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Human Rights & Aid Groups Welcome UN Peacekeeper Boost for CAR

(New York) - Today's unanimous decision by the UN Security Council to add a further 900 peacekeepers to the UN mission in the Central African Republic (CAR) was welcomed by a group of 16 non-governmental organisations including Aegis Trust, the Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect, Mercy Corps, and Invisible Children.

The situation in the country has been worsening in recent months, with fighting between rival militias forcing hundreds of thousands of civilians to flee their homes, and rendering 2.4m in need of humanitarian assistance.

The UN mission in CAR, known by its initials MINUSCA, has had some notable successes in preventing or controlling violence, but its 10,000 peacekeepers are spread thin over a country the size of France. Issues of poor performance have also dogged the mission, and damaged trust among local communities.

Kessy Soignet, founder of **URU ("Take Off")**, a youth organization in CAR, said: "Young people are the future of my country and the vast majority of us want a peaceful and prosperous future. Today's decision gives us hope. It reaffirms that the international community shares our vision and understands that making people in CAR feel safer is the top priority. It is literally a matter of life or death to ensure that UN peacekeepers have the ability to deploy rapidly and protect innocent civilians when the next wave of violence comes."

Stephen Cockburn, deputy regional director for **Amnesty International** in West and Central Africa, said: "Civilians in CAR need the full support and protection of the international community in an ever more fragile context. The UN mission has been doing an important job with limited means to save lives and prevent further bloodshed, and this agreement to strengthen the force is welcome and should be implemented as soon as possible."

Mariane Irion, regional director from the **Norwegian Refugee Council** said: "While a strengthened UN mission is not a panacea for all the country's problems, it is essential for preventing an escalation of violence, and potential mass atrocities. The number one priority of peacekeepers must now be protection of civilians."

Ciaran Donnelly, senior vice-president of international programs, **International Rescue Committee** said: "Security Council members have made the right decision today in choosing to support a mission that has the potential to make a real difference to a very perilous situation. There are hundreds of thousands of innocent and vulnerable civilians in CAR who deserve protection. In spite of pressure to cut budgets, members have rightly voted to back efforts to help them, and shore up peace and democracy in this troubled state."

Martine Villeneuve, country director for the **Danish Refugee Council**, said: "We recently met with community members in Batangafo, where violent attacks took place in September, forcing humanitarian actors to leave. After the attacks, UN forces supported locals and armed groups to negotiate a peace treaty. These civilians strongly support a strengthened UN mission in CAR and fear that without the UN's presence, they could face more violence and danger."

Alison Giffen, director of the peacekeeping program from the **Center for Civilians in Conflict** said: "Civilians in CAR have faced a devastating year of violence. While the UN mission has succeeded in protecting some from egregious violence, it has failed to protect others. It needs personnel that are well-

trained, properly equipped, and willing to act. The additional troops approved today need to be rapidly deployed to help stem the escalating violence. And the UN must continuously improve on how it delivers on its primary task—the protection of civilians.”

Florent Geel, Africa director from the **International Federation for Human Rights**, said: “This welcome decision can give UN peacekeepers the chance to rebuild trust among communities. If the UN mission makes civilian protection its top priority, it should be able to respond more robustly to deter armed groups that murder, rape and loot and to set the conditions necessary to break the cycles of impunity that continue to drive violence in the Central African Republic.”

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Signatories to the statement:

ACORD, Aegis Trust, Amnesty International, Better World Campaign, Center for Civilians in Conflict, Concordis, Columbia Law School Human Rights Clinic, Danish Refugee Council, Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect, International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH), International Rescue Committee, Invisible Children, Mercy Corps, Norwegian Refugee Council, Search for Common Ground, URU/"Take Off" (youth organization, CAR)

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*Crisis Action works behind-the-scenes with coalitions to protect civilians caught in conflict.
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