

Update on women, peace and security in the Central African Republic November 2nd 2017

The Informal Expert Group of the Security Council on Women, Peace and Security met in June ([S/2016/672](#)) and December of 2016 ([S/2016/1105](#)) to discuss the situation in the Central African Republic, and decided to reconvene once more during 2017 to follow up and review progress and challenges. This note summarizes relevant developments on women, peace and security in the Central African Republic since then.

The Security Council

Compared to the previous year, the Security Council increased its references to women, peace and security in its decisions on the Central African Republic in 2017, but these issues were barely discussed during Council meetings and briefings. In July, a **presidential statement** (S/PRST/2017/9) deplored all acts of sexual and gender-based violence, encouraged the government to lead an inclusive political process, and called for “dedicated commitment to women’s empowerment, participation, and human rights” and for “concerted leadership, consistent information and action, and support to build women’s engagement in all levels of decision-making.” Earlier, in January, **resolution 2339** renewing the mandate of the sanctions committee and panel of experts included: stronger language on sexual exploitation and abuse; a call to ensure that perpetrators of violations of applicable international law, including those committed against women, are excluded from the CAR security and armed forces; a request to the SRSs on Children and Armed Conflict and Sexual Violence in Conflict to continue sharing relevant information with the sanctions committee; and a reiteration that individuals or entities can be sanctioned for planning, directing, or committing sexual and gender-based violence. So far, four out of twelve individuals and one out of two entities listed by the sanctions committee are accused of these acts. However, most of these are related to violence committed by the Lord’s Resistance Army, and no individual or entity accused of sexual and gender-based violence has been sanctioned this year despite multiple allegations of widespread sexual violence in reports by the UN. For example, the midterm report of the panel of experts (S/2017/639), presented in July, contains an annex with 62 reported cases of rape from January to June broken down by prefecture, provides information about sexual violence committed by an armed group during their occupation of Niem in May, and explicitly names an anti-balaka leader and his elements for kidnapping and raping 10 Muslim girls between 11 and 13 years of age on April 25th.

Gender and conflict analysis

MINUSCA conducted a **conflict analysis** in collaboration with its partners, and gender equality considerations were extensively covered, from the political marginalization of women as a root cause and their absence from decision-making structures as a limit to durable peace, to the specific risks of homelessness of women whose husbands have left them or were killed during the conflict, as often the husband’s family will reject the widow’s claim to land inheritance, and the growing number of female-headed households. Women’s organizations are identified as an important mediation actor at the community level -for example, in May 2017 a peace accord was reached between women of both factions to the conflict in Bambari- but are rarely recognized or linked up to national decision-making.

The long list of **priorities for CAR** identified in the conflict analysis included: gender-sensitive security sector, greater support for widows of the conflict, income-generation support tailored particularly to women during the DDRR process, combatting gender-based violence, conflict-related sexual violence, and harmful cultural practices that discriminate against women, including witchcraft, addressing the trauma and stigma of sexual violence survivors and the marginalization and exclusion of women, ensuring the representation of women in all State institutions, promoting and protecting women’s property rights, promoting women’s equal and full participation in inclusive dialogue for national cohesion, improving management of public finances, including gender-responsive budgeting, and creating economic and employment opportunities for women, including in non-traditional areas.

A protection crisis

The CAR is in the midst of an acute protection crisis, with more than two-thirds of the territory now controlled by armed groups, half the population in need of humanitarian assistance, and a significant increase in human rights violations reported to MINUSCA. Apart from clashes between armed groups and a rising number of attacks against humanitarians and peacekeepers, there is growing intercommunal violence along ethnic and religious lines, and UN officials have warned of a renewed risk of genocide

