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Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. P.O. Box: 3243 Tel.: (251-11) 5513 822 Fax: (251-11) 5519 321

Email: [situationroom@africa-union.org](mailto:situationroom@africa-union.org)

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PEACE AND SECURITY COUNCIL

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ADDIS ABABA, ETHIOPIA

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**BRIEFING NOTE**

**THE SITUATION IN THE CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC**

## **BRIEFING NOTE ON THE SITUATION IN THE CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC**

### **I. BACKGROUND**

1. This Briefing Note is produced as part of the regular review of the situation in the Central African Republic (CAR) by the Peace and Security Council (PSC) of the African Union (AU). It reflects on major developments, highlighting the main events since the last meeting of the PSC, the 1116<sup>th</sup> PSC meeting held on 31 October 2022, in which among others, requested the AU Commission to gradually withdraw and close the AU Military Observation Mission in the Central African Republic (MOUACA); dispatch a multidisciplinary Mission made up of technical experts, including members of the Military Staff Committee (MSC) and human rights specialists, tasked with liquidating MOUACA and strengthening the capacity of the AU Mission in the Central African Republic (MISAC), in view of the recent developments in the country; and report back to Council.

2. The Briefing Note provides updates on the political, security, socio-economic and humanitarian situations in the CAR, as well as the implementation of the Political Agreement for Peace and Reconciliation in the CAR (PAPR-CAR) and reviews the level of implementation of the decisions of the 1116<sup>th</sup> Council meeting held on 31 October 2022.

### **II. STATUS OF THE SITUATIONS**

#### **A. Political Situation**

3. On 30 May 2023, President Faustin Touadera announced that a constitutional referendum will be held on the bill for a new Constitution for the Central African Republic (CAR), in accordance with Article 90 of the Constitution of 30 March 2016 and Article 2 of the Law of 13 January 2023 establishing procedures governing referendums in the Central African Republic. This decision comes against a background of opposition parties and groups operating under the umbrella of the Republican Bloc for the Defence of the Constitution (BRDC) are militating against the current constitutional reforms in the CAR.

4. The Parliament has passed a bill for the organization of referendums in the country in which the opposition political parties suspect that the government wants to remove presidential terms limits in order to allow President Touadera to stand again after his current two constitutional terms. Since 22 July 2022, civil society has been rejecting any idea of a constitutional referendum and has launched the Group of 16 (G-16) to push back against the referendum.

5. In September 2022, the Constitutional Court ruled that the Government's approach to drafting a new constitution for the Central African Republic was unconstitutional. However, on 20 January 2023, after examining the constitutionality of the bill in question once again, the same Constitutional Court found that all the provisions of the law were in compliance with the rules and, therefore, deemed them admissible in accordance with Articles 3 and 4 relating to the procedures for drafting the law and the holding of a referendum in the Central African Republic is consistent with the Constitution. Consequently, the Government was legally permitted to organize the referendum.

6. Other disputes have arisen concerning the process leading to the local elections in the CAR, which have been postponed from January to July and/or October 2023. The postponement did nothing to change the conditions previously given by the main opposition political parties to participate in the regional and municipal elections. They maintained that they can participate only if the National Elections Authority is reconstituted, due to doubts over its impartiality arising from its current composition. They also wanted assurances that there would be no constitutional referendum. All this

points to an exacerbation of tension, which underscores the importance of national reconciliation initiatives in the CAR as important tools for the return to peace in the country.

7. It is against these challenges that the AU Panel of the Wise undertook a mission to the Central African Republic from 5 to 11 March 2023. The mission was led by the former Chairperson of the Panel of the Wise, H.E. Mr. Domitien Ndayizeye, former President of the Republic of Burundi, who was accompanied by Professor Babacar Kanté, former Vice-President of the Constitutional Council of Senegal and Member of the Panel of the Wise. During its mission, the Panel of the Wise, held consultations with the President of the National Assembly, the Prime Minister, the former President of the Transitional Authority, Ambassadors of the African Group, the G5+, the United Nations, the President of the Constitutional Court, representatives of the opposition political parties, the ruling party, the Religious Platform, civil society organizations, youth, women's representatives as well as armed groups. The Panel of the Wise clarified the objective of its visit to the CAR, which was to establish contacts with decision-makers and other civil and political stakeholders in order to address the challenges facing the country in order to promote peace, security and stability in the country.

