



Security Council

Seventy-eighth year

Provisional

9454th meeting

Thursday, 26 October 2023, 10 a.m.

New York

President: Mr. França Danese. (Brazil)

Members:

Albania	Ms. Dautllari
China	Mr. Dai Bing
Ecuador	Mr. Pérez Loose
France	Mr. De Rivière
Gabon	Ms. Bouanga Ayouné
Ghana	Ms. Barnor
Japan	Mrs. Shino
Malta	Mrs. Frazier
Mozambique	Mr. Afonso
Russian Federation.	Ms. Evstigneeva
Switzerland	Mr. Hauri
United Arab Emirates	Ms. Harqoos
United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland . .	Mr. Kariuki
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/2023/769)

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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/2023/769)

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

On behalf of the Council, I welcome Her Excellency Ms. Sylvie Valérie Baipo Temon, Minister for Foreign Affairs, Francophonie and Central Africans Abroad of the Central African Republic.

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/2023/769, which contains the report of the Secretary-General on the Central African Republic.

I now give the floor to Ms. Rugwabiza.

Ms. Rugwabiza (*spoke in French*): Thank you, Mr. President, for giving me the floor.

At the outset, I would like to congratulate Brazil on its presidency of the Security Council for the month of October and to thank you, Mr. President, for convening the current session, which is of particular importance as the vote on the renewal of the mandate of the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA) is scheduled for next month. I am therefore honoured to be here today, ahead of that deadline, to present the Secretary-General's most recent report on the Central African Republic (S/2023/769) and to inform the Council of recent developments and important achievements of the Mission in fulfilling its mandate.

I would like to focus my first remarks on the progress made by the Government in moving the peace

process forward, notwithstanding the ongoing political, security and socioeconomic challenges that entail a need for strengthened and concerted support from the Council and the international community.

First, allow me to touch on the political and peace process. As we know, the preparations and the campaign for the referendum, which was held on 31 July, occupied a central position in the national political agenda during the period covered by the report. Nevertheless, the Government, with the support of MINUSCA, has continued its efforts to decentralize the political peace process. As part of those efforts, I had the privilege to accompany the Prime Minister and Head of Government, members of the Government and development partners to certain prefectures in the north-east and west of the Central African Republic, where major efforts had been made to stabilize the security situation with the full support of MINUSCA. It should be noted that some of the communities we visited were receiving a visit from a Prime Minister for the first time, as was the case for the Vakaga prefecture. MINUSCA will continue to assist such initiatives in order to support the Government in its efforts to extend the State presence throughout the country. In that regard, a stronger commitment from international financial partners and development actors remains central to consolidating the hard-won security gains, whether through investment or stabilization programmes aimed at providing basic services and sustainable socioeconomic livelihoods for the population.

I also welcome the effective reactivation and operationalization of a number of prefectural mechanisms for the implementation of the 2019 Political Agreement for Peace and Reconciliation in the Central African Republic, which remain essential for promoting inclusive dialogue and reconciliation at the local level, particularly in areas that have historically been marginalized, largely because of access difficulties.

The seventh Republic of the Central African Republic and its new Constitution, officially promulgated on 30 August, mark a new stage for the country. I welcome the statements made by the President of the Republic, His Excellency President Touadera, on 31 August and at the general debate of the seventy-eighth session of the General Assembly, in which he reaffirmed his commitment to speeding up the implementation of the political and peace process. The national ownership of that process was illustrated once again by the convening on Monday in Bangui of the

second strategic review of the peace process, with the guarantors and facilitators of the Political Agreement and the Luanda joint road map for peace in the Central African Republic — known as the Luanda road map — and the Ministers for Foreign Affairs of Angola and Rwanda in attendance. With the aim of conducting an assessment of the peace process, the meeting noted the dissolution of nine armed groups, or their branches, that were signatories to the Political Agreement. The meeting also noted the progress made on disarmament, demobilization and reintegration, security-sector reform, the national policy on border management, which has now been adopted, and the restoration of State authority. It will be essential to capitalize on that momentum in order to continue building confidence between all the parties to the political peace process through tangible actions and initiatives. In that regard, we welcome the announcement by the Government of the Central African Republic of a strategy for engaging the leaders of armed groups with a view to ensuring their return to the political process.

Preparations for the local elections have been resumed, and the first round of voting is scheduled for October 2024. The new timetable provides a framework for accelerating the mobilization of resources and for revising the electoral code to ensure its compliance with the new Constitution. It is also essential that the commitment of the Central African Republic authorities to political solutions be made manifest in the form of efforts to preserve the democratic space and resume a dialogue with the opposition, with the aim of promoting inclusive and credible local elections.

The security situation remains volatile in some regions outside Bangui, particularly in border areas. Against that backdrop, and in line with our new political strategy, MINUSCA has strengthened its operational space in Haute-Kotto and Vakaga prefectures, enhancing its protection of civilians and deterring the threats posed by armed groups more effectively. In Haut-Mbomou prefecture, the Mission facilitated the first joint deployment with Central African defence and security forces in an area where they had previously been absent. The initiative was launched in response to intensifying clashes between Unité pour la Paix en Centrafrique and the new Azande Ani Kpi Gbe militia, with tangible and almost immediate results. In early October, that militia contacted MINUSCA and informed the Mission that it had decided to declare a ceasefire, join the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration process and promote social cohesion.

Once again, those results demonstrate — if proof were required — the effectiveness of concerted efforts, even if much remains to be done, including in terms of strengthening the capacities of national security and defence institutions.

In the past few months we also witnessed a major development, the facilitation of the voluntary repatriation of ex-combatants of the Lord's Resistance Army. It had been a presence in Haut-Mbomou for more than 15 years and a real and constant threat to civilians. I also welcomed the signing of a border cooperation agreement between the Central African Republic and South Sudan on 1 September, which should help reinforce the development of coordinated responses to cross-border threats.

The increase in recorded cases of violations of human rights and international humanitarian law remains alarming. The Mission's expansion of its operational space and stabilization efforts has enabled it to access remote areas of the country and conduct human rights investigations. Among other things, those investigations have shed light on violations, as yet unreported, that were committed before 2021 and 2022. I welcome the Government's efforts to step up its response to human rights violations and its fight against impunity, as shown by its adoption in August of a national human rights policy whose formulation benefited from contributions from civil society. We also encourage the Government to do more to support the national justice system, the prison administration and the strict application of the law, so as to ensure that anyone who has committed or is committing heinous crimes against civilians or peacekeepers is duly tried and that justice is done for such crimes.

On the socioeconomic front, the period that just ended was unfortunately dominated by persistent challenges, which in turn were aggravated by the growing humanitarian needs associated with the influx of refugees from Chad and the Sudan. I welcome the solidarity with the refugees expressed by the Government of the Central African Republic and the populations of Vakaga and Lim-Pende prefectures, despite their own challenges and extreme food insecurity, which has been exacerbated by the closure of the border with the Sudan, a traditional source of basic foodstuffs for Vakaga. I also commend the Government for its policy of welcoming Central African refugees and returnees, and I would like to thank donors for their generous support in that regard.

The Mission has continued to reconfigure its security arrangements, following a sequenced rationalization process aimed at optimizing our uniformed and civilian staff's effectiveness, particularly with regard to our mandate to support the protection of civilians, secure humanitarian assistance, support local conflict mediation and reconciliation and facilitate the decentralized implementation of the political peace process. With a view to enhancing performance and integration, we will continue to rationalize the number of temporary operational bases and improve the living and working conditions of MINUSCA's civilian and uniformed personnel, making the working conditions for personnel deployed outside Bangui in areas that are difficult to reach a priority.

In order to uphold the values of the United Nations and maintain the population's trust wherever we operate, MINUSCA continues to strengthen its efforts to prevent and manage risks of sexual exploitation and abuse, while working with United Nations country team agencies to assist identified victims. All in all, the increased scrutiny exercised by MINUSCA and local community networks, with the Mission's support, helped reduce the number of new cases reported in 2023. We will increase and maintain those multidimensional efforts, in full compliance with the Secretary-General's zero-tolerance policy.

