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Report of the Secretary-General on the Central African Republic submitted pursuant to paragraph 22 of Security Council resolution 2121 (2013)

I. Introduction

1. The present report is submitted pursuant to paragraph 22 of Security Council resolution 2121 (2013), by which the Council requested me to submit, in close consultation with the African Union, the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS) and interested bilateral partners and international organizations, a written report on the planning of the African-led International Support Mission in the Central African Republic (MISCA) with detailed options for international support to MISCA, including the possible option of transforming it into a United Nations peacekeeping operation, subject to appropriate conditions on the ground.

II. Findings of the assessment mission

2. For the preparation of this report, I dispatched a technical assessment mission to the Central African Republic from 27 October to 8 November 2013. The multidisciplinary team was led by my Assistant Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations, Edmond Mulet, and included representatives of the African Union and ECCAS. The assessment mission consulted with a wide range of stakeholders, including the Head of State of the Transition in the Central African Republic, the Prime Minister and members of his Government, the President of the Constitutional Court, representatives of political parties and civil society, religious leaders and international partners, as well as representatives of the United Nations Integrated Peacebuilding Office in the Central African Republic (BINUCA) and the United Nations country team. Members of the team visited locations outside Bangui, including Bambari, Bangassou and Bossangoa. The head of the assessment mission consulted the Peace and Security Commissioner of the African Union and the Secretary-General of ECCAS on the margins of the international contact group meeting, which was held in Bangui on 8 November.

3. The assessment mission confirmed the findings presented to the Security Council in my letter dated 16 September 2013 (S/2013/557), but noted a significant deterioration in the overall situation, coupled with unanimous calls for urgent action in the political, security, humanitarian and human rights areas. Of particular concern, the mission found an alarming increase in intercommunal violence. The



political situation remains highly volatile and unpredictable and the tenuous relationship between the Head of State of the Transition and the Prime Minister further complicates an already fragile political arrangement for the transition. Meanwhile, the transitional government has made only limited progress towards the implementation of key elements of the transitional framework, notably the organization of elections within 18 months of the inauguration of the Head of State of the Transition and the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration of former combatants, as well as the repatriation of foreign elements.

4. Most actors in the Central African Republic stressed the need to adhere to the time frame envisaged for the transition. Yet, most of those with whom the assessment mission engaged expressed serious concern that, without renewed pressure by the international community, elections might not be held by the foreseen deadline of February 2015, thereby endangering the entire transition process. Moreover, although officially disbanded, the disparate group of well-armed ex-Séléka combatants who had brought the Head of State of the Transition to power continues to hold significant sway in the governance of the country and to pose a serious risk to the sustainability of the current political order and to the population.

5. The security situation in the country has continued to deteriorate amid an increase in the number and intensity of incidents of violence and grave human rights abuses committed against the civilian population by armed elements. In Bangui, sporadic incidents continue during the day and a high level of criminality remains prevalent at night. Violence has increased in the countryside. The ex-Séléka combatants, who are not under the unified command and control of the transitional authorities, continue to commit serious violations of human rights with total impunity. The lack of confirmed information regarding their numbers, origin and affiliation makes it difficult to plan their disarmament and the reconstruction of the armed forces. While it is estimated that there are between 15,000 and 20,000 ex-Séléka elements, the transitional government has identified nearly 9,000 ex-Séléka combatants who formed the core of the rebellion. Of these, approximately 5,000 are to be integrated into the security services (500 into the police, 500 into the gendarmerie, 500 into the forestry services and 3,500 into the army). A significant number of ex-Séléka combatants are said to be of foreign origin.

6. In response to the violations committed by the ex-Séléka combatants, traditional militia groups known as the “anti-balaka” have re-emerged, creating a new dynamic of violence and retaliation. The past two months have seen an increasing number of attacks by anti-balaka groups against ex-Séléka forces, as well as local communities, including the Muslim population. These attacks have triggered reprisals from ex-Séléka elements against members of the local population perceived to be supporting the anti-balaka groups. This cycle, if not addressed now, threatens to degenerate into a countrywide religious and ethnic divide with the potential to spiral into an uncontrollable situation that could include atrocities and have serious regional implications.

7. The assessment mission found the capacity of the country’s armed forces and other security services to confront such threats to be virtually non-existent. Most of the members of these forces deserted during the crisis. Of those who have since returned to their posts (approximately 7,000 members of the national armed forces, 1,675 police officers and 3,500 gendarmes, largely concentrated in Bangui) almost all have been disarmed. They are unequipped and unable to exercise their functions.

