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Children and armed conflict in the Central African Republic

Report of the Secretary-General

Summary

The present report, submitted pursuant to Security Council resolution [1612 \(2005\)](#) and subsequent resolutions on children and armed conflict, is the sixth report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict in the Central African Republic and covers the period from 1 July 2021 to 30 June 2023.

The report documents the effects of conflict on children in the Central African Republic, highlighting trends and patterns of the six grave violations against children, namely, the recruitment and use of children, the killing and maiming of children, rape and other forms of sexual violence against children, attacks on schools, hospitals and protected persons in relation to schools and/or hospitals,¹ the abduction of children and denial of humanitarian access. Where available, the report contains information on perpetrators.

The report provides a series of recommendations addressed to all parties to the conflict aimed at ending and preventing grave violations against children and strengthening child protection in the Central African Republic.

¹ For the purposes of the present report, the phrase “protected persons in relation to schools and/or hospitals”, used in Security Council resolutions [1998 \(2011\)](#), [2143 \(2014\)](#) and [2427 \(2018\)](#) as well as in the statements by the President of the Security Council of 17 June 2013 ([S/PRST/2013/8](#)) and 31 October 2017 ([S/PRST/2017/21](#)), refers to teachers, doctors, other educational personnel, students and patients.



I. Introduction

1. The present report, prepared pursuant to Security Council resolution [1612 \(2005\)](#) and subsequent resolutions on children and armed conflict, covers the period from 1 July 2021 to 30 June 2023. It is the sixth report of the Secretary-General on the situation of children affected by armed conflict in the Central African Republic to be submitted to the Security Council and its Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict. The report highlights trends and patterns of grave violations committed against children by parties to the conflict in the Central African Republic and provides details of the progress made to end and prevent such violations since the previous report ([S/2021/882](#)) and the adoption by the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict of its conclusions on the situation of children and armed conflict in the Central African Republic ([S/AC.51/2022/5](#)). Where possible, perpetrators of grave violations are identified.

2. In annex I to the most recent report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict ([A/77/895-S/2023/363](#)), under the list of parties that have put in place measures during the reporting period aimed at improving the protection of children, Front populaire pour la renaissance de la Centrafrique (FPRC), Mouvement patriotique pour la Centrafrique (MPC) and Union pour la paix en Centrafrique (UPC), as part of the former Séléka coalition, remained listed for the recruitment and use of children, the killing and maiming of children, rape and other forms of sexual violence against children, and attacks on schools and hospitals. Furthermore, under the list of parties that have not put in place measures during the reporting period to improve the protection of children, local militias known as the anti-balaka and the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) remained listed for the recruitment and use of children, the killing and maiming of children and rape and sexual violence against children. In addition, LRA also remained listed for the abduction of children.

3. Information contained in the present report was verified by the United Nations country task force on monitoring and reporting on grave violations against children in the Central African Republic, co-chaired by the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA) and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF). Armed groups continued to be the main perpetrators of grave violations during the reporting period, including those that are signatories to the Political Agreement for Peace and Reconciliation in the Central African Republic. However, violations were also attributed to government forces and other security personnel. Military offensives led by the Armed Forces of the Central African Republic and other security personnel, attacks by armed groups against the Armed Forces and other security personnel, attacks by armed groups against the Armed Forces and other security personnel and an increase in the indiscriminate use of explosive ordnance, as well as fighters living within their communities, hampered the ability of the country task force to safely monitor and report on grave violations. Therefore, the information contained in the present report does not represent the full extent of the grave violations committed against children in the Central African Republic, and the actual number of grave violations is likely higher.

II. Overview of the security, political and humanitarian situation

4. The political context was dominated by the preparations for the constitutional referendum, held on 30 July 2023. The seventh Republic of the Central African Republic was formally established following the promulgation of the new Constitution on 30 August. Ahead of the constitutional referendum, the Government stated that the constitutional changes aimed to respond to popular demand and would enable national development. The political opposition, some civil society and religious organizations, as well as a number of armed groups, have criticized the new

Constitution, with controversies remaining over some provisions, such as those pertaining to eligibility requirements for contesting elections.

5. Furthermore, throughout the reporting period, armed conflict continued in the Central African Republic, resulting in grave violations against children by all parties to the conflict. The Government strengthened its presence throughout the country, including through military offensives by the Armed Forces and other security personnel. The revitalization of the peace process resulted in the dissolution of six armed groups, three factions of signatories to the Political Agreement and the disarmament of 1,366 armed group elements. Of the 14 signatories to the Political Agreement, 9 had fully demobilized by the end of the reporting period. However, the signatory and non-signatory armed groups that remained active, including armed groups affiliated with the Coalition des patriotes pour le changement (CPC), which comprises UPC, FPRC, MPC, anti-balaka and the Retour, réclamation et réhabilitation (3R), continued to pose a serious threat to overall security, raising significant child protection concerns. Moreover, communities and civilians continued to be attacked by all parties to the conflict, including on the basis of ethnicity and religion.

6. In the centre, UPC continued to attack the Armed Forces and the internal security forces to regain control of their traditional strongholds. Serious violations were committed during those attacks, including a joint UPC/anti-balaka ambush in October 2021 in Matchika in Ouaka, in which 29 people, including 2 boys, were killed from both the Christian and Muslim communities.

7. In the west, 3R and anti-balaka increasingly lost control over mining sites owing to offensives by the Armed Forces and other security personnel, and resorted to criminal activities, such as abduction for ransom, including of children, robberies and looting of humanitarian equipment and supplies. In addition, CPC-affiliated armed groups continued to employ hit-and-run tactics against positions of the Armed Forces and mining sites, which regularly affected civilians, including children. For example, in June 2022, two boys aged 14 and 15 years were killed when CPC/3R elements attacked a position of the Armed Forces in Lim-Pendé prefecture.

8. Furthermore, from October 2022 to May 2023, Chadian nationals claiming to be members of the Révolutionnaires tchadiens sudistes (RTS) strengthened their ranks in Lim-Pendé prefecture. This development adds to the challenge of border control between the Central African Republic and Chad, including incidents between Chadian and Central African security forces over the past two years.