I would like to take this opportunity to draw the Council's attention to the critical gaps in the Mission's air capabilities, ground-transport capacities and supply chain. Those gaps were confirmed during the global assessment of our logistics transport capabilities, which was carried out in September with the support of Headquarters. The Mission's mobility is hampered by limited infrastructure and the lack or unusability of most runways outside Bangui. That state of affairs also affects the welfare, safety and security of our peacekeepers and our operational response. For instance, it takes several weeks for a convoy to travel from Bangui to Birao, in the north-east, or to Obo, in the south-east. The rainy season, which lasts seven months, makes the roads impassable. Furthermore, the Mission does not have sufficient operational coverage for the evacuation of the wounded throughout the territory. We plan to begin implementing some of the recommendations from the overall assessment of our logistics capabilities if we are granted the funds during the coming fiscal year. That is why we are now asking for the support of the Council and that of all Member

States with a view to the gradual implementation of all the recommended measures.

We therefore encourage all stakeholders, including contributing countries and partners of the Central African Republic, to support the improvement of mobility and land access in the Central African Republic. That support should contribute to improving MINUSCA's critical aviation capabilities, while allowing the rehabilitation of certain land transport infrastructure, with a view to maximizing the impact of MINUSCA operations. At the same time, continued investment by partners in the country's network and infrastructure remains central to the development of the Central African Republic, which is hampered by past conflicts and the regular resurgence of violence. Such investments will contribute to the consolidation of lasting peace and stability in Central Africa.

The implementation of the Political Agreement for Peace and Reconciliation remains the only viable and appropriate solution for the return to peace and sustainable development in the Central African Republic. It is therefore essential to pay renewed attention to an inclusive dialogue with the political opposition and armed groups, as part of the peace process. I call for a remobilization of all stakeholders at the national, subregional and regional levels for a holistic implementation of the Political Agreement. I also reiterate that MINUSCA will continue to provide all the necessary support to establish an environment that is conducive to the advancement of the peace process.

I must also specify that decentralized governance in the Central African Republic cannot happen without the effective extension of State authority throughout the national territory. This is a priority and a prerequisite for the lasting restoration of peace and development in the country. I would like to emphasize that the efforts and resources invested by the Mission to expand its operational space and strengthen its preventive and robust posture have resulted in a substantial improvement in the protection of civilians, humanitarian access and the implementation of the entire mandate that the Council has entrusted to us. However, we know that the primary responsibility for the protection of civilians and the territorial integrity of the country lies with the Central African Government, whose national defence and internal security forces require strengthened capacities. Support from MINUSCA alone is not enough. Therefore, the stepped up and coordinated commitment of all partners to strengthen the strategic,

operational and logistical capacities of national defence and security forces remains essential.

I would like to conclude by emphasizing that, despite the multiple challenges and difficulties, MINUSCA has contributed to protecting civilians and has facilitated the creation of an environment that is conducive to revitalized implementation of the political peace and reconciliation process, as well as the delivery of vital humanitarian aid to the most vulnerable people. The Mission, through its uniformed and civilian components, has implemented the mandate rigorously, with emphasis on providing innovative solutions to the identified challenges. Furthermore, I would like to pay tribute to the sacrifice of the peacekeepers. We lost three of our peacekeepers in the month of October alone, in two separate ground transportation accidents.

Despite the laudable efforts of the Government and the people of the Central African Republic, with the support of MINUSCA, the achievements remain very fragile and call for expanded and strengthened joint efforts from us to minimize the real risks of regression, particularly in view of the upcoming municipal elections in 2024 and 2025. Those elections will require even more extensive coordination in the joint plan of the Central African defence and security forces and MINUSCA for the security of elections. In that context, the presence of the Mission, in its current full capacity, remains vital to the restoration of sustainable and lasting peace, in support of the people and the Government of the Central African Republic.

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 Rivi re (France) (*spoke in French*): I thank the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for her briefing and commend her resolute action at the head of the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA). I reiterate France's full support and take this opportunity to pay tribute for the recent sacrifice made by three MINUSCA Blue Helmets. I welcome the presence among us of the Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Central African Republic.

There has been progress in the Central African Republic in recent months. I particularly welcome the authorities' commitment to the peace process. This week in Bangui, the second strategic review for the

further implementation of the Political Agreement for Peace and Reconciliation in the Central African Republic and the Luanda road map took place. The personal commitment of President Touadera in the process is commendable. We welcome the efforts led by the Central African authorities, with the support of MINUSCA, for the decentralization of the peace process. That is essential for the entire Central African population to take ownership of the process.

We also recognize the progress made with the support of MINUSCA in the fight against armed groups and in the disarmament, demobilization, reintegration and repatriation process. We encourage continued engagement with countries in the region. That involves implementing concrete cooperation and anchoring the progress made over time in conjunction with the African Union, the Economic Community of Central African States and the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region. France encourages the authorities to continue their efforts in the fight against impunity and the promotion of transitional justice, as well as in strengthening the rule of law and the proper functioning of the judicial system.

France also welcomes the strengthening of cooperation between the Central African authorities and MINUSCA. The joint commitments of the Special Representative and the Prime Minister in several regional prefectures demonstrate positive cooperation in favour of the decentralization of the peace process and the strengthening of the restoration of State authority.

However, the situation remains fragile. Armed groups continue to threaten civilian populations, Central African forces and MINUSCA. France strongly condemns all attacks by those groups. France is also concerned about the growing threat posed by explosive devices in several regions. In addition, France remains concerned by human rights violations, in particular by armed groups and members of the Wagner Group. We also condemn the increase in conflict-related sexual violence, particularly that committed by armed groups. Those violations must not go unpunished, and we encourage the Central African authorities to continue to take and to step up the measures taken in this area.

It is essential to strengthen the humanitarian response in the country and to ensure full, safe and unhindered access for the delivery of aid as the situation continues to deteriorate in border regions due to the crisis in the Sudan and the influx of refugees. France has supported the work of humanitarian organizations in the

Central African Republic in the amount of more than €10 million this year, in conjunction with its response to the crisis in the Sudan and neighbouring countries.

On the political front, we take note of the new date of 24 October 2024 that was scheduled for the holding of local elections. We urge the authorities of the Central African Republic to guarantee that all citizens are able to exercise their civil and political rights and to create as of now conditions conducive to the holding of free, transparent and inclusive local elections. Those elections will also be an opportunity to strengthen the ownership and decentralization of the peace process.

France will soon request the members of the Security Council to renew MINUSCA's mandate for another year, as recommended by the Secretary-General. The preparatory work for it has been carried out in very close consultation with the authorities of the Central African Republic. We are counting on the support of all members of the Council for that objective, which is essential for the stability of the Central African Republic.

Mr. Afonso (Mozambique): I have the honour to make this statement on behalf of the three African members of the Security Council (A3).

We would like to thank Ms. Valentine Rugwabiza, Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA), for her important briefing and perspective on the situation in the Central African Republic and the activities of the Mission. We welcome the participation in this meeting of Ms. Sylvie Valérie Baipo Temon, Minister for Foreign Affairs, Francophonie and Central Africans Abroad of the Central African Republic. We acknowledge the presence in the Chamber of the representative of Angola.

The Central African Republic faces multidimensional challenges, for which our support in restoring peace and security throughout the country is essential.

On the political front, the A3 notes the holding of the constitutional referendum on 30 July and the official establishment of the seventh Central African Republic. We welcome the Government's mobilization to organize the first local elections in more than 20 years, with the first round scheduled to be held in October 2024. We encourage the international community to support the Central African Republic in organizing those elections.

The effective holding of local elections within the agreed time frame is eagerly awaited by the people of the Central African Republic, who aspire to lasting peace and to free, fair and credible elections. 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 society, especially women and young people.

We are encouraged by the holding in Bangui on 23 October of the second strategic review of the political process of mutualization of the Luanda joint road map and the Political Agreement for Peace and Reconciliation in the Central African Republic. In that connection, we welcome the efforts to increase women's representation on local peace and reconciliation committees.

The A3 welcomes President Touadera's activism in strengthening subregional cooperation and improving the security of the Central African Republic's borders. We echo the communiqué of 13 June of the African Union Peace and Security Council on the situation in the Central African Republic, and we welcome the continued commitment to the Central African Republic on the part of the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region and the Economic Community of Central African States.

On the security front, we note that civilians are subjected to a continuous cycle of violence perpetrated by armed groups, which we condemn in the strongest terms. We also condemn the repeated attacks by armed groups against humanitarian actors, MINUSCA and the Central African armed forces, which are committed to securing and restoring peace in the Central African Republic. We express our deepest condolences to all the families of those who have lost their lives in the line of duty in the Central African Republic. The perpetrators of those heinous crimes must be prosecuted.

