

To: Members of the Peacebuilding Commission, Central African Republic Configuration

Subject: Summary of the visit of the Chair of the Central African Republic Configuration, Peacebuilding Commission, to Central African Republic 4-7 March 2014

Dear Colleagues

In my capacity as Chair of the Peacebuilding Commission's Country Specific Configuration, I visited the Central African Republic from 4-7 March accompanied by Mr. Kenneth Gluck, Director and Deputy Head of the Peacebuilding Support Office (PBSO). As described in the Terms of Reference which was circulated to the members of the Configuration, the purpose of the visit was to:

1. Hold discussions, in close collaboration with BINUCA, with different stakeholders concerning peacebuilding efforts in Central African Republic.
2. Seek views from the transitional authorities and BINUCA on the priorities for PBC's engagement in the Central African Republic in light of the current political and security situation.
3. Exchange views on how best to provide political and diplomatic support for the efforts of the Transitional Authorities, BINUCA, ECCAS, MISCA, and the UNCT.

During the visit, I held extensive meetings with the Head of State of the Transition, Ms Samba Panza, the Prime Minister, M. André Nzapayeké, the Minister of Communication and Reconciliation, Ms Antoinette Montaigne, and the Minister of Defence, M. Thomas Theophile Timangoa. In addition to the Transitional Authorities, I met with the SRSG Babacar Gaye and the leadership of MISCA, and Sangaris as well as representatives of women's and youth organizations, political parties and religious leaders.

I am grateful to the Government of the Transition in CAR for their warm welcome and to General Gaye and his staff in BINUCA for their excellent facilitation of the visit as well as their frank and honest assessment of the opportunities and the obstacles of CAR's transition towards peace.

The visit was conducted at a critical time for the Central African Republic. MISCA and Sangaris have achieved dramatic decrease in the levels of violence, particularly in the capital. While there remain sporadic outbreaks of violence in the city and periodic targeting killings, there is a significant decrease in violence in Bangui since the terrible events of December. The situation is far worse in rural areas, where the levels of violence remain high and the forced displacement of the Muslim population from the south and the west of the country continues. The humanitarian situation remains dire and there is a great need for the expansion of the provision of humanitarian services, their swift delivery, and to ensure the protection of civilians.

There are however many positive developments which we should encourage and support. There is a great need for coherent international support for the country and the initial efforts of the Transitional Authorities.

It is my pleasure to share with you here the principal conclusions of my visit, which seek to highlight the main challenges facing the country's transition, as well as its Transitional Authorities in the areas of reconciliation and political dialogue, security situation, establishment of basic public services and elections. As a conclusion I note some of the priorities for the international community's engagement in the coming period for your consideration.

Reconciliation and Political Dialogue

The inter-confessional hostilities which have emerged in recent months continue to generate considerable violence and remain a key source of instability and a threat to the political future of the country. It was very painful to hear youth from different communities describe how they had been forced to flee their homes but still facing insecurity on a daily basis.

According to all of my interlocutors, reconciliation is an urgent priority. They noted as well that inter-confessional tensions are neither deep-rooted nor a long-standing part of CAR's history. Government and civil society leaders all stressed that the inter-confessional tensions are the result of the long-standing political crisis rather than its cause. As such, efforts at reconciliation will need to be designed together with comprehensive plans for an inclusive political settlement.

I was deeply impressed by the many national efforts at reconciliation. The Head of State of the Transition has personally spoken out numerous times in favour of tolerance and reconciliation and reached out to the displaced communities affected by the violence. The Transitional Authorities led a women's gathering for peace which brought together over a thousand women, both Christian and Muslim, during my visit. Religious leaders, including the Archbishop of Bangui, the President of the Islamic Council in the Central African Republic and President of the CAR's Evangelical Alliance, have collaborated closely to stop inter-communal tensions and have intervened in several cases to help avoid an escalation of tensions.

I met with the religious leaders again in New York on 13 March to further discuss the continuing challenge that the inter-communal tensions pose to the country's peace and stability as well as efforts of the configuration.