8. The situation is further exacerbated by the near-total absence of State administration and services across the country. Most of the authorities have fled and their offices have been pillaged or occupied by ex-Séléka combatants. With the partial exception of Bangui, justice and corrections institutions are absent throughout the country, contributing to a state of lawlessness and creating an environment of impunity for human rights violations. The assessment mission found that ex-Séléka elements had taken over most State functions and were acting as civil administrators, tax collectors, police officers and judicial arbiters.

9. The effects of this pervasive breakdown in law and order were most evident outside Bangui, where thousands of civilians have been displaced to regional population centres and into the bush, further exacerbating an already serious humanitarian situation. In addition, the presence of unsafely stored ammunition and weapons throughout the country, as well as of explosive remnants of war, represents an immediate threat to the civilian population and to United Nations personnel.

10. On the human rights front, the assessment mission heard testimonies of widespread violations against civilians, including summary executions, sexual and gender-based violence, torture, illegal arrests and detentions, looting of property, illegal checkpoints and extortion. Women and children continue to be particularly affected, with allegations of widespread sexual violence occurring in an environment of absolute impunity. It is reported that some 3,500 children remain in the ranks of the ex-Séléka forces and that children continue to be recruited by self-defence groups. The vast majority of schools and hospitals have been looted and are no longer functional, resulting in serious violations of the rights to education and health.

11. The current crisis has triggered a dramatic deterioration in the long-standing and dire humanitarian situation in the Central African Republic, which has affected the entire population of 4.6 million people, half of them children. More than 400,000 persons are internally displaced and over 1.1 million people are food insecure. Nearly 66,000 refugees have been registered by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees in neighbouring countries since December 2012. Access by humanitarian actors to affected people, including refugees, is constrained by extremely precarious and unpredictable security conditions, particularly in rural areas.

12. The implications for the region of the growing insecurity should not be underestimated. The significant presence of foreign fighters among ex-Séléka ranks attests to the complex relations between the countries of the region. Porous borders, the absence of State authority, opportunities for the illegal and lucrative exploitation of natural resources and the remoteness of many parts of the country provide an environment that is conducive to transnational criminal activity, such as the flow of arms and mercenaries, as well as a potential breeding ground for radical networks.

13. An immediate improvement in the security situation was seen by all interlocutors as the critical prerequisite for making progress in all other spheres, including politics, the rule of law, the humanitarian situation, human rights, early recovery and development. Most of the interlocutors emphasized the urgent need to strengthen BINUCA and to deploy rapidly an effective and impartial force to protect civilians, deter human rights violations and abuses, help restore security and the observance of the rule of law and prevent the possible occurrence of mass violence.

III. Planning of the African-led International Support Mission in the Central African Republic and options for international support

A. Planning of the African-led International Support Mission in the Central African Republic

14. The African Union Peace and Security Council decided on 17 June to support, in principle, the establishment of MISCA, the core elements of which would be the contingents serving under the Mission of the Economic Community of Central African States for the Consolidation of Peace in the Central African Republic (MICOPAX). In the same decision, the Council requested the African Union Commission to develop, in consultation with ECCAS and other potential troop- and police-contributing countries, as well as with relevant international partners, a concept of operations and a concept of logistical support. The African Union Commission subsequently held a meeting of experts in Addis Ababa from 2 to 5 July that brought together representatives of countries of the region, potential troop- and police-contributing countries and representatives of relevant regional and international organizations to develop the strategic concept of operations.

15. As outlined in my report of 5 August 2013 (S/2013/470), on the basis of the strategic concept of operations, the African Union Peace and Security Council authorized on 19 July the deployment of MISCA for an initial period of six months at a total strength of 3,652 personnel, including 3,500 uniformed personnel (2,475 for the military component and 1,025 for the police component) and 152 civilians. MISCA was mandated to contribute to (a) the protection of civilians and the restoration of security and public order through the implementation of appropriate measures; (b) the stabilization of the country and the restoration of the authority of the central Government; (c) the reform and restructuring of the defence and security sector; and (d) the creation of conditions conducive to the provision of humanitarian assistance to populations in need. The Peace and Security Council requested the United Nations, the European Union and other partners to lend their full support to the African Union and ECCAS to facilitate the transformation of MICOPAX into MISCA and to ensure its effective functioning through the provision of the necessary financial, logistical and technical support.