In addition to the Central African Republic's internal security challenges, such as cross-border insecurity, the illicit trafficking in natural resources and small arms and light weapons, and the increasing use of explosive devices and complex weapons by armed groups, there is now a regional dimension as a result of the crisis in the Sudan, which has undoubtedly exacerbated the volatility of the security situation in the Central African Republic. The movement of Sudanese refugees into the Central African Republic has unfortunately been accompanied by an uncontrolled flow of small arms and light weapons, with serious risks for the security and

stability of all the neighbouring countries. We reiterate that it is crucial to coordinate a security response at the regional level, through the organization of joint military operations, in order to effectively annihilate the capacity of armed groups operating in the Central African Republic's border zones.

We welcome the dissolution of several armed groups that are signatories to the peace agreement in the Central African Republic, and we call on all other armed groups to immediately and unconditionally join the peace and reconciliation process, cease hostilities and fully comply with the disarmament, demobilization, reintegration and repatriation programme.

We encourage the Central African authorities to continue strengthening the operational capabilities of the Central African armed forces in order to respond effectively to the new security challenges posed by the continuing increase in asymmetric threats. To that end, we welcome MINUSCA's training and capacity-building initiatives for defence and security forces in the fields of mine clearance, logistics and human rights. The Central African forces must be able, in the long term, to exercise their sovereign mission of securing the territory. In that respect, we invite international partners to mobilize and provide technical and financial support to the country in its quest for peace. Securing the Central African Republic and its population requires ending the continued predation of its natural resources by armed groups, establishing mechanisms for the traceability and certification of minerals and strengthening cross-border security.

There can be no peace without justice, and the A3 is encouraged by MINUSCA's support for building the capacity of the Ministry of Justice, the national courts, the Special Criminal Court and the penitentiary system to strengthen the fight against impunity. We welcome the Central African Republic's adoption on 26 August of a national human rights policy with the objective of contributing to the effectiveness of international and national instruments' guarantees of human rights.

On the humanitarian front, the influx of refugees from the Sudan, the surge in violence against civilians by armed groups and the effects of climate change, which are exacerbating community tensions, are having a disastrous impact on the humanitarian situation in the Central African Republic. We note that 3.4 million people, or 56 per cent of the population, are in need of food assistance and protection. It is therefore imperative to have a coordinated humanitarian response and

adequate funding for humanitarian response plans in all the countries in the region that are affected by the Sudanese crisis. In this volatile environment, we call for the unhindered movement of humanitarian workers and salute their continued commitment despite the very high security risks.

In conclusion, the A3 reiterates its strong support to MINUSCA. We highly commend the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Ms. Rugwabiza, for her remarkable and invaluable 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 their country's independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity.

Mr. Wood (United States of America): I thank Special Representative of the Secretary-General Rugwabiza for her comprehensive briefing. I also welcome the Foreign Minister of the Central African Republic to today's meeting.

I would like to emphasize that the report by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General 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 — MINUSCA's contributions to peace and security, the need for free and fair local elections and the importance of a political solution to ending the country's conflict.

First, I want to convey my deep appreciation to MINUSCA, its leadership and troop- and police-contributing countries for their sacrifices and commitment to promoting peace in the Central African Republic. We mourn the tragic loss of life and injuries sustained by Moroccan peacekeepers, on 2 October, and a Tanzanian peacekeeper, on 8 October, following road accidents. Those unfortunate events highlight some of the challenges that MINUSCA's peacekeepers face as they seek to adopt the posture needed to provide the robust protection of civilians. We reiterate the importance of properly equipping the Mission to manoeuvre in this environment and fully implement its mandate.

However, despite the difficult operating environment, MINUSCA has made contributions to

peace and security over the past year in partnership with the Central African Republic Government and civil society. We commend the enhanced cooperation between the Mission and the Central African armed forces, as well as the efforts to support a more proactive force through the closure of 14 temporary operating bases. The joint operations and enhanced mobility of Mission personnel are an important way to empower the country's security forces to provide for the Central African people and support a durable and responsible restoration of State authority. We also appreciate MINUSCA's work to mitigate the threat of explosive ordnance through its risk-reduction sessions for more than 5,000 civilians and its capacity-building for national forces, as well as the Central African Republic Government's decision to create a national authority to address that threat.

This leads me to my second point. The Central African Republic's partners, including MINUSCA, have a critical role to play in supporting the local elections scheduled for October 2024. It has been far too long since Central Africans have been able to elect local leaders. These elections are a critical component of decentralization and should be conducted in a transparent, timely and inclusive manner. To that end, we stress the importance of the full, equal and meaningful participation of women and young people at all levels in political dialogue and throughout the elections process.

Finally, combating armed groups that refuse to engage in the peace process is important, but military solutions alone will not stop the cycle of violence. We echo the Secretary-General's call on the Government of the Central African Republic to resume a dialogue with the political opposition and armed groups within the framework of the peace process, and for the opposition to engage constructively.

Not all of the Central African Republic's partners are invested in promoting a lasting peace, however. It is well documented that Kremlin-backed Wagner Group forces are engaging in the illicit extraction of the mineral wealth of the Central African Republic without contributing to the country's development. The Wagner Group's operations, which at times are conducted alongside Central African forces outside the Government's formal chain of command, effectively drive armed groups away from the peace process, undermine disarmament, demobilization and reintegration efforts through parallel but inconsistent

processes and threaten local and regional efforts to stabilize the country. We call on all actors to choose the path of peace. The Central African people deserve a political solution that will unlock the country's potential. The United States remains a steadfast partner of the Central African people, and we look forward to further supporting MINUSCA's work in next month's mandate renewal.

Mrs. Frazier (Malta): I too thank Special Representative of the Secretary-General Rugwabiza for her comprehensive briefing and welcome the presence at today's meeting of the Central African Republic's Foreign Minister and the representative of Angola.

We would first like to address the humanitarian situation in the country. The Central African Republic is grappling with significant challenges, including a dire socioeconomic crisis, escalating commodity prices, internal displacement and mounting difficulties for humanitarian workers in accessing certain areas, partly due to an increased use of explosive devices. With the situation being further compounded by a substantial influx of returnees and refugees from the Sudan and Chad, the risks of further destabilizing effects become real. We welcome the decision of the Central African Republic's authorities to acknowledge the refugee status of the Sudanese entering the country, and we commend their endeavours to safeguard and assist the most vulnerable. We reiterate our call for all parties to adopt and swiftly implement actions to end and prevent grave violations against children.

Turning to political and security matters, we have taken note of the promulgation of the new Constitution and the accompanying tense political climate that marked the referendum process. We strongly encourage a renewed focus on the peace process, which should include efforts to address the deep grievances within the country, encompassing political and socioeconomic exclusion and State investment in essential services and the rule of law. We commend the progress that has been made in increasing women's participation in the local peace and reconciliation committees and addressing obstacles to their political participation and to inclusive elections.

Malta unequivocally condemns violence by all armed groups. We are concerned that the *Retour, réclamation et réhabilitation* stands out as a primary perpetrator of conflict-related sexual violence, violations of the right to physical integrity and abductions, and that the *Unité pour la paix* is predominantly responsible for cases

of summary executions, killings, abductions and the deprivation of liberty. In addressing those challenges, the Political Agreement for Peace and Reconciliation in the Central African Republic remains central to enduring stabilization in the country. Significant investment in the disarmament, demobilization, repatriation and reintegration process also provides a credible alternative to conflict and violence. The use of proxies from both the authorities and the Wagner Group will not serve that cause. We believe in the crucial role of political dialogue, open and secure civic spaces and confidence-building measures towards facilitating meaningful and representative local elections in the country.

We are at a timely juncture, as the Council will soon embark on negotiations for the renewal of the mandate of the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA). We commend the efforts of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General and the Blue Helmets on the improved relations with the authorities. While we still observe incidents in status-of-forces violations, we welcome the designation of focal points within all armed bodies of the State to facilitate smoother communication and isolate such cases.

We also commend MINUSCA for interpreting its mandate in a manner that recognizes the importance of extending State authority, as that can have a positive impact on all other priorities. We consider that to be a natural progression that should continue in harmony with the other mandated tasks of the Mission, all of which we believe contribute holistically to peacekeeping and peacemaking efforts. While we echo the Secretary-General's call for the renewal of MINUSCA in line with its current mandate and priorities, we remain confident that the annual human rights report will be issued in due time.

In conclusion, Malta recognizes the critical stabilization factor displayed by MINUSCA. We encourage the Government of the Central African Republic in progressively addressing the root causes of conflict and stress the need for its partners to remain committed to upholding human rights and international law. Together with the European Union and other partners, we are confident of such support if those milestones are prioritized by all.