Conflict-related sexual violence continues to be one of the main violations reported to the UN, and the numbers are believed to be much higher because of the lack of access by service providers or judicial authorities outside of Bangui. Since the beginning of the year, MINUSCA has registered 176 cases of conflict-related sexual violence, including 141 cases of rape or attempted rape and 18 cases of forced marriage.¹ The number of reports of sexual violence against girls more than doubled in comparison with the second half of 2016. Most incidents take place during essential livelihood activities, such as farming or firewood collection, or against women suspected of engaging in trade across the sectarian divide. This month, Human Rights Watch published the most extensive documentation of sexual violence committed by Seleka and anti-Balaka fighters from 2013 to 2017, and claims that commanders of armed groups have consistently condoned sexual violence by their forces. Some have ordered it or committed it themselves, including torture and sexual slavery. Only half of the survivors they interviewed had accessed any post-rape medical care, and many said service providers did not offer them critical elements of post-rape care, including PEP, emergency contraception, and testing for HIV and other STIs. In only 66 cases had survivors received any psychosocial support, and only 12 received a medical certificate, which is a key document to seek justice. Out of 296 survivors, only 11 attempted to file a criminal complaint, and most of them said that authorities had mistreated them, demanding that survivors track down their own abusers, refusing to accept complaints, or failing to follow up their cases.

The UN published a comprehensive **mapping report** that documents 620 major incidents of human rights violations throughout 13 years of several conflicts in the CAR (2002-2015), including multiple gang-rapes of women and girls. The mapping report warns against the Special Criminal Court overlooking evidence of sexual violence, noting the urgency of prioritizing investigations into crimes of sexual violence, ensure the court has dedicated capacity on this matter, and protecting victims and witnesses in such cases. It calls for the adoption of a proactive recruitment strategy to ensure gender parity in staffing and the deployment of gender advisers to the Court to develop and implement policies and operational guidelines for gender issues and cases of sexual violence. After last year's verdict against Congolese warlord Jean-Pierre Bemba for sexual violence in CAR during the 2002-2003 crisis, the ICC has yet to charge any individuals in the investigations they opened in 2014 on Seleka and anti-Balaka fighters. The UN participated as *amicus curiae* in the reparations proceedings against Bemba, arguing for reparations to sexual violence survivors, and is supporting the relevant government ministries in the development of a **national strategy on gender-based violence**.

In the two criminal court sessions conducted in Bangui in 2015 and 2016, there were only three cases of rape, but none of the perpetrators belonged to armed groups. However, since its inauguration by the President in June 2017, the *Unité Mixte d'Intervention Rapide et de Répression des Violences Sexuelles Faites aux Femmes et aux enfants (UMIRR)* has handled 71 cases, of which 30 were submitted for prosecution. While not all cases concern conflict-related sexual violence, 18 cases were perpetrated by uniformed elements. In coordination with MINUSCA and UNDP, the Team of Experts on the Rule of Law and Sexual Violence in Conflict designed a capacity building programme for the UMIRR, and UNPOL co-located four international police officers within the unit. The UMIRR and the UN have developed a referral system and raised public awareness of this new service, in collaboration with the Mayors' Network against Sexual Violence and grassroots women's associations, which has led to an immediate increase in information sharing. This new mechanism is crucial to responding to sexual violence, particularly given the collapse of the judiciary and security sector in the country because of the conflict. However, the unit lacks resources to pay for operational costs and salaries.

¹ The victims of these cases were all female and 92 were minors. The perpetrators were identified as belonging to the following armed groups: ex-Seleka (85 cases), anti-Balaka (30 cases), Peulh (16 cases), FPDC (14 cases), and R3 (9 cases), and unaffiliated (22 cases).

Other updates: December 2016 to October 2017)

There has been notable progress on prevention and response to **sexual exploitation and abuse** by peacekeepers, resulting in a significant reduction of new allegations and better victims' assistance. However, there has been much less progress on several of the issues highlighted by the IEG last year.

For example, **recent peace talks** in Rome, hosted by the Community of Sant'Egidio, **did not include a single woman**. In spite of the adoption of a gender parity law at the end of last year, seeking 35 percent of female representation in all decision-making bodies, and the fact that the UN has provided considerable electoral assistance, **women's representation in national politics has regressed** since the transition: 10 percent of advisors in the Presidential Cabinet, 8.5 percent of deputies in Parliament, and 15 percent of ministers (5 out of 34). Women are better represented in the National Elections Authority and the Constitutional Court, both led by women, and **two women have been appointed to the Special Criminal Court** as international judges, but none among the five national magistrates and the special prosecutor. In September, the President appointed new prefects to all 16 prefectures, nine of whom have a military background, and this included 6 women out of 73 appointed sub-prefects.

