross-border security problems in Central Africa by deciding to hold a subregional conference on the matter during its twenty-sixth ministerial meeting to be held in Yaoundé from 3 to 7 September 2007.



At the end of the twenty-fifth meeting, the Committee also adopted the São Tomé initiative, which provides for the drafting of a legal instrument on small arms and light weapons control in Central Africa and of code of conduct for defence and security forces in Central Africa.

In conclusion, the 11 States members of the Committee reaffirmed their commitment to taking action to strengthen peace and security in the subregion. Aware of the importance of the Committee, States members agreed to work together, with the support of the United Nations and its partners, to implement the decisions taken at meetings. In that regard, the Committee requested interested States, especially those in a position to do so, to assist it in financing its projects, through the United Nations trust fund.

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I. Introduction

1. In its resolution 61/96, the General Assembly, *inter alia*, reaffirmed its support for efforts aimed at promoting confidence-building measures at the regional and subregional levels in order to ease tensions and conflicts in Central Africa and to further sustainable peace, stability and development in the subregion. It also reaffirmed its support for the programme of work of the Standing Advisory Committee adopted at the organizational meeting of the Committee, held at Yaoundé in July 1992 (see A/47/511).

2. By the same resolution, the General Assembly requested the Secretary-General to continue to provide the States members of the Committee with assistance to ensure that they are able to carry out their efforts and further requested him to submit to it at its sixty-second session a report on the implementation of the resolution.

3. The present report is submitted in response to that request. It covers the activities undertaken by the Standing Advisory Committee on Security Questions in Central Africa from July 2006 to June 2007.

II. Meetings of the Standing Advisory Committee

A. The twenty-fourth ministerial meeting of the Committee

4. The Twenty-fourth meeting of the Committee was held from 25 to 29 September 2006 in Kigali. The agenda considered by the 11 States members¹ included:

(a) Recent developments in the geopolitical and security situation in some member States of the Committee, including Burundi, the Central African Republic, Chad and the Democratic Republic of the Congo;

(b) The impact of the Darfur crisis on the security of some States members of the Committee;

(c) An exchange of national experiences in the implementation of disarmament, demobilization and reintegration programmes and in the implementation in Central Africa of the United Nations Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects;

(d) The establishment by Angola, Burundi, Cameroon, the Central African Republic, Chad, the Congo, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Equatorial Guinea, Rwanda and São Tomé and Príncipe of the Central African Early Warning System.

5. The Committee welcomed the progress achieved in the situation in Burundi, in particular the signing in Dar es Salaam on 7 September 2006 of a Ceasefire Agreement between the Government of Burundi and Agathon Rwasa's Parti pour la libération du peuple hutu — Forces nationales de libération (PALIPEHUTU-FNL),

¹ Angola, Burundi, Cameroon, the Central African Republic, Chad, the Congo, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Equatorial Guinea, Gabon, Rwanda and São Tomé and Príncipe.

the pursuit of the disarmament and demobilization process and the progress achieved in disbanding militias.

6. The Committee encouraged the Government of Burundi to continue its efforts to restore lasting peace in the country and to fully implement the political and economic reforms already under way. There was an urgent need to resolve conflicts over land ownership and use and to protect human rights.

7. The Committee expressed concern about insecurity in the Central African Republic as a result of fighting between rebel movements and Government forces. Such clashes had led to the steady deterioration of the humanitarian and human rights situation. In the socio-economic sphere, the Committee appealed to bilateral and multilateral donors and international financial institutions to pay special attention to the economic and financial situation of the Central African Republic and to provide it with special assistance.

8. The Committee welcomed the significant progress made in the implementation of the transition process in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, including the holding of legislative elections and the presidential election of 30 July 2006. However, it deplored the deadly clashes that had taken place from 20 to 22 August 2006 between the Republican Guard and former Vice-President Jean-Pierre Bemba Gombo's protection unit, which had resulted in civilian victims. It urged the country's political leaders to conduct the elections in a peaceful and responsible manner, and encouraged them to give priority to conciliation and harmony in the best interests of the Congolese people.

9. The Committee expressed concern at the persistence of allegations of serious violations of human rights in the context of military operations in Ituri and northern Katanga. It welcomed the measures taken by the authorities to combat impunity and strongly urged them to prosecute and punish everyone found guilty of human rights violations. It urged the Democratic Republic of the Congo authorities to join with the United Nations and its partners to implement a comprehensive policy for the settlement of the current humanitarian crisis.

10. The Committee expressed concern at the activities of Chadian rebel groups based in Darfur that not only posed a serious threat to Chad's security and stability but also created serious tension between Chad and the Sudan. The Committee expressed deep concern about the deterioration of the situation in Darfur and the possible spread of the crisis to countries of the subregion. It roundly condemned the acts of violence perpetrated against refugees, displaced persons, the civilian population and humanitarian workers in eastern Chad.