Ms. Evstigneeva (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): We thank the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Ms. Valentine Rugwabiza, for her

briefing. We welcome the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Francophonie and Central Africans Abroad of the Central African Republic, Ms. Sylvie Valérie Baïpo Temon, to this meeting.

At the outset, we would like to congratulate Bangui on the successful holding of the constitutional referendum in July, which is undeniably an important step in the development of the Central African Republic and eloquently attests to the people's support for the path chosen by the country's leadership to ensure security, safeguard the country's sovereignty and promote its domestic development, based on equal and mutually beneficial cooperation with the international community.

We note with satisfaction that, with every year, the situation in the Central African Republic has continued to change for the better. With the support of the international community, represented by the United Nations and bilateral partners, including Russia, the authorities of the country have managed to overcome the most difficult phase of the fight against illegal armed groups. Government troops now control more than 85 per cent of the national territory, which is a significant achievement. The Russian instructors sent to the Central African Republic in response to the request by the Government of the country have made a significant contribution to that end. We are aware of the efforts of Western countries, including the United States, who send representatives to African countries. Their only demand is to stop cooperating with Russia. The public campaign to spread disinformation and misinformation continues unabated. We interpret such actions by Western countries as an acknowledgement of the effectiveness of our assistance, given the fact that it is provided on an equal and respectful basis, with full respect for the sovereignty of African States. However, the most important proof of this lies in the trust that African countries place in us, despite the pressure being exerted on them, as well as the goodwill we have created within the general population of those countries.

Security threats in the Central African Republic have not been definitively eradicated, and work continues. At the moment, however, that mainly concerns areas bordering neighbouring States. We welcome Bangui's efforts to strengthen coordination and targeted cooperation with countries of the region. We call for support for the people of the Central African Republic in their efforts to ensure border security in order to prevent the cross-border movements of illegal

armed groups and their weapons supply. Earmarked funding and expert assistance are important in that regard. We call on the militants who have not laid down their arms to give up violent means and engage in good-faith dialogue with Bangui, since there is no alternative to a political and diplomatic settlement in the Central African Republic. We welcome the commitment of the leadership of the Central African Republic to the further implementation of the Political Agreement for Peace and Reconciliation in the Central African Republic and the Luanda road map. We are convinced that the agreements reached are key to ensuring stability and security in the Central African Republic.

We note the practical steps taken by Bangui to continue the political process. Thanks to the consistent work in that area, to date, 9 of the 14 signatory groups to the Political Agreement have voluntarily disbanded. We also welcome the significant results in the implementation of the disarmament, demobilization and social reintegration programme for combatants. Within the framework of the programme, approximately 4,500 former combatants who fought against the national army have laid down their weapons and have embarked on the path to the peaceful return to civilian life. That progress, together with the voluntary disbandment of most of the signatory groups to the Political Agreement, is highly commendable. It is important to build on the results and continue further efforts. We call for the continuation of adequate international financial support for Bangui.

The unique operation, supported by the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA), to repatriate 127 former Lord's Resistance Army fighters to Uganda should be commended. We also welcome the efforts of the authorities of the Central African Republic to establish a State presence, strengthen administrative structures, continue security sector reform, develop the judiciary and prepare for local elections. It is important to continue humanitarian and development assistance to Bangui so as not to jeopardize the achievements of recent years. Aid should not be politicized, as civilians are the ones who suffer the most, especially now that the humanitarian needs of the Central African Republic have been further exacerbated by developments in the neighbouring Sudan and growing instability in parts of Chad. According to estimates by the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, the number of refugees from those countries, among them many from the Central African Republic wanting to return

home, has surpassed 56,000. The situation seriously increases the burden on the country's State budget. In that regard, in addition to stopping the politicization and instrumentalization of external assistance, it is also necessary to fully fund the United Nations humanitarian appeal for the Central African Republic.

Further progress on the issue of ensuring the country's full participation in the Kimberley Process is also important for strengthening Bangui's capacity in terms of an effective humanitarian response and, in general, improving the socioeconomic situation in the Central African Republic. We call for the settlement of all related issues of a technical nature. We are convinced that a long-term settlement and progressive progress towards stabilization will not be possible without effective support for the Central African Republic in increasing the combat effectiveness of the national armed forces and law enforcement units. The current sanctions restrictions on the Central African Republic, despite having been eased, hamper Bangui's ability to restore order in the country. We are determined to seek their complete lifting.

In general, we support the work of the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic. MINUSCA is an important contributor to security and plays a key role in the efforts to counter armed groups and protect civilians. We thank the personnel deployed by troop-contributing countries for their commitment to carrying out their duty, which often involves risking their lives. We are convinced that the full implementation of the peacekeepers' mandate will be possible only if a mutual understanding is maintained with the authorities of the host country. We commend the work of Special Representative Rugwabiza, who has established close contacts with Bangui.

Russia will continue to provide the Central African Republic with all the necessary support, both as a permanent member of the Security Council and on a bilateral basis. We sympathize with the citizens of the Central African Republic in their desire to return to a normal, peaceful life in their country, and we have no doubt that their aspirations will be fulfilled.

Mr. Kariuki (United Kingdom): Let me thank Special Representative Rugwabiza for her briefing. I also welcome the participation in this meeting of the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Francophonie and Central Africans Abroad of the Central African Republic,

Ms. Sylvie Valérie Baipo Temon, and the representative of Angola.

Let me first emphasize our continued appreciation for the peacekeepers of the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA), as they seek to fulfil their mandate in challenging circumstances. The Mission's improved cooperation with the authorities of the Central African Republic highlights the importance of effective leadership in pursuing efforts to stabilize the country after decades of conflict.

The United Kingdom welcomes the positive progress outlined by the Secretary-General in the latest report (S/2023/769), including the improved border management policy, the greater inclusion of women in political processes and the achievement of milestones in disarmament, demobilization, repatriation and reintegration operations. Now is the time to build on those achievements on the path to peace and stability.

First, the authorities of the Central African Republic must deconflict their security partners, ensure that they abide by international law and end impunity for any human rights violations they commit. The Wagner Group's systematic human rights abuses and spread of misinformation and disinformation are not the solution to the multifaceted challenges in the Central African Republic. They serve only to strengthen the narrative of armed groups.

Secondly, all parties in the Central African Republic must recommit to the Political Agreement for Peace and Reconciliation in the Central African Republic to ensure that a long-term solution to the conflict can be realized. We call on the Government to redouble its efforts to facilitate inclusive dialogue and implement the joint road map with all political actors and armed groups. MINUSCA's role in providing good offices and supporting the peace process continues to be crucial.

Thirdly, conducting local elections remains important for extending democratic local governance and fulfilling the decentralization required for sustainable peace. With the support of MINUSCA, the authorities of the Central African Republic must fulfil their commitment to holding local elections in 2024.

In conclusion, we urge the Council to renew MINUSCA's mandate with the provisions necessary to allow the Mission to further increase its effectiveness. The United Kingdom fully supports MINUSCA in supporting the extension of State authority through joint

operations with the Central African Republic military, enabling access to basic services, improving mission capacity, supporting local elections and promoting human rights.

Ms. Dautllari (Albania): I would like to thank Special Representative Rugwabiza for her briefing and take this opportunity to express Albania's appreciation for her leadership and the contribution of the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA) to a safer country. We also welcome to today's meeting the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Francophonie and Central Africans Abroad of the Central African Republic, Ms. Sylvie Valérie Baipo Temon, and the representative of Angola.

The situation in the Central African Republic is very complex, and the country has been plagued by instability and humanitarian crises for far too long. In order to understand the political landscape, we need to consider the roots of the crisis, including the long-standing intercommunal tensions, the competition for resources and the weak governance. It is important to note the public pledge to seek political solutions through the implementation of the Political Agreement for Peace and Reconciliation in the Central African Republic, with an emphasis on decentralizing the peace process.

The relaunch of preparations for the 2024 local elections is an important starting point, and we urge the inclusion of women and young people in the political processes. However, considering the deep divisions resulting from the July referendum, the efforts to revise the electoral code to align it with the new constitutional provisions must include tangible confidence-building measures in order to increase trust and transparency in the process.

As we know, civilians have borne the brunt of the crisis — from the enduring violence, the displacement and the lack of access to basic services to the sexual violence and abuse against women.

On a positive note, Albania welcomes the improved cooperation between MINUSCA and the national authorities. The unhindered implementation of the status-of-forces agreement is a substantial element in the successful implementation of MINUSCA's robust mandate, the annual extension of which we support, as suggested by the Secretary-General.