9. In the east, the Armed Forces and other security personnel strengthened their presence in Bria to expel CPC from Nzacko in Haute-Kotto prefecture. Also in the east, the Armed Forces and other security personnel continued to carry out military operations against UPC, FPRC and Rassemblement patriotique pour le renouveau de la Centrafrique elements.

10. In the centre, UPC reinforced its presence in Ouaka and Basse-Kotto prefectures and intensified attacks against the Armed Forces. The presence of UPC and anti-balaka elements increased threats against civilians.

11. Of concern, as of September 2021, was the recruitment by the Armed Forces and other security personnel of demobilized UPC dissidents and anti-balaka elements as proxies to fight against UPC and other armed groups affiliated with CPC. These proxies often resorted to violence against the population, in particular the Fulani community, accusing them of collusion with armed groups. In Ouaka prefecture between 6 and 13 December 2021, several civilians were reportedly killed in attacks by anti-balaka elements recruited as proxies by the Armed Forces and other security personnel, many of them brutally, including by beheading, throat slitting and dismemberment. Seven children (6 boys, 1 girl) were verified to have been killed in

the incidents. Furthermore, the Armed Forces and other security personnel also continued attacks against civilians in efforts to neutralize alleged CPC elements. For example, in July 2021, two Fulani children (1 boy, 1 girl) were executed for alleged association with UPC in Ouaka prefecture during a counter-offensive by the Armed Forces and other security personnel against UPC.

12. In 2023, a militia called Azande Ani Kpi Gbe emerged in Haut-Mbomou prefecture, claiming to defend Azande communities against UPC. The group ignited ethnic and political tensions by singling out Fulani and Muslim communities, whom they accused of collaborating with UPC, causing displacement. The country task force has already verified grave violations by Azande Ani Kpi Gbe, including the recruitment and use, maiming, rape and abduction of children, as well as denial of humanitarian access.

13. Of further concern, the indiscriminate use of explosive ordnance by parties to the conflict increased, particularly in Nana-Mambéré, Mambéré-Kadéï, Lim-Pendé and Ouham-Pendé prefectures, which both resulted in a greater number of child casualties compared with the previous reporting period and impeded access for and the delivery of humanitarian aid.

14. The implementation of the Political Agreement and the joint road map for peace in the Central African Republic continued and expanded to the local level in an effort to decentralize the peace process. Implementation of local mechanisms in response to security threats entailed progress on disarmament, demobilization, reintegration and repatriation efforts, community reconciliation efforts and voluntary returns.

15. The humanitarian situation deteriorated throughout the reporting period, leading to an increasing number of people in need of humanitarian assistance, totalling 2.8 million in 2021, 3.1 million in 2022 and 3.4 million in 2023. Access to humanitarian assistance was hampered by clashes between parties to the conflict and military operations; insecurity, including violence against humanitarian personnel, goods and infrastructure; and the risks posed by the presence of explosive ordnance. Persistent insecurity kept 71 per cent of children in the Central African Republic from regularly attending school in the period 2021–2022. Approximately 1.4 million children were affected by a lack of access to education in 2022.

16. Violence also triggered population displacement. At the end of the reporting period, over 515,665 people had been internally displaced, and 740,833 persons had sought refuge in neighbouring countries, of whom about 50 per cent were children.

17. In addition, as of June 2023, about 13,800 people had fled from the Sudan into the Central African Republic, including 3,456 returnees. The crisis in the Sudan also led to a shortfall of over 50 per cent of basic foodstuffs in the north-east of the Central African Republic, which was already one of the areas with the lowest levels of access to humanitarian aid.

III. Progress and challenges in addressing grave violations against children

A. Release of children and programmatic responses

18. There was a significant decrease in the release of children during the period under review (134) compared with the previous reporting period (653), owing mainly to challenges in engaging with armed groups associated with CPC.² However, dialogue with FPRC and UPC factions operating outside of CPC led to the separation

² Armed groups with no CPC association are indicated by the addition of “faction” to their name in the present report.

of 134 children (117 boys, 17 girls) from FPRC (92) and UPC (42) in Vakaga and Haute-Kotto prefectures. An additional 394 children (265 boys, 129 girls) escaped or had been allowed to leave from or been abandoned – by CPC factions (356), including FPRC (267), anti-balaka (42), UPC (22), FPRC/MPC/UPC (15) and FPRC/MPC (10); FPRC/faction (36); anti-balaka/faction (1); and UPC/faction (1) – in Haute-Kotto (209), Bamingui-Bangoran (144), Nana-Grébizi (25) and Ouaka (16) prefectures.

19. All of the children released from armed groups during the reporting period were handed over to child protection partners and received psychosocial and medical support, family reunification and community reintegration services. Overall, 949 children, including children released in previous reporting periods, received reintegration support. However, access for children to sustainable socioeconomic reintegration programmes after receiving short-term vocational training was impaired by ongoing fighting, an increase in logistical costs for humanitarian interventions and a decrease in funding for long-term reintegration programmes, thereby reducing the capacity of the country task force to maintain medium-term support to children and to ensure their sustainable reintegration.

20. To support reintegration efforts and prevent children from becoming victims of grave violations, in particular their recruitment and use in the light of the high number of children dropping out of secondary school, MINUSCA supported the Ministry of National Education in operationalizing a vocational training centre for children in Ouaka prefecture from the age of 14 years.

B. Dialogue with the Government of the Central African Republic

21. During the reporting period, the Government took important steps to end and prevent grave violations. The country task force supported the Government in preparing a draft strategy for a national plan on the prevention of grave violations against children. Once finalized, the national prevention plan will serve as a framework through which the Government will operationalize mechanisms to protect children from grave violations. The plan's implementation will be spearheaded by the National Council on Child Protection, which is composed of child protection focal points from relevant ministries, as provided for in the 2020 National Child Protection Code. The decree for the establishment of the National Council was adopted by the President of the Central African Republic on 31 October 2023.