The **disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration** process has a mandate to support women combatants and those associated with armed groups and a specific budget has been allocated to address conflict-related sexual violence concerns. However, women's representation in the committees is minimal -only 2 out of 36 members-, and their participation is low in pre-DDRR activities, community violence reduction programmes, and a variety of cash-for-work initiatives undertaken by the UN, ranging from 6 to 25 percent.

Attacks and killings of women and girls associated with accusations of **witchcraft** remains an issue of great concern. Over 70 percent of women in the Bimbo and Mbeki prisons are accused of witchcraft, and have been detained for months without trial.

The UN **Peacebuilding Fund** approved a new project to enhance women and girls' leadership and engagement in the national dialogue and in CAR's public life, in recognition of the critical contribution women will make in CAR's post-conflict planning, including the implementation of reconciliation and recovery activities.

While the mission has increased its efforts to support **gender-responsive security sector reform**, 23 percent of candidates for recruitment as police officers and gendarmerie officers were women.

The **representation of women in the peacekeeping mission** across all three components has not improved either, and has even declined among civilian staff, from 29 percent to 25 percent. Only 1.5 percent of the military component are women, and approximately 6 percent of the police component, both below the global average. Perhaps most worryingly, the **gender advisory capacity of MINUSCA was downgraded** in recent negotiations over its budget.

Recommendations for the Security Council

Resolution 2301 renewing MINUSCA's mandate in July 2016 contained important 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, and DDRR, in line with the CAR Action Plan on Women Peace and Security.

These references need to be maintained and are still relevant for MINUSCA's mandate going forward. In addition, a new resolution could:

- Call on Member States to support the mission and country team's capacity and expertise on gender equality and conflict-related sexual violence. For example, Council Members could request information from the UN about the current capacity in the mission and the country team on gender equality and conflict-related sexual violence, as well as the requirements needed to meet the mission's commitments to women, peace and security.

- Express alarm over the lack of women's representation in national decision-making structures and new mediation initiatives and propose stronger and explicit language and instructions to strengthen leadership and participation of women from diverse backgrounds in UN-supported elections, national reconciliation, transitional justice and DDDR and CVR, rather than as part of a long list of calls for inclusion of various groups, and specifically in the implementation and monitoring of the Libreville roadmap and African Initiative, the Framework of Mutual Accountability and the National Recovery and Peacebuilding Plan, and the Special Criminal Court and upcoming Truth, Justice, Reparation, and Reconciliation Commission.
- Call on the mission to strengthen its gender-responsive conflict analysis, ensuring the participation of women and women's organizations in such analysis, and its use to inform the mission's planning and operations.
- Include 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.
- Call on the government and the international community to issue a strong and public message directed to the Seleka and anti-Balaka leaders, committing to hold perpetrators of sexual violence accountable, without exception, and reminding them of the consequences of their actions -from ongoing national and international investigations to potential sanctions.
- 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, including the development of a comprehensive national strategy on sexual and gender-based violence.
- Request that the mission's Protection of Civilians strategy include robust measures to prevent and respond to sexual violence.
- Emphasize the importance of capacity building and training initiatives for the FACA and the internal security forces to include prevention of sexual violence, and to support the work of rule of law and transitional justice institutions on investigation and prosecution of sexual and gender-based violence, prioritizing the recruitment of female personnel and gender expertise, and establishing mechanisms for the effective participation of women's organizations.
- Call on Member States to provide sustainable support to the UMIRR and the Special Criminal Court, and ensure the formal cooperation between these two mechanisms to ensure accountability for conflict-related sexual violence.
- Call on the Sanctions Committee to impose targeted sanctions against Seleka and anti-Balaka commanders responsible for planning, directing, or committing conflict-related sexual violence, based on the reports of the Panel of Experts.