We also acknowledge the brave efforts of humanitarian partners, especially now as they

welcome more refugees from Chad and the Sudan. However, we are deeply concerned by the impact of explosive ordnance threats on humanitarian actors and peacekeepers.

The situation has hindered the Government's ability to enforce its authority, ensure security and deliver essential services for its people. The people of the Central African Republic deserve institutions that guarantee respect for human rights, the application of the rule of law and the meaningful participation of civil society. That would be the best means to restore State authority throughout the whole country.

We join the Secretary-General in welcoming the gradual progress we have seen with regard to tackling human rights violations and violations of international humanitarian law, including the validation of the national human rights policy. In contrast to the efforts for comprehensive solutions, we warn against the appeal of easy and fast promises coming from mercenary groups such as the Wagner Group, which are motivated by financial gains and have little incentive to support political resolutions. Their activities have led to documented human rights abuses and killings. The climate of impunity erodes trust in the country's ability to take care of its nationals.

Let me conclude by highlighting that, while the road ahead is challenging, with the commitment of all parties involved — including MINUSCA — there can be hope for a better future.

Ms. Harqoos (United Arab Emirates) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I thank Special Representative Rugwabiza for her informative briefing on the most recent developments in the Central African Republic. We also welcome the participation in this meeting of the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Francophonie and Central Africans Abroad of the Central African Republic, Ms. Sylvie Valérie Baipo Temon, and the representative of the Republic of Angola.

In the light of the recent developments in the Central African Republic and the activities of the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA), I will touch on the following three points.

First, the protection of civilians must remain at the forefront of any security responses. The reporting period witnessed the continued activities of armed groups, which inflict harm on civilians across the Central African Republic, especially in the country's

eastern regions. In addition, the increased use of explosive ordnance continued to take a heavy toll on communities and to hinder efforts to protect civilians.

The statistics on the overall impact on civilians of the security situation are shocking. Between 2021 and 2023, conflict-related sexual violence cases alone more than doubled as compared to the previous reporting period, while the number of grave violations against children almost tripled. Breaking the cycle of recurrent violence requires an urgent and comprehensive approach that focuses on preventing the further escalation of violence and addressing the root causes of the conflict.

We emphasize the crucial role played by MINUSCA, especially with regard to the protection of civilians, working closely with the Government of the Central African Republic to address security threats. We also appreciate the sacrifices of the Mission's forces in a difficult environment. In that regard, we look forward to engaging constructively in the upcoming negotiations on the Mission's mandate.

Secondly, it is important to prioritize inclusive dialogue through the implementation of the Political Agreement for Peace and Reconciliation and the joint road map for peace. Dialogue remains key to making progress towards national reconciliation and finding peaceful solutions to intercommunal tensions. Special attention must also be paid to the grave repercussions of hate speech and incitement to violence. That is particularly important as the country gets ready to hold elections next year.

We also stress the importance of continued regional support for peace efforts in the Central African Republic, including support from the African Union, the Economic Community of Central African States and the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region. Furthermore, the engagement between the Government and neighbouring States to jointly address security concerns related to border security is an important step in maintaining the security of all States.

Thirdly, special attention must be paid to the country's dire humanitarian situation, with more than half of the population requiring humanitarian assistance while the country faces a sharp rise in fuel and basic commodity prices, exacerbating the difficult economic conditions. That is taking place at a time when nearly half a million people are internally displaced and refugees from neighbouring countries are also being hosted. In that context, I would like to emphasize the importance

of ensuring that humanitarian assistance reaches those in need. We thank MINUSCA for its tireless efforts to facilitate access to humanitarian deliveries, secure sites for the displaced and refugees and help to build humanitarian infrastructure. We urge all relevant parties to facilitate the lifesaving work of humanitarian organizations and stress the importance of protecting humanitarian workers and United Nations personnel, in accordance with international humanitarian law.

To that end, it is necessary to work on improving humanitarian conditions through a comprehensive approach that addresses social and economic challenges and promotes the resilience of communities.

In conclusion, the United Arab Emirates supports all efforts that seek to establish stability in the Central African Republic and stands in solidarity with its people in their quest for peace and prosperity.

Mrs. Shino (Japan): I would like to express my gratitude to Special Representative of the Secretary-General Rugwabiza for her briefing. I welcome the presence of Her Excellency Foreign Minister Baipo Temon of the Central African Republic and the representative of Angola.

Let me begin by expressing sincere appreciation to all peacekeepers of the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA) for their contributions and extending our condolences for the loss of its members.

The Central African Republic is now at a critical juncture in its State-building efforts following the referendum on the new Constitution. To bring the country back to the path towards sustainable peace and development, full implementation of the 2019 Political Agreement for Peace and Reconciliation in the Central African Republic remains the highest priority. The promotion of political and socioeconomic reintegration, especially in local areas, is key to reducing any recurrence of armed violence and improving the plight of people on the ground.

We continue to apprehend the human rights violations and abuses committed by armed groups, State agents and other security personnel, who were mentioned in the recent report of the Secretary-General (S/2023/769) as being allegedly responsible. The reported increase in conflict-related sexual violence and grave violations against children is alarming and must stop.

Today I would like to highlight the following three points.

The first point is the primacy of achieving a political solution through inclusive dialogue. We are encouraged by the continuous efforts of the Government of the Central African Republic, including the follow-up meeting of the Political Agreement for Peace and Reconciliation in the Central African Republic recently organized by President Touadera, to engage with armed groups in the disarmament, demobilization, reintegration and repatriation process. That process is time-consuming and requires trust building among various stakeholders, as well as local support. To that point, we welcome the decentralization efforts by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General in supporting local mechanisms to revitalize conflict prevention, mediation and the return of armed groups to the peace process. Such ground-level engagement will help to expand State authority in remote areas.

Secondly, regional cooperation is essential for sustainable stability in the Central African Republic and the neighbouring countries. The maps in the annexes of the report of the Secretary-General clearly illustrate the presence of grave concentrations of armed group activities and illicit flows of weapons. We commend the efforts of the Government of the Central African Republic to develop more effective long-term border management systems with MINUSCA's support. The State's presence and the rule of law on both sides of the country's borders are a prerequisite to overcoming the challenges caused by porous borders. We welcome the close engagement by the Central African Republic authority with neighbouring countries.

The influx of refugees is another cause of instability in the border areas. Displaced people from Chad and the Sudan are facing a human security crisis, despite the commendable efforts of the Government of the Central African Republic to host them in its communities. It has compounded the already dire humanitarian situation within the Central African Republic itself and requires further assistance from the international community. In that respect, Japan is continuing to provide food assistance in partnership with the World Food Programme to alleviate human suffering.

Finally, advancing democratic processes throughout the country is essential to strengthen central and local governance. The suspended preparations for the local elections have resumed with specific targeted voting dates. Any election process should be fair, open,

inclusive and credible so that people can exercise their political rights freely, which over the long term will help to heal any divisions in the country.

We will actively engage in the upcoming discussion on the extension of the current mandate of MINUSCA.

Mr. Pérez Loose (Ecuador) (*spoke in Spanish*): I thank the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Ms. Valentine Rugwabiza, for her briefing and welcome Sylvie Valérie Baipo Temon, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Central African Republic. I recognize the presence of the representative of Angola in the Chamber.

I would also like to express our condolences for the death of the three Blue Helmets.

The conditions of insecurity in the Central African Republic remain complex owing to clashes among armed groups and attacks on the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA). There also continue to be challenges with regard to the peace process and unresolved challenges in the area of human rights.

Ecuador believes that ensuring control over the territory is central to strengthening the rule of law, institutions and security. The efforts undertaken by MINUSCA in that area undoubtedly are helping State forces to reach the most remote areas and to prevent an increase in the activities of armed groups. The five-year action plan to implement its national border management policy offers a solution to the corridors that facilitate organized crime and threaten the wealth of natural resources.

The implementation of the Political Agreement for Peace and Reconciliation in the Central African Republic progresses when the mechanisms created for that purpose are activated and revitalize the architecture of the Political Agreement. In that connection, we highlight the implementation of the monitoring mechanism of the prefectures.

The results are also reflected in the disarmament and demobilization of combatants, which, according to the figures gathered since 2022, exceeds 1,000 people, which includes women and takes into account the repatriation of former combatants.

The participation of women in the peace process remains an end in itself. While we recognize the increase in women's valuable participation to what

is now 35 per cent, we encourage further efforts to promote their inclusion. We also hope to see greater participation and inclusion of young people.