11. It appealed to the international community and the United Nations to help the Government of Chad ensure the security of refugees from Darfur living in camps in Chad, provide greater assistance to them and guarantee the camps' neutrality. The Committee noted with deep concern information about the development of cross-border trafficking in small arms and light weapons.

B. The twenty-fifth ministerial meeting of the Committee

12. The twenty-fifth ministerial meeting of the Committee was held in São Tomé from 14 to 18 May 2007. The following member States took part in the meeting: Angola, Burundi, Cameroon, the Congo, the Democratic Republic of the Congo,

Equatorial Guinea, Gabon, Rwanda and São Tomé and Príncipe. The Central African Republic was absent. Chad, although unable to be present, nevertheless transmitted its contribution to the proceedings.

13. The Committee invited the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS), the United Nations Integrated Office in Burundi (BINUB) and the United Nations Organization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUC) to attend the meeting as observers.

14. The issues considered by the States included:

(a) Recent developments in the geopolitical and security situation in some States members of the Committee, namely Burundi, the Central African Republic, Chad and the Democratic Republic of the Congo;

(b) The project for a subregional conference on cross-border security problems in Central Africa; the impact of the Darfur crisis and developments relating to security in the Great Lakes region;

(c) The project for the drafting of a legal instrument on small arms and light weapons control in Central Africa;

(d) The project for the drafting of a code of conduct for defence and security forces in Central Africa;

(e) Institutional evolution of peace and security structures and mechanisms in Central Africa;

(f) Revitalization of the work of the Committee.

15. Developments in the geopolitical and security situation in the countries concerned have shown sharp contrasts since the twenty-fourth meeting of the Committee. Despite some genuine advances in the peace processes under way, the persistence of tension, the deterioration of the security situation, and the resurgence of frequent armed confrontations highlight the fragility of peace in the countries covered.

16. The Committee welcomed the progress achieved in the political and security situation in Burundi, but deplored the delays in implementing the Ceasefire Agreement and the continued proliferation of firearms among the population. It urged the Government and PALIPEHUTU-FNL to ensure that the Agreement was fully implemented and to continue to cooperate closely and in good faith in order to reach a solution to all outstanding problems. It also invited the South African mediator, the members of the regional peace initiative and the other partners to lend support to the implementation of the Agreement.

17. The Committee expressed its deep concern about the instability of the situation in the Central African Republic. It encouraged the authorities and all the political actors to give priority to dialogue and work towards the strengthening of democracy in the Central African Republic. The Committee welcomed the decision of President Bozize to initiate an inclusive dialogue with the opposition parties and the representatives of armed rebel groups. It encouraged the Panel of the Wise to pursue, with the help of the United Nations Peacebuilding Support Office in the Central African Republic (BONUCA), the efforts to organize that dialogue. The Committee welcomed the decision of the United Nations to deploy an operation to

secure the borders of the Central African Republic, Chad and the Sudan and the dispatch of a multidisciplinary technical assessment mission to the region.

18. As it had done at the twenty-fourth ministerial meeting, the Committee welcomed the relatively peaceful holding of the presidential election and the legislative, provincial and senatorial elections in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. It applauded the political, financial, technical and logistical efforts made by the international community and congratulated the Congolese people on their sense of civic responsibility.

19. The Committee deplored the deadly clashes that had taken place from 22 to 24 March 2007 in Kinshasa between guards assigned to protect former Vice-President Jean-Pierre Bemba Gombo and other soldiers of the Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (FARDC). It once again urged the country's political leaders to give priority to the interests of the country and the security of the Congolese people. The Committee also expressed concern at the precarious security situation in Ituri, North Kivu, South Kivu and northern Katanga.

20. The Committee expressed deep concern at the multiple destabilization attempts against Chad owing to repeated attacks by rebel groups based in Darfur. The Committee objected to the abuse perpetrated by militias against the civilian population and considered that the violence was affecting the progress achieved with the conclusion of peace agreements between the Government of Chad and some factions of the political-military opposition and the consequent integration into the February 2007 Government of senior officials of that opposition and with the signature on 2 May 2007 in Riyadh of a peace agreement between Chad and the Sudan.

21. The Committee also expressed deep concern at the humanitarian crisis in eastern and southern Chad. It strongly condemned the grave human rights violations, especially those perpetrated by the Janjaweed militias against refugees, displaced persons, the civilian populations and humanitarian workers. It appealed to the international community and the United Nations to help the Government of Chad ensure the safety of refugees from Darfur, provide the necessary assistance to them and guarantee the camps' neutrality.

22. It welcomed in this regard the dispatch to the region by the Secretary-General of the United Nations of two assessment missions to prepare the deployment of a multidisciplinary United Nations presence in the areas pursuant to Security Council resolution 1706 (2006).