Despite these efforts, most Muslims have already fled the capital and attacks targeting this community have continued in rural areas of the west of the country. If this trend continues, this could have very negative implications for the future of the country, the possibilities for reconciliation and a durable national political settlement.

BINUCA has brought in a team of mediation and reconciliation specialists from DPA to explore options in the current situation. They are consulting closely with the Transitional Authorities, the Office of the Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide, the UN Country team and civil society in order to help design comprehensive integrated strategies for reconciliation and political dialogue. It will be urgent to provide political and financial support to these initiatives which seek to link local reconciliation efforts to broader national reconciliation and political dialogue.

The reconciliation and political dialogue efforts will have to involve the displaced and refugee population in Bangui, in the north-east of the country and in neighbouring countries. These efforts will also likely address the military groups which remain active. It is very probable that any attempts to build a durable political settlement will require encouragement and support from the neighbouring countries and regional actors.

The Challenges Facing the Transitional Authorities

The appointment of the Head of State of the Transition, Catherine Samba-Panza, was broadly welcomed by the population. The transitional government, largely comprised of technocrats, has tremendous challenges before it. The Head of State spoke strongly and passionately about the need for the Transitional Authorities to bring concrete and positive changes to the population in order to maintain its credibility. She noted that the Transitional Authorities still had been unable to pay salaries for civil servants, whose payments had already stopped four months before their appointment.

In addition to building credibility, the payment of salaries will be the first step in the Transitional Authorities' ability to re-activate many state functions which have ceased over the last year, including the provision of basic services as well as the judicial and security sectors. The payment of salaries will be important as well to provide greater liquidity in the local market and to boost domestic commerce.

BINUCA and UNDP, with funding from PBSO, have started a program to support the reactivation of police and gendarmerie in Bangui through the rehabilitation of commissariat and the provision of vehicles. Sangaris is conducting joint patrols with MISCA and the EU has also announced programs to support this sector with technical assistance and financial support.

The international community should look for urgent means of supporting the payment of salaries for the entire civil service in order to help restart essential social services and state functioning. The Transitional Authorities, for its part, will also need to make strong commitments to guarantee that international support is used effectively by ensuring the accuracy of civil service lists and their continued impartiality. The Head of State of the Transition and the Prime Minister both assured me that they are willing to put in place an international mechanism to ensure that there is no diversion of international funds provided for salaries, budgetary support or development.

The Transitional Authorities have received funds from neighbouring countries to complete the first salary payments. We should praise the States of the region for their rapid support in this area. The WB and PBF are currently planning to ensure that the state can provide salaries for 4 months, but there will be a need for further international support to guarantee that the Transitional Authorities' ability to pay salaries is maintained. I urge those partners in a position to do so to contribute to that goal.

Stabilizing the Security Situation

A large part of the security challenge facing CAR currently relate to the continued existence of non-state militias and the unclear status of the members of the Forces Armées Centrafricaines (FACA).

A part of the ex-Seleka forces are regrouped in Bangui under the protection of MISCA forces. Their presence however has continued to lead to security incidents as they face periodic attacks from anti-Balaka groups. BINUCA is currently developing plans to relocate these groups, provide necessary support and help establish better control over their weapons. This will require close cooperation with MISCA, which would be required to provide protection to the group.

The larger ex-Seleka units which have left the capital and are now thought to be in the north-east of the country, could prove to be a great threat to stability in the long-term. A political and security strategy to deal with these groups, in coordination with regional actors, will be a necessary part of a comprehensive approach to help the country avoid partition and ensure that the state can restore authority over all of the country's territory.

Equally difficult will be the decisions regarding the FACA, part of which are suspected to be involved in the violence conducted by the anti-Balaka. There is an immediate need for measures which re-establish control over the armed parts of the FACA. The longer-term ability to design effective Security Sector Reforms will require the Transitional Authorities and subsequent governments to take decisions on the future of CAR's armed forces including a determination of their status.

Many interlocutors in the government and in civil society stressed the need for the rapid deployment of a UN peacekeeping mission. It is gratifying to see that the AU and neighbouring states have also supported this plan, and that efforts are underway to expedite the deployment of such operation.