There is no doubt that municipal and regional elections contribute to decentralization, which is necessary to bolster State presence. The mobilization of funds is critical to ensure compliance with the electoral timetable. Coordination between the Government and MINUSCA is also essential to ensure the security of the process.

Ecuador condemns the increasing use of explosive devices, which jeopardize not only security operations but also humanitarian access. My delegation is particularly concerned that 56 per cent of the population of the Central African Republic is in need of humanitarian assistance and even more so that the percentage is increasing due to the flow of refugees from the Sudan and Chad. Given the circumstances, international support cannot waver.

The Secretary-General's report (S/2023/769) details the increase in sexual violence and abuse compared to the previous period, which is alarming, as is the increase in violence against children. We therefore call for the consolidation of policies to eradicate recruitment and to address this problem in accordance with international standards for the prevention and protection of children's rights.

Combating impunity is central to ending the cycle of violence and promoting reconciliation. In this area, we note progress in the work of the Special Criminal Court, which prosecutes war crimes and crimes against humanity. MINUSCA must continue to implement the necessary measures to combat and eliminate misconduct by its personnel or affiliates, such as acts of sexual exploitation and abuse, as well as to prevent such acts.

Finally, Ecuador supports the work of MINUSCA and its active cooperation with the Government of the Central African Republic. We urge the continuation of dialogue and the facilitation of peace operations so as to improve their results for the benefit of the population.

Mr. Hauri (Switzerland) (*spoke in French*): I would like to thank the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for her briefing, and I welcome the participation of the Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Central African Republic and the representative of Angola in today's meeting.

In this period of reflection on the renewal of the mandate of the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA), Switzerland would like to reiterate its full support for the Mission's work. We believe that MINUSCA's mandate remains fully relevant. While the protection of civilians must remain the Mission's main priority, its role in supporting the peace process, promoting human rights and supporting the extension of State authority also remain key.

Switzerland has taken note of the adoption of the new Constitution and the postponement of local elections until 2024. A free, transparent and, above all, inclusive process is necessary to ensure credible elections. Switzerland will continue its cooperation with the authorities of the Central African Republic, MINUSCA and all partners involved in advancing the peace and reconciliation process in the country.

In that context, I would like to raise three points.

First, the Political Agreement for Peace and Reconciliation in the Central African Republic remains central to peacebuilding in the Central African Republic. The practical implementation of this agreement, more than four years after it was signed, remains a real challenge. We hope that the second strategic review of the Luanda joint road map for peace and the Political Agreement, held in the Central African Republic on 23 October, will revitalize those efforts. As mentioned in the meeting's final communiqué, the decentralization of the peace process must be accelerated. We welcome the Government's initiatives to deploy the State's administrative and security authorities outside Bangui. Strengthened State authority must go hand in hand with good local governance.

Secondly, despite improvements in some parts of the country, the security and humanitarian situation remains fragile. Attacks by armed groups and violence in the Sudan and Chad have affected the Central African Republic in recent months. More than 50,000 refugees and returnees from neighbouring countries have entered the country. In addition, unexploded ordnance and the use of improvised explosive devices by certain armed groups, particularly in the north-west, are further reducing humanitarian space and pose a threat to civilians. We call on all parties to the conflict to respect international humanitarian law and to allow and facilitate rapid and unhindered humanitarian access to civilians in need.

Thirdly, respect for human rights and the fight against impunity are fundamental to achieving lasting peace. We welcome the recent adoption of the national human rights policy by the authorities of the Central African Republic. The policy provides a basis for preventing human rights violations. Switzerland also believes that it is essential to maintain a democratic and peaceful dialogue between the authorities, the opposition and civil society. For such dialogue to be constructive, it is necessary to guarantee civic space, combat hate speech and respect civic and political rights.

In the fight against impunity, we welcome the progress made in the Central African Republic, both by the ordinary justice system and by the Special Criminal Court, which recently handed down its first appeal judgment. Switzerland will continue to support those efforts by seconding two judges to the Court. In order to advance reconciliation efforts, we encourage the Central African Republic to redouble its efforts to operationalize the Truth, Justice, Reparation and Reconciliation Commission.

MINUSCA continues to play a key role in the consolidation of lasting peace in the country. As a member of the Council, we fully recognize our shared responsibility to show unity in our deliberations, especially when it comes to the renewal of the mandate. Switzerland stands ready to work with all members of the Council and to pursue a sustained constructive dialogue with the authorities of the Central African Republic.

Mr. Dai Bing (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): I thank Special Representative Rugwabiza for her briefing, and welcome Ms. Baipo Temon, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Central African Republic, and the representative of Angola to today's meeting.

In recent times, the Central African Republic has continued to make progress in its peace process. China is pleased to see that the Central African Republic has achieved significant results in areas such as disarmament, demobilization and reintegration, security sector reform and local peace and reconciliation. Out of the 14 armed groups that are signatories to the Political Agreement for Peace and Reconciliation in the Central African Republic, nine have declared their dissolution.

Recently, the Central African Government and subregional organizations co-hosted the second strategic review of the peace process. All parties praised the positive developments, and President Touadera pledged to continue to advance the peace process.

China welcomes that. China supports the international community and regional organizations in continuing to strengthen communication with the Government and in providing constructive support for the peace process and local elections based on the circumstances and needs on the ground.

Recently, the Central African Republic successfully completed its referendum and adopted a new Constitution. That will greatly improve national governance and promote the political peace process. The international community must respect the country's sovereignty in support of a development path that is in line with its national conditions.

The Central African Republic still faces a complex security situation. Clashes with, and attacks by anti-Government armed groups and local militias continue, threatening local stability, leading to massive civilian casualties and displacement and seriously disrupting humanitarian relief and the work of the United Nations. The international community should support the Government of the Central African Republic in its efforts to maintain security and protect civilians. The United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA) should provide more support for reforming the security sector, building the capacity of the armed forces and extending State authority in the Central African Republic. The Security Council will be discussing MINUSCA's mandate renewal next month. China hopes that the Council will push MINUSCA to adjust and optimize its mandate in the light of the needs of the Government of the Central African Republic, focus on key tasks and contribute more to maintaining peace and stability in the country. The challenges to the security situation in the border areas between the Central African Republic, the Sudan and Chad are growing. China supports the Central African Republic in its work with neighbouring countries to strengthen border control and combat cross-border crimes and the illicit trafficking of small and light weapons so as to safeguard common security in the region.

The Central African Republic is at an important stage in its transition from peacekeeping to peacebuilding. As the Secretary-General points out in his report (S/2023/769), if the country is to address the root causes of the crisis and put an end to the cycle of violence there, it will be imperative to overcome its socioeconomic challenges and increase long-term investment in national development. The

international community should pay attention to those recommendations and increase its cooperation with the Central African Republic. In particular, it should give it more support in eradicating poverty, improving employment opportunities and developing infrastructure. MINUSCA should also play a more active role in the Central African Republic's long-term development. Its recent assistance in areas such as fixing roads and building health-care centres in many parts of the country has significantly contributed to improving livelihoods and economic development and stability. The relevant practices should be studied and promoted by United Nations peacekeeping operations.

In conclusion, China welcomed the Council's substantive adjustment in June of the arms embargo on the Central African Republic. At the same time, the Government is hoping for a complete lifting of sanctions. The Council should heed its concerns and continue to work to reduce the sanctions measures constraining the Central African Republic's defence until they are lifted entirely.

The President: I shall now make a statement in my capacity as the representative of Brazil.

I thank the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for her detailed briefing and welcome the Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Central African Republic and the delegation of Angola to this meeting. I would also like to thank the Secretary-General for his detailed report on the situation in the Central African Republic (S/2023/769) and on the activities of the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA). I commend the work of the Mission in accomplishing its complex mandate. Brazil deeply regrets the deaths of three more Blue Helmets in the Central African Republic and expresses its condolences to their families.

Despite the challenging political and security situation in the Central African Republic, MINUSCA was able to advance the fulfilment of its mandate, in particular by supporting the Government in establishing conditions conducive to the implementation of the Political Agreement for Peace and Reconciliation in the Central African Republic. The efforts made by the Central African Republic to decentralize the peace process through the implementation of community-based and local-level initiatives are encouraging. Among other factors, the success of peace agreements depends on how the people most affected by the conflict

are engaged in their implementation. In that regard, we would like to commend the increased participation of women in local peace and reconciliation committees and congratulate all responsible for the many initiatives that aim to guarantee women's full participation in the political process.