22. Furthermore, on 15 April 2022 the President signed an action plan against the trafficking of children in the Central African Republic, with a focus on preventing the use of children by the Armed Forces. In addition, a circular issued by the Minister for National Defence and Reconstruction of the Army prohibited the presence of children around military bases of the Armed Forces and MINUSCA. Civilian and military representatives visited bases of the Armed Forces to raise awareness on the issue.

C. Action plans and dialogue with armed groups

23. During the period under review, the country task force faced major challenges in engaging with the leadership of MPC, FPRC and UPC armed groups associated with CPC on the implementation of their respective action plans, as interlocutors had gone into hiding. Limited engagement at the leadership and zone commander levels led to the separation of 134 children in September 2021.

24. In June 2022, following country task force engagement with CPC leadership on the action plans with MPC, FPRC and UPC, the Coalition's military coordinator and leader of the Unité pour la paix en Centrafrique, Ali Darassa Mahamat, issued a

command directive that called for the strict respect of international humanitarian law, the protection of civilians and the prohibition of recruitment and use of children and other grave violations against children. Following the announcement by CPC of offensives against the Armed Forces in December 2022, the country task force advocated for adherence with the directive.

25. On behalf of the country task force, the MINUSCA Child Protection Unit continued its dialogue – initiated in 2020 – with the LRA Achaye faction (LRA-Achaye) on the release of abductees, disarmament of fighters, prevention of grave violations and respect for surrounding communities. The country task force transmitted the LRA-Achaye disarmament requests to the Government and advocated for the request to be considered positively. In March 2022, a high-level delegation led by the Minister of State for the Political Agreement for Peace and Reconciliation in the Central African Republic and Disarmament, Demobilization, Reintegration and Repatriation and with participation from the African Union initiated a dialogue with LRA-Achaye and the LRA/Zaïko Langa-Langa factions (LRA/Zaïko Langa-Langa) in Mbomou prefecture. In November 2022, following engagement with LRA-Achaye, 18 associated children (8 boys, 10 girls) were identified in a camp by the country task force and verified to have been abducted, recruited and used and subjected to sexual violence.

26. Of note, as of July 2023, in a process led by the Governments of the Central African Republic and Uganda, with support from MINUSCA, including the Child and Women's Protection Units, and UNICEF, LRA ex-combatants and their dependents, including 13 women and 31 children, were voluntarily repatriated from Haut-Mbomou prefecture to Uganda. All women concerned had been abducted and 30 of the 31 children had been born in captivity. One boy had been abducted from the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

D. Progress in legislative framework and accountability

27. Some progress was made on accountability for grave violations against children, in particular for sexual violence, including through the gradual operationalization of the military justice system and proceedings before domestic courts, the Special Criminal Court and the International Criminal Court.

28. Following incidents of widespread sexual violence in Mbomou prefecture in 2020 and 2021, the Unité mixte d'intervention rapide et de répression des violences sexuelles faites aux femmes et aux enfants, comprising gendarmes, police, medical and social staff, deployed to the prefecture in early 2022 with the support of the United Nations. The Unité investigated incidents of sexual violence against women and girls that had taken place between December 2020 and April 2021 when Bakouma and the surrounding areas were controlled by FPRC under the command of Mahamat Sallet. Some 125 testimonies were collected, including from 27 girls. Many victims had reportedly been attacked while pursuing livelihood activities, such as attending to the fields, collecting food and water, or had been abducted from their homes. Rapes also had been committed during widespread attacks on villages, during which victims were frequently raped in their homes. The evidence collected was transferred to the Special Criminal Court for further investigation in January 2023.

29. Moreover, in October 2022, the Trial Chamber of the Special Criminal Court convicted 3R military leader Issa Sallet Adoum for rape as a crime against humanity and a war crime committed by his subordinates on 21 May 2019 in Koundjili. Among the victims were two boys.

30. During the reporting period, the Appeal Courts in Bangui and Bouar tried 33 cases involving sexual violence, including 9 cases with child victims. All cases

involving children resulted in convictions, with sentences ranging from 5 to 20 years of imprisonment.

31. Of concern, the customary practice of “friendly arrangements”, whereby the perpetrator pays the victim’s family and is consequently understood to be “married” to the victim, remained a notable challenge in addressing accountability for sexual violence.

32. Regarding the recruitment and use of children, anti-balaka leader and former Minister for Disarmament, Demobilization, Reintegration and Repatriation, Maxime Jeoffroy Eli Mokom Gawaka, was arrested in Chad and surrendered to the International Criminal Court in March 2022 for his alleged involvement in crimes against humanity and war crimes between 2013 and 2014, including the enlistment of children under the age of 15. However, on 16 October 2023, shortly after the end of the reporting period, the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court withdrew all charges against him. Having considered the totality of the evidence, and in the light of changed circumstances regarding the availability of witnesses, the Prosecutor concluded that there were no longer any reasonable prospects of conviction at trial.

33. On 7 February 2023, the Armed Forces and other security personnel arrested anti-balaka leader Sossengue, who is accused of human rights abuses, in particular against Muslim communities. At the time of reporting, it was not known whether his charges included grave violations against children.

34. As of June 2022, the country task force also supported the Government in validating a draft protocol for the handover and protection of children allegedly associated with armed groups to the Ministry for the Promotion of Women, Family and Protection of Children, which will facilitate the handover of children to civilian child protection actors as opposed to subjecting children to a judicial process.

35. The Government also initiated efforts to strengthen the protection of schools from attacks. In December 2021, the Parliamentary Commission for Foreign Affairs recommended the endorsement of the Safe Schools Declaration.

