

Update on women, peace and security in Central African Republic December 7th 2016

The Informal Expert Group of the Security Council on Women, Peace and Security met on **15 June 2016** to discuss the situation in Central African Republic, with the participation of the leadership of the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Central African Republic (MINUSCA) and the United Nations Country Team. A comprehensive background note was prepared for the meeting and a record of the meeting was issued as [S/2016/672](#). The group resolved to reconvene in six months. Below is a non-exhaustive list of **relevant developments since then**.

The overall security situation has deteriorated following the successful completion of the transition and elections held in late 2015 and the first part of 2016. **Half the country is still in need of humanitarian assistance**, and yet only one-third of the humanitarian appeal has received funding. In November, the international community pledged continued financial assistance to the Central African Republic in a **donor conference in Brussels**, on the basis of a recovery and peacebuilding assessment conducted by the UN, the EU, and the World Bank. In recent months, the government has adopted national strategies on reconciliation and disarmament, demobilization, reintegration and repatriation (DDRR).

The Security Council has met four times since June 15th to discuss the situation in the Central African Republic, and adopted a resolution and a presidential statement. Women, peace and security have not featured prominently in these meetings, including in the report of the Panel of Experts that informs the Security Council sanctions committee concerning CAR. The presidential statement only mentions women as one of several constituencies that need to be taken into account in the “spirit of inclusiveness” and to condemn “targeted violence against women and children.” However, **resolution 2301 renewing MINUSCA’s mandate on July 26th contains extensive references to gender equality and women’s protection and empowerment**, including detailed instructions on addressing sexual and gender-based violence and sexual exploitation and abuse, calls for the deployment of adequate expertise on these matters and enhanced reporting from the mission, and the need for the mission to support the full and effective participation, involvement and representation of women in national reconciliation, stabilization activities, electoral processes, transitional justice, conflict resolution, local community dialogues, security sector reform, DDRR, in line with the CAR Action Plan on Women Peace and Security. Many of these provisions mirror the recommendations identified in the previous meeting of the IEG and the mission’s **strategic review** presented in June. The review also included a gender perspective in its considerations on the UN’s work on corrections, and the need to support the participation of women in local development decisions.

Since the end of 2015, the UN has provided considerable assistance for a constitutional referendum, two rounds of presidential elections, two rounds of legislative elections, and several run-offs, and yet **women’s representation in national politics has regressed since the transition**, with percentages lower than eight in the National Assembly and lower than 20 in the cabinet. In July, the Independent Expert on the situation of human rights in the Central African Republic welcomed the fact that no member of the armed groups was allocated a ministerial portfolio and the presence of several Muslims in the cabinet, but noted the inadequate representation of women in the new government.

In recent months, the government has adopted its **national strategy on DDRR** and has taken steps to define the composition of the various committees in charge of this process, with **minimal representation of women** in spite of the broad-based composition lists announced in successive decrees. In its support to pre-DDRR activities, the UN has noted that around 15 percent of participants are women, as are between 25 and 30 percent of participants in community violence reduction activities, targeting individuals not eligible for DDRR.

The National Recovery and Peacebuilding Plan adopted in October and based on the previous assessment conducted by the UN, the EU, and the World Bank, emphasizes the link between sustainable peace recovery and

gender equality and the equal access of women and girls to education, health care, decent work, and representation in political and economic decision-making processes across governance levels. The government's plan notes that sexual and gender-based violence is widespread and female genital mutilation affects about one-third of women. In rural areas, poverty rates reach 81 percent for women, compared to 69 percent for men, and the crisis increased gender inequality with regard to access to education and to the vulnerability of girls to exploitation and abuse. The plan recommends targeted interventions to enhance women's participation in reconciliation, politics and governance, and income-generation activities.

There has been little progress in the domestic **prosecution of rape** as a criminal offense –which had not been prosecuted as a crime since 1998 in the Central African Republic. **The planned Rapid Response Unit (RRU) of the police and gendarmerie on sexual and gender-based violence is currently being established.** In early October, the Ministry of Interior appointed the RRU staff (including the director and police investigators) who are currently being trained with the support of the Team of Experts on Sexual Violence in Conflict and Rule of Law (TOE) and the WPA, and the RRU building should become operational in March 2017. After some delays, the Special Criminal Court is expected to start working in the first semester of 2017. Resources will be needed to guarantee the inclusion of investigators and prosecutors with specific expertise on sexual violence in the Special Court, and for adequate outreach and measures to secure the participation of victims in the proceedings.

MINUSCA Human Rights Division is currently finalizing the report of the **human rights mapping exercise**, mandated in resolution 2301 (2016). The mapping, covering the period from January 2003 to December 2015, documents violations of international human rights and humanitarian law and includes a chapter on conflict related sexual violence and gender based violence. Most recently, a significant percentage of the verified cases of **conflict-related sexual violence** (CRSV) are cases of gang rape, and half of the identified victims in recent months are minors. MINUSCA's Human Rights Division also continues to document violence committed against mainly women and girls accused of **witchcraft**, and has documented dozens of cases this year. Women are the main victims, except in Bangui, where they tend to be children. Victims are brutally tortured and buried alive, and armed actors increasingly use these accusations to extort money from civilians.

The UN has intensified its efforts to reduce misconduct and **sexual exploitation and abuse**. These include regular risk assessment visits to the accommodation sites of uniformed personnel, targeted patrols, bimonthly induction and specialized trainings, including in relation to the conduct of investigations by immediate response teams and the national investigation officers appointed within each military contingent, outreach to communities in the vicinity of military barracks, in coordination with local authorities, religious and community leaders, young people and women's groups, and the establishment of joint prevention teams comprising mission and country team staff.

Recommendations for the Security Council

For **future resolutions on CAR**, Council members could express alarm over the lack of female representation in politics or in DDRR committees and propose stronger language and instructions on women's participation in UN-supported elections, national reconciliation, transitional justice –including protection of victims and witnesses- and DDRR and CVR, rather than as part of a long list of calls for inclusion of various groups. This should be paralleled by a strong call to the mission and troop and police-contributing countries to address the very **low representation of women in the military, police, and civilian components of the mission**, and a request for detailed information on measures undertaken to improve the mission's gender balance and implementation of women, peace and security commitments. Council Members should emphasize the need for the mission's support in the promotion of **accountability for serious crimes of sexual violence**, and call on the government and non-state armed actors to agree on and implement **structured, time-bound commitments to prevent and respond to these violations**.

Council Members should **request information from the UN** about the current capacity in the mission and the country team on gender equality and women's protection, as well as plans to implement the gender architecture reforms recommended in the 2015 high-level reviews of peace operations and women, peace and security.

Council Members should **ensure the inclusion of the necessary gender expertise in the Panel of Experts** on the Central African Republic in order to adequately report on gross human rights violations committed against women and girls.