Regarding the ongoing security challenges on the ground, we remain concerned about the continued instability in some regions of the country and the number of incidents involving explosive ordnance, including improvised devices. We salute MINUSCA's work to mitigate that threat, including through education sessions and capacity-building. We are very alarmed by the information on the increasing number of human rights violations, cases of conflict-related sexual violence and grave violations against children. We call for continued efforts to halt that appalling trend and bring those accountable to justice. The humanitarian situation in the Central African Republic deserves our continued attention, with 56 per cent of the population requiring humanitarian assistance. Food insecurity is a grave concern, worsened by rising prices for goods and fuel. Yet despite those challenging factors, the Central African Republic remains a destination for people who have been forcibly displaced from the Sudan and Chad. We would like to echo the Secretary-General's praise for Central African communities in generously welcoming the people fleeing severe conditions.

We welcome initiatives such as the reactivation of MINUSCA's peacekeeping-intelligence coordination mechanism, which can provide the Mission with better early-warning capacities. We have also noted with great interest the environmentally friendly infrastructure that MINUSCA has been using, especially its increased use of renewable energy. In a time of crisis for the prevalent models of peacekeeping operations, MINUSCA has been able to support a delicate political process while also implementing innovations in its operational aspects. It deserves our full appreciation and continued support.

I now resume my functions as President of the Council.

I give the floor to the Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Central African Republic.

Ms. Baïpo Temon (Central African Republic) (*spoke in French*): I would like to begin by extending my greetings to the members of the Security Council. I am delighted to be here today and to have the opportunity

to present the security and political situation of the Central African Republic. Before I start, I would like to thank you, Mr. President, for giving me the floor and to congratulate you on your country's presidency, which you are guiding so skilfully.

The security and political situation in the Central African Republic has improved significantly. Our efforts are bearing fruit. Even if there are still challenges, particularly in the area of security, owing to the continuing harmful impact of armed groups, it should be noted that those groups are primarily focused on setting up roadblocks with unwelcome sporadic raids for the purposes of preying on people and racketeering. But in order to fully understand the current situation, we need to remember how far we have come. The Central African Republic has come a very long way — from the bloody crisis imposed in 2013 by the Séléka terrorists, who went from house to house slitting Central Africans' throats and incinerating them, to that of the Coalition des patriotes pour le changement, which plunged an already scarred population into a living hell.

My country, the Central African Republic, is rising from the ashes. This can be credited to President Touadera's commitment to sparing no effort in building a new and prosperous Central African Republic at peace with itself and the rest of the world, the Government's perseverance despite the mountain of challenges it faces and the resilience of a peace-loving people. We should add to that the success we have had in working together with the support of the Central African Republic's partners, in particular MINUSCA, with which coordination has significantly improved and has had concrete results. In that regard, allow me to pay tribute to the work of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General alongside the Government of the Central African Republic. We commend their commitment and their significant efforts. Even if there are still areas for improvement, we must recognize that we are working effectively together.

I express the gratitude of the Government and the people of the Central African Republic to subregional organizations, namely, the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS) and the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region (ICGLR), for their invaluable support and, above all, their unfailing fraternal support, which is much appreciated in these turbulent times, in which decisions taken depend on the extent of similarities or lack thereof. We are reminded of the founding values of our continental organization,

values that must be reaffirmed so as not to relive the prejudices of a bygone era, in the light of which our forefathers rightly saw the need for unity and solidarity. Following in the footsteps of Barthélémy Boganda, the founding father of the Central African Republic, he warned that only large groups survive and that our independence, attained in a piecemeal manner, would render us vulnerable.

I would also like to commend the guarantors and facilitators of the peace agreements and processes in the Central African Republic and the technical and financial partners with whom we engage tirelessly, namely, Angola, Rwanda, the African Union, the World Bank, the European Union and the United States of America, to name but a few.

I also wish to congratulate and thank the bilateral partners to which I express the Central African Republic's gratitude, namely, the Russian Federation and Rwanda, which have not hesitated to respond — and courageously at that — to our cries of distress by making a substantial contribution that has enabled us to reach the current stage.

I would also like to thank the French Republic. The turbulence of the past cannot make us forget Operation Sangaris, which managed to stem the bloodshed caused by the Séléka at the height of the crisis.

The challenges are still many, but great strides have been made, much to everyone's surprise. Our achievements include the restoration of State authority throughout most of the country, thanks to efforts to establish security under the disarmament, demobilization, reintegration and repatriation (DDRR) programme, with 4,884 ex-combatants disarmed, 1,112 integrated into the defence and security forces and 3,081 reintegrated into the socioeconomic programme, with the support of the World Bank. To that must be added the more than 1,500 dissidents in the ranks of Coalition des patriotes pour le changement fighters, who have thus significantly undermined their capacity and accelerated the DDRR programme. While that effort constituted a real challenge for the Government, the challenge was met with flying colours.

We can also mention the launch of the Local Governance and Resilient Communities project financed by the World Bank and with financial support from the Peacebuilding Fund, which will strengthen and accelerate the DDRR programme. Major reforms have also been carried out in the security sector, with

the formulation of the national defence policy and, more specifically, the articulation of the fundamental principles that should govern the defence and security forces and their strategic priorities. In addition, a border management strategy has been set out in a national policy on managing and securing borders, and the national commission on border management has been operationalized.

On the political front, the commitment to an inclusive political process continues, a "republican dialogue" was conducted in 2022 and the review of the Constitution was carried out through a referendum, the quintessential framework that upholds democratic principles and embodies the rights and duties of the citizen as expressed by the citizen. The timetable for the local electoral process was announced, which are slated to be held in October 2024.

Those achievements and instances of progress made were presented at the second strategic follow-up meeting of the harmonized political process for peace in the Central African Republic, held on 23 October in Bangui, with the participation of the Ministers for Foreign Affairs of Angola and Rwanda, as mandated by the summit of the ICGLR Heads of State; the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Central Africa and Head of the United Nations Regional Office for Central Africa; the President of the ECCAS Commission, the Executive Secretary of the ICGLR; the diplomatic corps and all the Central African Republic's technical and financial partners accredited in Central Africa. The meeting was greatly appreciated for the considerable and significant progress made.

It should be noted that those advances and results have been attained through sacrifice, foresight that has paid off and perseverance in the face of great adversity in an unfair and unjust world — a world in which discrimination is still rife and human rights are still prioritized by some to the detriment of others, or even exploited for geopolitical end; in which we think that we have to think for others; and in which we do to others what we do not wish to have done to us.

The Central African Republic is justly surprised by certain denunciations in the Secretary-General's report (S/2023/769), in particular the violations of the status-of-forces agreement, given the efforts made by the Government, which has to date recorded four such violations mentioned by MINUSCA and which nevertheless, I would like to point out, affects the sovereignty of the Central African State, particularly

the night patrols and the acts of corruption that are noted in order to be shielded from patrol.

However, the Government deplores MINUSCA's one-sided approach to interpreting and presenting the status-of-forces agreement. Noting that the Central African context has changed significantly, the Government is therefore calling for a review of the status-of-forces agreement through a working committee, which it would like to see set up before the vote to renew MINUSCA's mandate. Indeed, the discrepancy between the Central African Republic's reality and MINUSCA's current mandate must be the focus of consensual and responsible work. It is inconceivable to continue to run an operation for almost 10 years without a series of milestones, all the while knowing that the effectiveness of United Nations operations must be judged by their ability to keep the peace within a reasonable time frame. The unanimous recognition of the progress made means that we must adjust MINUSCA's mandate to the realities of the Central African Republic, in particular to meet the cross-border challenges exacerbated by the lack of infrastructure that itself is owed to the underdevelopment perpetuated by the burden of agreements signed during a period in which the transitional authorities at the time were vulnerable. Moreover, we must not forget that it has been a collegial effort since 2021, combining multilateral, bilateral and national efforts, that has enabled us to achieve the results we have achieved to date.

What is more, given that the status-of-forces agreement has come to hinder recovery efforts in the Central African Republic, it is imperative to draw up a road map now rather than tomorrow, with a view to readjusting the mandate and possibly preparing for MINUSCA's withdrawal. In addition, the abuses and violations of the status-of-forces agreement by the United Nations side have become intolerable for the Central African Republic, while at the same time representing a considerable loss of revenue in the amount of more than 150 billion CFA francs. That loss constitutes a handicap to the country's ongoing process of stabilization, recovery and development.