E. Advocacy and mainstreaming of child protection

36. In December 2022, MINUSCA expanded the scope of the MINUSCA Force directive to protect schools and universities, initially issued in December 2015, to apply to the whole Mission. The directive addresses both uniformed and civilian personnel. MINUSCA directly trained 5,229 military, police and civilian personnel on child rights and child protection. Similar training on the protection of children during armed conflict, electoral processes and on the roll-out of the Child Protection Code were delivered to 4,167 national stakeholders, including members of the Armed Forces (2,057), internal security forces (1,683), Unités spéciales mixtes de sécurité (30) and the judiciary (397). Training and awareness-raising sessions were delivered to 14,320 (8,381 men, 5,939 women) community and religious leaders, local authorities, civil society members and members of armed groups, as part of the Act to Protect Children Affected by Armed Conflict campaign.

37. Shortly after the end of the reporting period, a human rights focal point was appointed at the État-major of the Armed Forces, with whom the country task force can liaise to address child protection concerns and accountability for grave violations committed by the Armed Forces.

38. The country task force continued to advocate for the Government to develop further prevention tools, such as the issuance of a command directive prohibiting grave violations by the Armed Forces. Advocacy to end the removal of persons, including children, from police stations by non-judicial actors also continued.

39. The MINUSCA juvenile justice task force and its members also continued to advocate for the enforcement of the 2020 Child Protection Code, including for children formerly associated with armed groups and armed forces, who committed serious crimes, to be treated primarily as victims.

IV. Grave violations against children

40. Between 1 July 2021 and 30 June 2023, the country task force verified 1,432 violations against 1,046 children (674 boys, 372 girls). Of those, 486 occurred in the second half of 2021, 498 occurred in 2022 and 448 in the first half of 2023. The decrease of 14 per cent compared with the previous reporting period, is likely due to access restrictions to areas of ongoing military and armed groups operations and a lower number of children having been separated from armed groups due to challenges in engaging with CPC.

41. Recruitment and use of children was the most prevalent violation (713), followed by abduction (228) and sexual violence (184).

42. Of the total 1,432 grave violations verified, armed groups were responsible for about 75 per cent, while government forces, other security personnel and pro-government proxies were responsible for 20 per cent. Violations were attributed to CPC factions (756), including FPRC (260), 3R (156), UPC (155), anti-balaka (115), unidentified CPC (25), anti-balaka/3R (17), MPC (9), anti-balaka/FPRC/MPC (5), FPRC/MPC (4), anti-balaka/MPC (4), anti-balaka/UPC (2), 3R/FPRC (1), anti-balaka/FPRC (1), FPRC/Parti du rassemblement de la nation centrafricaine (PRNC) (1), and in clashes between FPRC and MPC (1); as well as FPRC/faction (92); UPC/faction (75); anti-balaka/Darlan faction (5); anti-balaka/faction (2); LRA-Achaye (70); LRA/Zaïko Langa-Langa (14); Azande Ani Kpi Gbe (14); unidentified former Séléka factions (5); the Siriri coalition³ (2); and RTS (2). Verified violations were further attributed to government and pro-government forces and proxies (283), including other security personnel (111), the Armed Forces (89), the Armed Forces/other security personnel (42), internal security forces (14), the Armed Forces/internal security forces (10), demobilized anti-balaka elements used as proxies by the Armed Forces/other security personnel (9), the Armed Forces/internal security forces/other security personnel (4), Unités spéciales mixtes de sécurité (2), unidentified pro-government former Séléka factions (1), and unidentified pro-government proxies (1); as well as unidentified perpetrators (112).

43. Violations were verified in Haute-Kotto (461), Ouaka (219), Ouham-Pendé (162), Haut-Mbomou (142), Nana-Mambéré (97), Ouham-Fafa (88), Nana-Grébizi (47), Lim-Pendé (43), Ouham (40), Ombella-M'Poko (26), Basse-Kotto (23), Vakaga (21), Mboumo (20), Mambéré-Kadei (18), Bangui (10), Bamingui-Bangoran (6), Kemo (4), Lobaye (3) and Sangha-Mbaéré (2) prefectures.

44. At total of 181 children were victims of multiple violations. Some 53 girls were victims of abduction, recruitment and use, and rape, and 128 children (99 boys, 29 girls) were victims of two violations: abduction, and recruitment and use (96); recruitment and use, and rape (12); abduction and rape (9); recruitment and use, and maiming (3); abduction and killing (2); rape and killing (2); recruitment and use, and killing (1); maiming and subsequent killing (1); maiming and sexual violence (2).

45. In addition, the country task force late verified 448 violations against 426 children (208 boys, 218 girls), namely, recruitment and use (297), sexual violence

³ The Siriri coalition, created in 2017 in Mambéré Kadéi prefecture, is a Fulani-dominated armed group that consists of local factions that coordinate their positions. The creation of Siriri was a response to cases of cattle theft by anti-balaka elements.

(132), killing and maiming (8), abduction (5), attacks against schools and hospitals (4) and denial of humanitarian access (2), which occurred prior to the reporting period. Three girls were victims of multiple violations: abduction, recruitment and use, and rape; and 10 children (3 boys, 7 girls) were victims of two violations: recruitment and use, and rape (7); recruitment and use, and killing (2); and abduction, and recruitment and use (1).

A. Recruitment and use

46. The United Nations verified the recruitment and use of 713 children (544 boys and 169 girls), aged 7 to 17 years. Of those, 252 occurred in the second half of 2021, 181 occurred in 2022 and 280 in the first half of 2023. This represents a decrease of 16 per cent compared with the previous reporting period. Children were recruited between 2008 and 2021 and continued to be used during the reporting period.

47. Armed groups remained the main perpetrators accounting for 80 per cent of cases of recruitment and use (568), as follows: CPC factions (367), including FPRC (164), UPC (80), 3R (76), anti-balaka (36), anti-balaka/3R (4), unidentified CPC (4), and MPC (3); FPRC/faction (92); UPC/faction (69); LRA-Achaye (28); LRA/Zaïko Langa-Langa (8); and Azande Ani Kpi Gbe (4). In total, 19 per cent of children were used by government and pro-government forces (143), including other security personnel (89), the Armed Forces (28), the Armed Forces/other security personnel (15), the Armed Forces/internal security forces (10), and internal security forces (1). The children were used as cooks or porters, to run errands and operate checkpoints; 10 girls were used for sexual purposes. Two children were recruited and used by unidentified perpetrators.