8. The 14<sup>th</sup> session of the PAPR-CAR's Executive Monitoring Committee (CES) was held on 24 February 2023, soon after the commemoration of the fourth anniversary of the Political Agreement on 6 February 2023. The 14<sup>th</sup> session of the CES assessed the progress and challenges encountered, as well as the outstanding issues to be addressed in implementing the PAPR-CAR. Dialogue remains a key strategy which is yielding encouraging results, including the complete disbandment in December 2022 of four (4) armed groups out of the fourteen (14) officially recognized politico-military movements. On 28 April 2023, a further five (5) armed groups were disbanded in a solemn ceremony presided over by President Faustin Archange Touadera. The overall DDDR process remains a major priority in order to sustain the progress made so as to eventually lead to the dismantling of all armed groups in CAR, the harmonization of the ranks of ex-combatants and their integration into the national army.

9. It should be noted that progress has been made in fostering the process between the Luanda joint roadmap and the PAPR in the areas of mediation, cross-border issues, DDR and joint commissions with neighbouring countries, without which the prospects for peace and stability will be in vain.

## **B. Security Situation**

10. The security situation in the Central African Republic generally remains volatile and unpredictable. The Government has been receiving support from Russian and Rwandan Forces since December 2020 within the framework of the bilateral cooperation agreement. Since the second half of January 2023, the main concerns have had to do with the fighters of the Coalition of Patriots for Change (CPC) led by ex-President François Bozize, which stepped up attacks on the positions of the Defence and Security Forces, particularly in the West, North-East and Centre-East regions of the CAR (bordering Chad, Sudan and South Sudan).

11. On 21 January 2023, the Beloko customs terminal (Western Region) was completely destroyed by fire after an attack by suspected armed men belonging to CPC. The attack on the position of the Armed Forces of the Central African Republic (FACA) in Sikikédé in Vakaga on 14 February 2023, where eighteen (18) soldiers were reportedly killed and three (3) others were wounded, has raised new concerns. In addition, twenty (20) FACA soldiers captured during the attack were released and officially handed over to the Central African Republic authorities on 5 April 2023 through mediation between the ICRC and MINUSCA.

12. On 18 March 2023, at Sam Ouandja in the VAKAGA region, the Rwandan MINUSCA forces arrested a high-ranking CPC officer, General Doumboucha, a right-hand man of Nouredine Adam (under an ICC arrest warrant), and brought him before the courts of competent jurisdiction in Bangui. On 19 March 2023, unidentified armed individuals attacked a mining site in Chimbolo, 25km east of the town of Bambari in the Ouaka region, which was being operated by Chinese nationals under the protection of the FACA. The attack left nine (9) Chinese nationals dead, and two (2) others wounded. Although no armed group has claimed responsibility for the attack, many are of the view that it was carried out by CPC fighters.

13. Since the beginning of March 2023, a new armed group called the "AZANDE ANI KPI GBE" has become increasingly active in the eastern region bordering South Sudan and the DRC. In addition to perpetrating acts of violence against the civilian population and humanitarian workers, this group frequently attacks the Police based in the area.

14. On 19 April 2023, a coalition of armed groups known as the "People's Rally for Justice and Equality in Chad (RPJET)" officially wrote to the Prefect of Vakaga (north-eastern CAR) requesting that they should be allowed to have and operate a rear base in the Central African Republic. The Government of the Central African Republic did not accede to this request. However, upon a Chadian Government request dated 15 May 2023, a joint FACA/Chadian army operation was carried out against these rebel positions based at Benerne, 46 km north of Paoua (near the border with Chad). Official reports claim that six (6) rebels were killed, while twelve (12) leaders were captured and taken back to Chad.

15. These security events negatively affect the efforts of the Government aimed at disbanding the armed groups completely. As part of the gradual integration of ex-combatants of the armed groups that have remained loyal to the PAPR-CAR, the Government has offered the following agreed quotas per each armed group: 19 in the Armed Forces, four in the National Gendarmerie and four in the National Police. The process has had no positive effect on the ground. In the North-West (bordering Cameroon and Chad) and North-East (bordering Chad and Sudan), deadly armed clashes continue to take place between the rebels of the Coalition of Patriots for Change (CPC) and the FACA. The use of improvised explosive devices in these troubled regions poses a serious threat to the free movement of people and goods, as well as to the civilian population. In this respect, the outstanding challenge is how to convince the CPC to return to the peace and reconciliation process. This situation requires the necessary support of the AU and the countries of the region.