Consequently, the Government would like for the United Nations and MINUSCA to convey as soon as possible their willingness and availability to review, respectively, MINUSCA's mandate and the agreement linking the Central African Government to MINUSCA.

As far as hate messages and hate speech are concerned, the Government has made a successful

effort, and hate speech has declined considerably. However, we do not see reciprocity when the Central African Republic is concerned. We are pleased to note a clear reduction in hate speech in the Central African Republic, but hate speech and calls for armed destabilization are being made from the territory of a friendly country without any reaction from its authorities. The Government urges those countries to make every effort to avoid any hint of complicity.

On the subject of human rights violations, I would like to remind the Council first and foremost that reports must be drawn up with respect for human rights, that is, with objectivity and impartiality. Moreover, we need to get away from issuing redundant reports in the service of geopolitical aims, or reports or articles published in a timely manner with the aim of maintaining instability. Please note that the people of the Central African Republic have become wise to, and totally fed up with, the methods used in support of an objective that has nothing to do with helping the Central African Republic out of its precarious situation and its human misery.

One example of that is the non-governmental organization whose name I will avoid mentioning here, but which everyone can identify by the article it published yesterday on sexual violations in the Central African Republic — a subject that sells a lot of papers on the Central African Republic — and that stirs up indignation, discourages technical and financial partners and gives those entitled to it the comfort of deciding on humanitarian grounds what is right and good for the Central African Republic, instead of the people of the Central African Republic themselves. What the world needs to know — and the people of the Central African Republic in particular — in order to avoid being taken in by those tactics, which are designed to manipulate the minds of the masses and blacklist a country, is that those non-governmental organizations (NGOs) that are so quick to publish articles denouncing others are themselves perpetrators of human rights violations and are even complicit in the Central African Republic crisis due to their involvement with the enemies of peace. Members of those NGOs have been repeatedly detained for possession of weapons and for operating without Government approval — for example, without the knowledge of the Central African Republic authorities, they have prepared airfields in remote areas of the hinterland that serve as a source of supply of arms for certain rebels. Furthermore, the fact that the article was published on 25 October concerning facts

dating back to the period 2020–2021 is not irrelevant. We need to understand that the objective is to invalidate the efforts made by the Government, in particular the establishment of a strategic committee on conflict-related sexual violence under the authority of the President of the Republic himself, which demonstrates political commitment; the recent appointment of two deputy prosecutors specializing on issues of sexual violence and the protection of minors in order to allow for much faster legal proceedings; and the adoption of the law on human trafficking on 31 August 2022.

Allow me to take this opportunity to once again urge the Security Council to be consistent with regard to the resolution on renewing the embargo for one year. Indeed, a text establishing an embargo on armed groups leaves no one indifferent to the inability or unwillingness to target the sources of the supply of weapons to those terrorist criminals. I would like to think that the reports produced upon request could have the objective of classifying as terrorists the armed criminal groups that have been operating for decades in the Central African Republic, so that they would have the same status as the jihadist criminals, hunted by everyone and not legitimized by some. We must not forget that objectivity preserves the conscience of humankind.

Turning to another surprising example, how can we speak of slowness in the implementation of the peace agreements in the Central African Republic, when pragmatism would dictate that we first tackle the work to obtain the convincing results presented here, as was also done last Monday, 23 October, as part of the strategic review. That shows the extent to which there is a disconnect between the reports produced from pretty ivory towers and the reality on the ground in the Central African Republic. Furthermore, that all corresponds to a timetable that is very different from what is being carried out by the Central African Republic. It would therefore be appropriate to remind the people of the Central African Republic that its destiny and its future depends only on them — that is to say, it depends on their timetable and not on one that is imposed on us. That is why we call for the upcoming local elections not to be used as a pretext to keep the Central African Republic in a precarious situation.

The referendum process held at the national level and secured by the Central African Republic defence and security forces, with the support of bilateral partners, must be kept in mind and should serve as an

example of a process that was run smoothly despite a security situation described as volatile due to the banditry deployed by armed groups that have fallen back to the border against a complex subregional background. The Government calls for pragmatism and a qualitative, rather than quantitative, assessment if — and only if — the desired goal is really to help the Central African Republic and not to keep it in a state of endless crisis, because we all know that war is destructive for some but favourable for others.

Allow me to conclude by reiterating the gratitude of the Central African Government and people to both its multilateral and bilateral partners for all the multifaceted support that has been provided. The Central African Government pays tribute to the memory of all the lives lost as a result of the terrible conflict. In order to put an end to the cycle of human losses, I call on the Council to remain focused on the essential, namely, putting an end to the murderous actions of armed groups, so as not to disperse its energy, thereby rendering its actions irrelevant to the population. It is therefore essential for periodic and regular evaluations to be conducted by bodies that are independent of the stakeholders in order to guarantee compliance with our texts and commitments, as well as the effectiveness of the actions carried out, in order to adjust the needs to the realities on the ground.

In the framework of the renewal of MINUSCA's mandate, the expectations of the Central African Republic were explained to the penholder during the first discussions initiated two weeks ago. We expect that the expectations and needs that were expressed will be taken into account.

Given a world in turmoil that requires us to react quickly and promptly, and because every day we are moving a little further away from the pious dream of international peace that gave birth to the United Nations, specifically to the Security Council, I would like to invite the Council to make the experience of the Central African Republic a successful one, one that could be of considerable help in regaining control of a multilateralism that is losing its essential nature.

Before concluding, I would like to respond to some remarks made here by certain Member States, in the hope of providing useful information. I would like to clarify that the situation in the Central African Republic is not complex. It has been made complex deliberately through geopolitical strategies that penalize the country and its people, preying on and

coveting the country's resources. In addition, I extend an invitation to members to take the time to understand the history of the Central African Republic in order to avoid distorting it, in particular with respect to the root causes of the Central African Republic crisis, in order to better understand the Central African Republic context and to provide appropriate solutions. Moreover, I would like to urge the international community to break with geopolitically motivated disinformation and to cease its support for a political opposition that calls for armed rebellion, that is, for the blood of the Central African people. May peace finally take shape in this troubled world.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Angola.

Mr. Luemba (Angola): We would like to thank Special Representative of the Secretary-General Rugwabiza for her insightful briefing. We also welcome Ms. Sylvie Valérie Baipo Temon, Minister for Foreign Affairs, Francophonie and Central Africans Abroad of the Central African Republic.

The report of the Secretary-General (S/2023/769) underlines that the political and security landscape has positively evolved in the Central African Republic, despite the persisting security challenges that the country continues to face. I would like to recall that the Summit of Heads of State and Government of the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region held in Luanda on 16 September 2021 adopted the joint road map for peace in the Central African Republic, better known as the Luanda road map. It was in that context that the Republic of Angola, at the invitation of Mr. Faustin Archange Touadera, President of the Central African Republic, participated on 23 October in the second meeting of the strategic committee for the supervision of the political process for peace in the Central African Republic. The meeting took note of the state of implementation of the political commitments, progress and challenges in the peace process. In that regard, it is important to note the progress that has been made on the restoration of State authority throughout the country and the dissolution of nine armed groups of the

14 signatories to the Political Agreement for Peace and Reconciliation in the Central African Republic. It is also important to note that progress was made on security sector reform and on the disarmament, demobilization, reintegration and repatriation programme.

Angola congratulates the Central African Republic for the initiative and for taking ownership of the review of the political process. We stress the importance of maintaining that strategic review on a quarterly basis, at both the political and the technical levels, including an inclusive review of the political process, in order to assess progress and identify challenges in the implementation of all activities. We would like to highlight that the strategic review of the political process marked the effective harmonization of the Political Agreement for Peace and Reconciliation in the Central African Republic and the Luanda road map. As we move forward, it is essential to ensure that the decentralization of the peace process is supported by a communication plan that supports the entire process and mobilizes all levels of society towards increased ownership and upholding the peace process dynamics.

Angola welcomes and encourages the efforts being implemented by the Central African Republic, in particular with regard to the dissolution of armed groups and the implementation of political processes, which have enabled the restoration of State authority to more than 85 per cent of the Central African territory. The results are visible. Angola will therefore continue to provide support towards the full implementation of the peace process. We call on all the parties to remain engaged throughout the process. Angola will remain fully engaged and cooperate with all the relevant actors to bring the peace process to a successful conclusion.

In conclusion, I would like to congratulate the authorities of the Central African Republic on their national appropriation of the Luanda road map's activity axes and encourage the continuity of that implementation in order to restore the climate of peace and security necessary to conduct post-conflict recovery and development programmes.

The meeting rose at noon.