48. Violations were verified in Haute-Kotto (331), Ouham-Pendé (125), Ouaka (101), Haut-Mbomou (68), Nana-Grébizi (30), Nana-Mambéré (28), Basse-Kotto (13), Ombella-M'Poko (6), Mambéré-Kadéï (4), Vakaga (3), Mbomou (2), Kemo (1) and Ouham-Fafa (1) prefectures.

49. The relatively high number of verified cases of recruitment and use in Haute-Kotto, Ouham-Pendé and Ouaka prefectures is explained by the country task force's engagement with armed groups, allowing for the screening of formerly associated children and their separation. Of the 713 children verified as recruited and used, 134 were separated from armed groups that have an action plan with the United Nations: FPRC/faction (92); and UPC/faction (42).

50. Children were used in combat (170 boys) and support roles (374 boys, 95 girls), including as porters or to fetch water, run errands, gather information and operate checkpoints.

51. A total of 75 girls associated with parties to the conflict were subjected to sexual violence or used for sexual purposes. In total, 47 girls were exposed to sexual violence during their association with CPC; 18 girls recruited and used by LRA factions were forced to marry LRA elements; and 10 girls were used by the Armed Forces and other security personnel for sexual purposes.

52. Most children joined armed groups to protect their communities or themselves or as a means of survival owing to poverty and fears of reprisal (429). Some 156 of children were abducted or forcefully recruited by armed groups, and 128 children were used by government and pro-government forces, of which 15 were also abducted.

53. In addition, the United Nations late-verified the recruitment and use of 297 children (201 boys, 96 girls) by the following: CPC factions (231), including FPRC (155), anti-balaka (29), FPRC/MPC (22), FPRC/MPC/UPC (15), UPC (6), 3R (2) and unidentified CPC (2); FPRC faction (37); anti-balaka faction (15); and UPC faction

(14). Violations occurred in Bamingui-Bangoran (144), Haute-Kotto (93), Ouaka (27), Nana-Grébizi (16), Kemo (15), Nana Mambéré (1) and Ouham-Pendé (1).

Deprivation of liberty of children for their alleged association with Armed Forces or armed groups

54. The detention of 11 boys by the national police and gendarmerie of the Central African Republic for alleged association with armed groups was verified. Following advocacy, all boys were released and handed over to civilian child protection actors.

55. In addition, 46 boys in detention, including 7 boys detained for alleged association with armed groups in previous years, were released during the reporting period following a presidential decree granting them clemency on 2 December 2022.

B. Killing and maiming of children

56. The country task force verified the killing (61) and maiming (94) of 155 children (103 boys, 52 girls), aged 3 months to 17 years. Of those, 50 occurred in the second half of 2021, 81 occurred in 2022 and 24 occurred in the first half of 2023. The number of casualties remained the same as in the previous reporting period.

57. Armed groups were responsible for 41 per cent (64) of child casualties, as follows: CPC factions (63), including 3R (37), UPC (6), anti-balaka/3R (5), anti-balaka/FPRC/MPC (4), anti-balaka (3), anti-balaka/UPC (2), unidentified CPC (2), FPRC (1), FPRC/MPC (1), FPRC/PRNC (1) and in clashes between FPRC and MPC (1); and RTS (1). Government and pro-government forces and proxies were responsible for 27 per cent of casualties (42), as follows: the Armed Forces (14), the Armed Forces/other security personnel (11), demobilized anti-balaka elements used as proxies by the Armed Forces/other security personnel (9), other security personnel (5), internal security forces (2) and unidentified pro-government proxies (1). Unidentified perpetrators were responsible for the remaining 32 per cent of violations (49).

58. Nana-Mambéré was the most affected Prefecture (38), followed by Ouaka (30), Lim-Pendé (17), Ombella-M'Poko (13), Haute-Kotto (11), Ouham-Pendé (10), Vakaga (8), Ouham-Fafa (7), Basse-Kotto (4), Ouham (4), Mambéré-Kadéï (3), Haut-Mbomou (3), Lobaye (2), Bangui (2), Kemo (1), Mbomou (1) and Nana-Grébizi (1).

59. Child casualties were caused by the following: gunshots (92), including during targeted killings (13); explosive ordnance (38); mutilation (10); physical assault (5); assault with a machete (4); shrapnel (3); burns (2); and death as a result of rape (1). Of concern, there was a 280 per cent increase in child casualties caused by explosive ordnance compared with the previous reporting period, highlighting the severe consequences of an increase in the indiscriminate use of explosive weapons by parties to the conflict, in particular in the West. For example, in January 2022 in Lim-Pendé prefecture, 6 children (2 boys, 4 girls) were killed (2) and maimed (4) after a grenade with which they were playing exploded. The children had found the grenade when returning home from the fields.

60. All child casualties verified in the second half of 2021 (50) occurred in the context of intensified operations by the Armed Forces/other security personnel against CPC factions and attacks in response thereto. For example, during one such operation in July 2021 in Ouaka prefecture aimed at reclaiming a community that was controlled by UPC, a 12-year Fulani girl was shot and killed in her home by the Armed Forces, allegedly because she was the wife of a UPC element.

61. Demobilized anti-balaka and UPC elements were recruited by the Armed Forces/other security personnel and used as proxies in attacks against Fulani and Muslim civilians, resulting in child casualties, in particular in Ouaka prefecture. For

example, in December 2021 in Ouaka prefecture, demobilized anti-balaka pro-government proxies gathered the civilian population, released Christians and killed Muslim civilians, including 6 boys and 1 girl.

62. Retaliatory attacks by CPC resulted in 23 child casualties. For example, 5 children (3 boys, 2 girls) were injured by stray bullets when CPC/3R elements attacked a post of the Armed Forces in Lim-Pendé prefecture in March 2022 after elements of the Armed Forces had reportedly stolen cattle from Fulani herders.