Elections

The Head of State highlighted the necessity to ensure that elections, for which the country has started to prepare, be credible and perceived as fully legitimate. She emphasised the risk that electoral results could be contested if the elections were not properly prepared and measures taken to ensure that all areas of the country and segments of the population could fully participate. Several political parties expressed their interest in very rapid elections which they saw as the only way to ensure a return to constitutional order.

I was informed during the visit that the "Agence Nationale des Elections" has been created and a space allocated to begin functioning. A recent UN technical mission has laid out the many challenges related to the conduct of elections in the coming year. A major hurdle will be the re-creation of the electoral registry in advance of the elections. Questions of voter eligibility will need to be approached with great caution by all relevant actors, mindful of the ongoing inter-communal tensions. The pre-mature or unconsidered treatment of this issue could negatively impact the transition.

Concluding remarks

The Central African Republic is at a very critical crossroads in its history. It needs and deserves our solidarity and assistance at this time. It is necessary to recognise and praise the role of ECCAS and States of the region which took the first and more difficult steps in deploying a peacekeeping force (MICOPAX) and providing financial support. The AU intervention (MISCA) which has followed has been a key factor in providing stability and safety to the capital and to the crucial Douala-Bangui corridor on which the CAR economy depends.

Even as we prepare for the deployment of a UN Peacekeeping Operation, we need to recognize that MISCA and Sangaris will meanwhile be the principal peacekeeping force on the ground. We need to ensure that they receive our full support.

The newly appointed Transitional Authorities under the Head of State Catherine Samba-Panza's direction, is a very positive development. She has shown great leadership since accepting the post. As she herself noted, the Transitional Authorities are still frail and will need extensive support so that they can ensure the resumption of state functions and lead the country towards peace and a new political consensus.

In consultation with the Transitional Authorities BINUCA and civil society, I would propose that the following areas be given priority in the coming period:

- **Restoration of Security and Protection of Civilians.**

There is a need for continued full international support for MISCA as well as the contribution of additional troops and police as we prepare for the deployment of a UN Peacekeeping Operation. We will need to ensure that there is close coordination between the different forces deployed in CAR.

The international community should convey its strong censure towards all groups engaged in attacks on civilians.

There is an urgent need to support BINUCA's efforts in the cantonment of ex-Seleka and FACA as interim stabilisation measures before full DDR and SSR can be planned.

- **Support for the Transitional Authorities**

We should encourage full diplomatic, technical and financial support to the Transitional Authorities to enhance the short-term functioning of the government for the provision of necessary services and the leadership of the restoration of peace and constitutional order. International assistance should include support for payment of salaries during the transitional period as well as technical assistance.

- **Reconciliation and Political Dialogue**

BINUCA currently has a team of UN mediation and reconciliation experts working with civil society, the Transitional Authorities, the Office of the Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide and the UN Country team to develop integrated plans for reconciliation and political dialogue. We should ensure international diplomatic, technical and financial support for these efforts.

- Ensuring Regional Coherence

Member states from the region have taken the lead in assisting CAR with the provision of peacekeeping forces and financial support, including for the payment of salaries. We should encourage these contributions and ensure that the efforts of the UN, AU, ECCAS, other sub-regional organisations and IFIs remain well integrated and complimentary, prioritising at all times the well-being and peaceful transition of the CAR.

As chair of the CAR Configuration of the Peacebuilding Commission, I plan to work closely with the members of the configuration and other concerned stakeholders in the coming months. I will seek to support the efforts of SRSB Gaye in CAR and in the region with a view to ensuring sufficient international support for CAR in this critical time, and that this support is well coordinated and coherent.

In closing I would like to reiterate my gratitude to the Transitional Authorities of the Central African Republic for receiving me in a spirit of trust and collaboration, and to SRSB Gaye and his Office for all their assistance and continued support. My appreciation goes also to Ms. Judy Cheng-Hopkins and her team in PBSO for their timely and substantive advice and support.

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