### **C. Humanitarian Situation**

16. The humanitarian situation in the CAR, heightened by the ongoing crisis in Sudan, remains worrying with the higher population in need of humanitarian assistance, including food.

17. The humanitarian community is preparing an addendum to the 2023 Humanitarian Response Plan to suit the response to the consequences that the ongoing crisis in Sudan is having on the CAR.

18. Due to growing insecurity along the border, traffic between Sudan and the CAR has been severely disrupted, thereby leading to a sharp rise in the prices of basic necessities. Sudan exports supplies to several towns in the CAR, particularly Birao in the Vakaga Prefecture and Ndélé in the Bamingui-Bangoran Prefecture. During the rainy season, which lasts from April to October, access is very difficult and supplies depend largely on Sudan. Prices have also doubled for some products. A 50 kg bag of sugar, which sold for 40,000 CFA francs before the conflict, is now going for 80,000 CFA francs in Birao. A small bowl of millet, which used to cost 500 CFA francs, is now selling at 1,000 CFA francs.

19. The northern region of CAR was already experiencing acute food insecurity, and this situation could get extremely dire by August if an adequate response is not sought. Am-Dafock is located in a flood-prone area, and with the onset of the rainy season in June, access will be very restricted. The suspected presence of explosive devices severely limits humanitarian access to vulnerable people in a situation which is already characterized by access restrictions due to armed conflict and physical constraints. In the Ouham, Ouham-Pendé, Nana-Mambéré and Mambéré-Kadei prefectures in the west of the country in particular, almost 940,000 needy people targeted by humanitarian actors in 2023 risk seeing their assistance delayed or suspended, especially with regard to food security, nutrition, access to drinking water and protection sectors as well as the fight against gender-based violence.

20. In 2023, however, these four prefectures will see an increase in the number of people in need of humanitarian assistance and protection. Even if assistance by air could be envisaged, it remains limited in view of its high cost and operational priorities. Civilians using the various roads and footpaths for their income-generating activities and other means of livelihood like farming find their movements severely curtailed in this region where food insecurity remains critical. In this regard, the presence of security and demining personnel remains essential for the protection of civilians and the implementation of humanitarian operations.

#### **D. Socio-Economic Situation**

21. During the period under review, the focus was on the Government's decision captured in an inter-ministerial decree issued by the Ministers of Finance and Budget, Trade and Industry, and Energy and Water Resource Development to the effect that fuel prices would be increased from 3 January 2023. The consequences of this price increase, after several months of severe fuel shortages in the country, have affected several sectors like transportation, increased not only the cost of living in the country, but also heightened popular discontent worsened by the soaring prices of foodstuffs and basic necessities in the markets.

22. It is in against this austere background that the Government adopted a programme to cut down on its budget considerably in order to cater for the deficit of CFA Francs 101 billion (USD 163 million) without asking for external resources. Parliament passed the 2023 Finance Bill by a majority of 132 votes in favour, 3 against and 5 abstentions out of 140 members. Cutbacks to key social programmes such as education, health and public security send a strong message about the need to resolve the country's economic crisis.

23. The CAR has come under close surveillance by the IMF and the World Bank, because the deficit financing situation compels it to implement its basic programmes. The Government signed an agreement with the IMF, which led to the granting of a US\$191.4 million Extended Credit Facility (ECF). This aid could relieve the cash flow tension that the CAR continues to experience, but this requires quick reforms to ensure the mobilization of the necessary resources to run the State. The Government intends to prepare and pass a supplementary finance bill to take this new situation into account.

24. In the same vein, the Government's efforts have focused on strengthening trade with neighbouring countries through a one-stop shop for customs and tax services. On 29 December 2022, President Faustin Archange Touadera inaugurated an inland dry port on the outskirts of Bangui (PK26). This new dry port is part of a strategic structure which can make an economic impact by helping to modernize the customs department and boosting the public treasury of the Central African Republic.