63. In another example, in May 2022, UPC elements shot and killed a baby boy and his parents who were on a motorcycle in Ouaka prefecture. The UPC elements stole their belongings and burned the motorcycle.

64. In addition, the country task force late-verified the killing of a 3-year-old boy by 3R in Nana-Mambéré prefecture, which occurred in January 2021.

C. Rape and other forms of sexual violence against children

65. The country task force verified 184 cases of rape and other forms of sexual violence against 183 girls, aged between 8 and 17 years. One girl was a victim of two separate incidents of rape by CPC/UPC elements in Haute-Kotto prefecture. In total, 60 cases of sexual violence occurred in the second half of 2021, 83 occurred in 2022 and 41 in the first half of 2023. Girls were often attacked during clashes, as well as in military offensives and attacks on villages. Overall, most incidents of sexual violence occurred in areas where armed groups had a strong presence.

66. While verified cases of sexual violence decreased by 26 per cent compared with the previous reporting period, sexual violence remained underreported owing to stigmatization, the risk of reprisals, a lack of accountability and the absence of adequate support services for survivors. Survivors often experience blame and alienation from their community after enduring sexual violence, especially if they become pregnant as a result. Hence, the actual extent of sexual violence remained difficult to assess, including owing to limited access to areas with ongoing military operations and the presence of explosive ordnance, in particular in the West, which hampered monitoring and reporting activities.

67. Armed groups were responsible for 63 per cent of cases of sexual violence (116), as follows: CPC factions (88), including FPRC (40), anti-balaka (16), UPC (15), 3R (14), unidentified CPC (2), and MPC (1); LRA-Achaye (18); unidentified former Séléka (3); LRA/Zaïko Langa-Langa (2); Azande Ani Kpi Gbe (2); unidentified anti-balaka (2); and UPC/faction (1). Government and pro-government forces were responsible for 29 per cent of cases (53), as follows: the Armed Forces (37); internal security forces (7); other security personnel (6); Unités spéciales mixtes de sécurité (2); and pro-government unidentified former Séléka (1). In total, 15 cases of rape were attributed to unidentified perpetrators.

68. Violations occurred in Haute-Kotto (49), Ouaka (25), Haut-Mbomou (23), Ouham-Fafa (16), Lim-Pendé (14), Mbomou (11), Ouham (11), Nana-Grébizi (10), Bangui (7), Ouham-Pendé (6), Nana-Mambéré (5), Sangha-Mbaéré (2), Vakaga (2), Basse-Kotto (1), Kemo (1) and Lobaye (1) prefectures.

69. A total of 75 girls were victims of sexual violence during their association with the following: CPC factions (47); LRA factions (18); and the Armed Forces/other security personnel (10). For example, in 2021, CPC/FPRC elements raped 27 girls, aged 8 to 17 years, during their association.

70. Some 21 girls were gang raped by CPC/3R (6), CPC/FPRC (4), unidentified perpetrators (4), CPC/UPC (3), the Armed Forces (3), and MPC (1). Of those, 16

cases of gang rape were attributed to CPC/FPRC under the leadership of Mahamat Sallet during the second half of 2021, when the group carried out attacks in Mbomou prefecture.

71. Of concern, armed groups continued to abduct women and girls to use them as sex slaves for fighters. Women and girls are often repeatedly raped, or gang raped.

72. Girls were also raped while engaging in livelihood activities. For example, in Ouham prefecture, a 15-year-old girl was working in the fields with her parents when they heard gun shots. The girl was raped by two other security personnel elements and her father was killed.

73. In addition, the country task force late-verified 132 cases of rape against 132 girls by the following: CPC factions (108), including unidentified CPC (62), anti-balaka (14), 3R (8), FPRC (8), MPC/FPRC (7), anti-balaka/3R (5) and UPC (4); government and pro-government forces (13), including Unités spéciales mixtes de sécurité (8), the Armed Forces (4) and other security personnel (1); unidentified perpetrators (8); and unidentified former Séléka (3). The violations were verified in Mbomou (54), Ombella M'Poko (24), Nana-Grébizi (18), Kemo (15), Nana-Mambéré (9), Bamingui-Bangoran (5), Lim-Pendé (2), Ouham-Pendé (2), Bangui (1), Haute-Kotto (1), and Mambéré-Kadéï prefectures (1).

74. Sexual exploitation and abuse of children by MINUSCA peacekeeping personnel continued to be a concern in the Central African Republic, in particular early on in the reporting period. Information on allegations received, as well as on measures taken by the United Nations or by Member States, is available online.⁴

D. Attacks on schools and hospitals

75. A total of 36 attacks against schools (19) and hospitals (17) were verified. Of those, 16 occurred in the second half of 2021, 18 occurred in 2022 and 2 in the first half of 2023. This represents a 50 per cent decrease compared with the previous reporting period. Increased advocacy and awareness-raising by the country task force may have contributed to the reduction.

76. Attacks on schools and hospitals were attributed to the following: government and pro-government forces (17), including the Armed Forces/other security personnel (7), the Armed Forces/other security personnel/internal security forces (3), other security personnel (5) and the Armed Forces (2); CPC factions (12), including unidentified CPC (4), anti-balaka (3), UPC (2), 3R (2) and 3R/FPRC (1); and unidentified perpetrators (7). Violations were verified in Ouham-Pendé (7), Ouham (6), Ouham-Fafa (5), Nana-Mambéré (5), Ouaka (4), Haute-Kotto (2), Vakaga (2), Bamingui-Bangoran (2), Lim-Pendé (2) and Haut-Mbomou (1) prefectures.

77. Incidents involved lootings and robberies (17), the destruction of and damage to school and hospital equipment (12), threats against protected persons (5), and killing (1) and maiming (1) of protected persons in relation to schools and/or hospitals.

78. For example, in March 2022, it was verified that the Armed Forces/other security personnel had used school furniture as firewood at two schools used for military purposes in Haute-Kotto prefecture.