23. In that context, the Committee considered that it was time for a collective review of cross-border security problems in Central Africa. It therefore decided to convene a three-day subregional conference specifically on these issues during the twenty-sixth ministerial meeting, to be held in Yaoundé from 3 to 7 September 2007. It mandated ECCAS to cooperate with the Cameroonian authorities and the United Nations for the organization of this special conference.

24. The Committee welcomed the news that the ECCAS secretariat had put the Central African Early Warning System into operation. It expressed satisfaction with the efforts of the secretariat and shared its deep appreciation for ECCAS partners and donors, and especially the European Union, for its financial and technical assistance.

25. At the end of the twenty-fifth meeting, the Committee also adopted the São Tomé Initiative regarding the drafting of a legal instrument on small arms and light weapons control in Central Africa and the drafting of a code of conduct for defence and security forces in Central Africa.

26. In that regard, the Committee welcomed the support that the United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs had agreed to provide to the ECCAS secretariat through the Regional Centre for Peace and Disarmament in Africa, and encouraged the two organizations to conclude at an early date a partnership agreement.

C. Revitalization of the Committee's methods of work and inputs from the United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs

27. In the course of the twenty-fourth and twenty-fifth ministerial meetings, representatives of the United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs contributed to the work of the Committee by delivering briefings on various disarmament issues. The issues covered included measures to implement the United Nations Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects, the complementarity of subregional instruments on small arms and light weapons and the implementation of Security Council resolution 1540 (2004) in Africa. Participants were also briefed on the participation of Central African States in the United Nations Register of Conventional Arms and in the standardized instrument for reporting military expenditures.

28. The Committee commended the United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs for its efforts to revitalize the work of the Committee. In particular, it had encouraged the United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs to organize regular consultations in New York with the Permanent Representatives of States members of the Committee. Such informal consultations offered States members the opportunity to become more involved in the work of the Committee, to define more effective guidelines for its work and to discuss meeting preparations, thereby encouraging more active participation by their national authorities.

29. Moreover, at the invitation of the Security Council, the United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs briefed the Security Council Ad Hoc Working Group on Conflict Prevention and Resolution in Africa on the Committee's activities. Regular briefings of the Security Council have been encouraged by States in order to keep members of the Security Council up to date with the Committee's activities in the subregion and to enable them to benefit from the Committee's experience in dealing with certain issues.

30. The Committee welcomed the appointment of the Director of the United Nations Regional Centre for Peace and Disarmament in Africa as Secretary of the Committee for its twenty-fifth ministerial meeting. Accordingly, in the future, the Centre would be more capable of providing technical and operational follow-up to decisions taken by the Committee, including for subregional and regional capacity-building activities.

III. Administrative and financial matters

31. During the period under review, the General Assembly continued to provide funding from the regular budget for the two ministerial meetings, while the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees continued to finance the activities of the Subregional Centre for Human Rights and Democracy in Central Africa.

32. At the end of the 2006-2007 period, approximately US\$ 13,800 will remain in the Trust Fund. The Secretary-General therefore reiterates his appeal to Member States and to intergovernmental, governmental and non-governmental organizations to contribute to the Trust Fund of the Standing Advisory Committee on Security Questions in Central Africa in order to enable the Advisory Committee to fully implement its programme of work.

IV. Conclusions and observations

33. During the period under review, the two meetings organized by the Committee have enabled member States to share information on and experience in crisis management, armed conflict resolution and the consolidation of peace and security in countries emerging from conflict in Central Africa. The decision to hold a subregional conference on cross-border security problems reflects the determination of member States to establish lasting peace in the subregion.

34. The twenty-fourth and twenty-fifth ministerial meetings also provided the opportunity for States members of the Committee to discuss how to enhance the impact of their activities. In the context of the efforts to streamline the methods of work, the closer and more regular cooperation between the United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs and the Permanent Representatives of States members of the Committee has enabled States to provide the Committee with clearer policy guidelines, and to become more involved in its programme of work as well as in the preparation of ministerial meetings. Similarly, the forming of a partnership between the ECCAS secretariat and the Office for Disarmament Affairs will facilitate cooperation between the two organizations in the area of peace and security, as well as the joint implementation of certain projects such as the São Tomé Initiative.

35. In conclusion, the 11 States members of the Committee reaffirmed their determination to use the diplomatic and political forum provided by the Committee to discuss their concerns in relation to the subregion and to adopt specific measures with respect to conflict prevention and the consolidation of peace and security. They reaffirmed their willingness to meet twice a year, in accordance with the principle of rotation that has always guided the functioning of the Committee and also to meet to deal with urgent issues should the need arise.

36. The revitalization of the work of the Committee in the current year shows that its work is not restricted to the two annual meetings financed by the United Nations regular budget. Member States are aware of the importance of the Committee and are committed to acting together, with the support of the United Nations and its partners, to implement the decisions that they make. In that connection, the Committee calls upon interested States, especially those who have the necessary means, to help with funding for implementation of specific projects through the United Nations Trust Fund.