25. The leaders of the Central African Economic and Monetary Community (CEMAC) met in Yaoundé (Cameroon) on 17 March 2023, for the 15th Ordinary Session of the Conference of Heads of

State, under the chairmanship of H.E. Paul Biya of the Republic of Cameroon. The meeting provided an opportunity to exchange views on complementary measures likely to consolidate the sub-region's economic recovery with the common objective of accelerating growth. On this occasion, President Touadera took over the rotating presidency of CEMAC for one (1) year.

26. On 19 May 2023, Prime Minister Félix Moloua co-chaired a retreat of the Joint Steering Committee (JSC) of the National Recovery and Peacebuilding Plan for the Central African Republic (RCPCA) with Mr. Douglas Carpenter, the Ambassador of the European Union Delegation to the Central African Republic. The retreat, which brought together Government leaders and development partners, in addition to evaluating the RCPCA, discussed the Interim Development Plan (IDP).

### **III. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

27. The debate surrounding the constitution has led opposition political parties and civil society to disagree and block any constitutional reform in the Central African Republic. If the stakeholders are not able to reach a broad consensus, this issue is likely to expose the country to social, political and security risks. In particular, the opposition has called on the Government to remain within the remit of the African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance.

28. With regard to the forthcoming local elections, the CAR is appealing for financial support from all those willing to assist. This call is particularly important for the AU as it provides an opportunity for the institution to demonstrate solidarity with regards to the consolidation of democratic governance in the country.

29. In the area of dialogue and reconciliation, after four years of implementation, the PAPR-CAR is facing challenges. However, although acts of violence committed by certain armed groups who have decided to dissociate themselves from the Peace Agreement persist, there is also a need to acknowledge the progress made under the Agreement.

30. In this regard, Council may wish to consider the following:

- i) commend the efforts deployed by the Government of CAR and neighbouring countries in addressing the security situation in the country, as well as humanitarian and socio-economic situations;
- ii) encourage the CAR Government and all political and social stakeholders to redouble their efforts to strengthen national institutions, as well as to promote good governance, constitutionalism and respect for the rule of law, in accordance with the AU's normative instruments;
- iii) welcome, as a major step forward, the positive steps taken by certain armed groups to disband, take note with satisfaction that these commitments which are in line with the letter and spirit of Article 5 para (d) of the PAPR-CAR, and once again urge other armed groups to re-engage in the peace and reconciliation process, in particular through the complete cessation of hostilities and the full compliance with the DDR process by their members, thereby leading ultimately to their complete disbandment;
- iv) express support for the transitional justice process led by the CVJRR, while recalling that the CVJRR is a response to one of the commitments made by the Government under Article 4 of the Political Agreement for Peace and Reconciliation in CAR (PAPR-CAR), which further stresses the need to speed up the implementation of the transitional justice

process in order to deepen national reconciliation by placing particular emphasis on the rights of victims to justice and reparation;

- v) commend the steps taken to ensure the departure of former President François Bozize, who was received by Guinea Bissau in March 2023 and also commend President Umaro Sissoco Embaló of the Republic of Guinea Bissau and the sister Republic of Chad for facilitating the quest for lasting peace in the CAR'
- vi) take note of the agreement on the Extended Credit Facility (ECF) granted by the IMF, and call on the international community to continue to mobilize and provide the necessary support to the CAR;
- vii) express deep concern over the humanitarian situation in the country and appeal to all Member States, bilateral and multilateral partners, as well as humanitarian agencies to provide the necessary humanitarian assistance to the population in need in CAR, in particular women and children;
- viii) underscore the need for the Government and all political and social stakeholders in the CAR to take all necessary measures to ensure that the local elections are held on the scheduled agreed dates in 2023; and stress the need for an inclusive approach that guarantees meaningful participation by all segments of society, especially youth, women and the representatives of children; and
- ix) express gratitude to Ambassador Bertino Matias Matondo, following the end of his mission to the CAR as the Special Representative of the Chairperson of the African Union Commission and Head of the African Union Mission for the Central African Republic and Central Africa (MISAC), after serving a four-year mission in the Central African Republic, and encourages the Chairperson of the Commission to expedite the appointment of Special Representative in CAR to provide strategic leadership for the AU's interventions in the country.

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# Communiqué of the 1157th Meeting of the Peace and Security Council held on 13 June 2023, on the Briefing on the Situation in the Central African Republic.

Peace and Security Council

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