79. In another instance, in August 2022, a medical officer wearing a vest identifying him as a vaccination agent was killed by unidentified perpetrators in Ouham-Fafa prefecture.

⁴ <https://conduct.unmissions.org>.

80. In addition, the country task force late-verified 4 attacks on schools by CPC factions (4), including UPC (2), FPRC (1) and 3R (1), which occurred in previous reporting periods.

Military use of schools and hospitals

81. The country task force verified the military use of 36 schools (29) and hospitals (7) by the following: government and pro-government forces (28), including other security personnel (12), the Armed Forces (10), and the Armed Forces/other security personnel (6); and CPC factions (8), including unidentified CPC (4), UPC (3) and MPC (1). Violations occurred in Ouham-Pendé (8), Haute-Kotto (7), Ouham (4), Vakaga (4), Ouaka (3), Ouham-Fafa (2), Haut-Mbomou (2), Nana-Grébizi (2), Lim-Pendé (1), Nana-Mambéré (1), Basse-Kotto (1) and Ombella-M'Poko (1) prefectures.

82. A total of 26 schools and 6 hospitals were vacated during the reporting period, following advocacy by the country task force. For example, one school that had been used for military purposes in Ouaka prefecture since February 2021 by the Armed Forces/other security personnel was vacated in March 2022. Three schools, used by the Armed Forces (1), other security personnel (1) and the Armed Forces/other security personnel (1) and one health centre used by UPC continued to be used for military purposes at the end of the reporting period.

E. Abduction

83. The country task force verified the abduction of 228 children (126 boys, 102 girls). Of those, 72 cases occurred in the second half of 2021, 84 cases in 2022 and 72 cases in the first half of 2023. This represents a two-fold increase compared with the previous reporting period. Of note, 50 abductions in the second half of 2021 were attributed to CPC/FPRC under the leadership of Mahamat Sallet. Of those 50 abductees, 25 girls were also raped.

84. Some 88 per cent of violations were attributed to armed groups (201), as follows: CPC factions (159), including FPRC (52), anti-balaka (38), UPC (35), 3R (22), anti-balaka/3R (8), MPC (2) and unidentified CPC (2); LRA-Achaye (24); Azande Ani Kpi Gbe (7); anti-balaka/Darlan faction (5); LRA/Zaïko Langa-Langa (4); UPC/faction (1); and RTS (1). Government and pro-government forces were responsible for 15 abductions, including the Armed Forces/other security personnel (8), other security personnel (4) and the Armed Forces (3). The remaining cases were attributed to unidentified perpetrators (12).

85. Haute-Kotto was the most affected prefecture (64), followed by Ouaka (41), Haut-Mbomou (37), Ouham-Fafa (25), Nana-Mambéré (19), Ouham-Pendé (10), Mambéré-Kadéï (7), Lim-Pendé (6), Ombella-M'Poko (6), Nana-Grébizi (5), Ouham (4), Mbomou (2), Basse-Kotto (1) and Kemo (1).

86. Children were abducted for the purpose of recruitment and use (103), recruitment and use and sexual purposes (53), for ransom (21), sexual purposes (12), as retaliation (7) and for unknown reasons (32).

87. For example, in January 2022 in Ouham prefecture, CPC/anti-balaka/FPRC/MPC elements attacked villages controlled by a pro-government anti-balaka/faction zone commander. Four civilians, two of whom were understood to be family members of the pro-government anti-balaka zone commander, were abducted by CPC/anti-balaka/FPRC/MPC, including a 14-year-old girl and 2 boys. In retaliation, pro-government anti-balaka elements abducted six civilians, including a baby boy and four girls. They were released after interventions from local authorities and religious leaders. MINUSCA advocated for and obtained the release of the remaining four

abductees. The girls had been forcefully married to pro-government anti-balaka elements as compensation for the security they allegedly provided to the village.

88. In another example, in February 2023 on the border with Cameroon, a 17-year-old Fulani boy was handed over to national police by the local population, suspecting him of being a member of 3R. The boy was taken from the police station by other security personnel for questioning in relation to a border post incident, in which suspected 3R elements had allegedly attacked and killed members of the Armed Forces and other security personnel, and was not returned. At the end of the reporting period, the country task force continued to follow up with national authorities on the boy's whereabouts.

89. At the end of the reporting period, of the 228 children abducted, 200 had been released, 10 had escaped and 18 continued to be used by LRA-Achaye. The whereabouts of one child abducted by other security personnel remained unknown at the end of the reporting period, despite inquiries by the country task force. Of concern, LRA-Achaye and LRA/Zaïko Langa-Langa in Haut-Mbomou prefecture sought to recapture their children, creating tensions with communities who had provided the escapees with protection and shelter, including five girls who had been forcefully married to LRA members. The country task force engaged with community protection mechanisms, civil society and local authorities to protect and securely relocate escapees.

90. In addition, the abduction of five children (3 boys, 2 girls) by FPRC/MPC (2), 3R (2) and FPRC (prior to the creation of CPC) (1) in Nana-Mambéré (2), Nana-Grébizi (2) and Haute-Kotto (1) prefectures were late-verified.

F. Denial of humanitarian access

91. Some 116 incidents of denial of humanitarian access were verified. Of those, 36 occurred in the second half of 2021, 51 in 2022 and 29 in the first half of 2023. In addition, throughout the reporting period humanitarian actors regularly had to temporarily suspend their operations owing to insecurity.

92. Of the incidents of denial of humanitarian access, armed groups were responsible for 66 per cent (76), unidentified perpetrators for 23 per cent (27) and government and pro-government forces for 11 per cent (13). Violations were attributed to the following: CPC factions (67), including anti-balaka (19), UPC (17), unidentified CPC (11), 3R (5), anti-balaka/MPC (4), FPRC (3), FPRC/MPC (3), MPC (3), anti-balaka/FPRC (1) and anti-balaka/FPRC/MPC (1); UPC/faction (4); SIRIRI (2); unidentified former Séléka factions (2); and Azande Ani Kpi Gbe (1). Government and pro-government forces were responsible for 13 violations, including the Armed Forces (5), internal security forces (4), other security personnel (2), the Armed Forces/other security personnel (1) and the Armed Forces/other security personnel/internal security forces (1).

93. Violations were verified in Ouham-Fafa (34), Ouaka (18), Ouham (15), Haut-Mbomou (10), Vakaga (6), Haute-Kotto (4), Bamingui-Bangoran (4), Basse-Kotto (4), Lim-Pendé (4), Mambéré-Kadéï (4), Mbomou (4), Ouham-Pendé (4), Nana-Mambéré (2), Bangui (1), Nana-Grébizi (1) and Ombella-M'Poko (1) prefectures.

94. Incidents involved the robbing of humanitarians (95), extortion (10), the collection of levies by armed groups (2), threats against humanitarian personnel (2), injury (2), abduction and physical assault (1), killing of humanitarian personnel (1), access denial (1), destruction of humanitarian goods (1) and explosive ordnance attacks (1).

95. For example, in 2021, the driver of an international non-governmental organization (NGO) vehicle was killed and two staff were seriously injured after the vehicle hit explosive ordnance in Ouham-Pendé prefecture. In another incident, in May 2022, other security personnel entered the compound of an NGO in Haute-Kotto prefecture, physically assaulted an NGO staff member and stole two motorcycles.

96. In addition, the country task force late-verified two incidents of denial of humanitarian access by unidentified perpetrators (1) and 3R (1) in Mambéré-Kadéï (1) and Ouham prefectures (1).

V. Observations and recommendations

97. I remain concerned by the scale of grave violations against children committed by parties to the conflict, including armed groups, the national defence and security forces and other security personnel. I urge all parties to the conflict immediately to end and prevent grave violations and to abide by international humanitarian law and international human rights law. I call upon all parties to adopt concrete measures to end and prevent grave violations.

98. I call upon the signatories to the Political Agreement for Peace and Reconciliation in the Central African Republic to uphold their commitments, including those pertaining to children, and urge all parties to pursue dialogue for peace.

99. I reiterate my call upon all parties to prioritize efforts to end and prevent child recruitment and use, including through the adoption, implementation and dissemination of command orders prohibiting the practice, and for armed groups to strengthen complaint and age assessment mechanisms.

100. I welcome the release of 134 children from armed groups following United Nations engagement and urge all parties to release all associated children unconditionally.

101. I welcome the adoption by the Government of a national plan to counter trafficking in children, with a focus on preventing the use of children by the Armed Forces, and a circular prohibiting the presence of children around Armed Forces and MINUSCA bases. I also welcome the Government's efforts, in cooperation with the United Nations, to develop a national prevention strategy on grave violations against children, and I call upon the Government to prioritize its finalization and adoption. However, I remain concerned by the number of grave violations attributed to the Armed Forces of the Central African Republic and other security personnel, notably recruitment and use and sexual violence.

102. I welcome the appointment of a Human Rights Focal Point in the État-Major of the Armed Forces. I call upon the Government to establish an interministerial committee to address grave violations, and to issue command directives applicable to all forces, including other security personnel.

103. I am concerned that, during counter-offensive operations of the Armed Forces and other security personnel, Muslim and Fulani civilians, including children, are being attacked and subjected to grave violations. I call upon the Government to investigate such cases and to ensure that all Government and associated forces abide by applicable law. I also call on the Government to prevent the removal of detained children from police stations by unauthorized actors and to investigate such cases. I am further alarmed about the use of proxies by the Armed Forces and other security personnel, including the use of demobilized fighters, and strongly urge that this practice stop.

104. I remain concerned about child casualties caused by explosive ordnance and urge all parties immediately to take all preventive and mitigating actions necessary to avoid and minimize harm and to better protect children during hostilities and from the effects of explosive ordnance.

105. I urge all parties to end and prevent sexual violence against children. I call upon the Government to address the practice of “friendly arrangements” and, with United Nations support, to ensure that adequate programmes are accessible to all survivors, including child-friendly and safe reporting and response mechanisms.

106. I commend the Government for investigating and prosecuting perpetrators of sexual violence and encourage the Government to ensure that all victims of sexual violence have access to justice. I further call on the Government to hold accountable all perpetrators of grave violations against children and for these efforts to be victim-centred.

107. I welcome the efforts of the Special Criminal Court to advance accountability for grave violations against children and encourage the Special Criminal Court to consider grave violations against children in its prosecution strategy.

108. I reiterate my commitment to preventing and addressing sexual exploitation and abuse by all United Nations personnel.

109. I welcome the recommendation of the Parliamentary Commission for Foreign Affairs to endorse the Safe Schools Declaration. Yet I remain concerned by continued attacks on schools and hospitals and their military use, including by the Armed Forces and other security personnel. I urge all relevant parties to cease and prevent attacks on schools and hospitals and cease using schools and hospitals for military purposes.

110. I urgently call on all parties to the conflict to facilitate and allow secure passage for humanitarian personnel and objects used for humanitarian relief and life-saving operations.

111. I welcome the adoption by CPC of a command directive prohibiting grave violations against children. Yet I remain concerned by the scale of violations attributed to them. I urge CPC to implement the command directive and further urge FPRC, MPC and UPC, all of which have signed action plans with the United Nations, to implement their commitments.

112. I urge LRA to release all abductees immediately and unconditionally. I welcome the dialogue between LRA-Achaye and the United Nations on the release of abducted children. I commend the Governments of the Central African Republic and Uganda for the repatriation of two LRA factions with United Nations support.

113. I welcome the efforts of the Government, with the support of the United Nations and partners, to reintegrate 949 children affected by conflict and the establishment of a vocational training centre in Ouaka Prefecture for conflict-affected children. I encourage the Government to continue to invest in educational and vocational facilities in all regions of the country.

114. I call upon donors to redouble their efforts to provide financial support and technical assistance for sustainable, timely and child-sensitive reintegration and rehabilitation programmes for children formerly associated with armed forces and groups.