16. From 7 to 10 October, I deployed United Nations planners to the African Union Commission to support the operational planning meeting between the African Union and ECCAS, which was aimed at finalizing the concept of operations for MISCA. France, the United States of America, the European Union and the International Organization of la Francophonie also participated in the meeting. The MISCA concept of operation is the result of an important collaborative engagement between the African Union and ECCAS at the strategic level.

17. The concept of operations envisages five phases for the deployment of MISCA, which would support the transitional government in carrying out its national responsibilities in accordance with the transition road map. The five phases are (a) the transfer of authority from MICOPAX to MISCA on 19 December 2013; (b) the stabilization of Bangui and of the Bangui-Bouar-Garou-Bouali corridor by the end of February 2014; (c) the restoration of State authority along the western corridor; (d) the restoration of State authority along the eastern corridor; and (e) the

handover of security tasks to State institutions upon completion of the electoral process. The concept of operations also envisages that the military, police and civilian components of MISCA work together to support the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration of former combatants from the Central African Republic, as well as the repatriation of foreign fighters.

18. As at 31 October, MICOPAX had deployed 2,589 uniformed personnel, including 2,220 military personnel and 379 police personnel. Of the total strength, 1,694 uniformed personnel are deployed in Bangui. This concentration of forces in Bangui has contributed to a certain degree of calm in the capital, although serious incidents continue to occur and the level of criminality remains worrying. In the provinces, however, the limited capacity of MICOPAX has made it challenging to guarantee the safety and security of the civilian population against the threat posed by ex-Séléka fighters, anti-balaka groups and other armed elements. Reports of increased tensions between ex-Séléka and MICOPAX forces in some localities are also of serious concern. The Secretary-General of ECCAS informed the assessment mission that, in the light of the recent deterioration in the situation, ECCAS envisages deploying additional troops to MICOPAX before the handover to the African Union, including an infantry battalion and a reserve force, as well as helicopter units from five ECCAS member States. ECCAS has continued to fund MICOPAX since 1 August.

19. From 25 to 29 October, the United Nations participated in a joint African Union-ECCAS evaluation of MICOPAX support capacity, which sought to assess the current capabilities of the force, identify gaps faced by MICOPAX and reach a common understanding of the material and technical support necessary to fill critical capacity gaps. This process included detailed consultations between the African Union, ECCAS and the United Nations through technical working groups, consultations with MICOPAX force headquarters and several visits to MICOPAX deployment sites.

20. A number of logistical gaps were identified, notably in terms of the following: (a) basic sustainment, including drinking water, rations and cooking fuel, waste management, medical facilities and medicines, and medical and casualty evacuation infrastructure; (b) administrative and financial support to cover allowances, death and disability and other benefits; (c) immediate strategic and operational support, including maintenance and engineering capabilities, mission-level ground transport, safety and security, air support, office furniture and accommodation, command and control communication and information systems, mission headquarters and ammunition; (d) major equipment and self-sustainment for troop- and police-contributing countries, including armoured personnel carriers, ambulances and personal equipment; and (e) predeployment and in-theatre training for troops and police, including specific training on child protection and the prevention of sexual violence.

21. The assessment mission also considered the expected capacity of MISCA to implement its overall mandate. The mission's envisaged 152-strong civilian component, which has yet to be established, will include both substantive and support personnel, to be deployed initially at mission headquarters in Bangui and later to the four regional headquarters. According to initial African Union plans, the civilian component will focus on planning, coordinating and liaising with the population and key stakeholders on the ground.

22. This leaves a number of gaps at the strategic and operational level. A mission concept for implementing civilian tasks remains to be developed in order to guide the activities of MISCA in these areas. Operationally, the current resource allocation is likely to present serious challenges in terms of enabling MISCA to reach the level of operational readiness necessary to implement its complex and challenging mandate, notably with regard to the urgent need to protect civilians. Implementing the MISCA mandate will also require the establishment of robust coordination mechanisms with BINUCA, the humanitarian community and the local population. All of these challenges imply a considerable commitment of human resources and expertise.

23. The process of transitioning from the ECCAS-led MICOPAX to the African-led MISCA (the transfer of authority is currently scheduled for 19 December 2013) is under way, but with significant operational challenges. In order for MISCA to build on the operational capacity of MICOPAX and effectively perform its mandated tasks within an operational environment characterized by extremely poor infrastructure significant external support will be needed.

24. The three key elements of support consist of (a) the provision of a logistics support package; (b) the payment of troop allowances and reimbursements for contingent-owned equipment and self-sustainment; and (c) the provision of critical capabilities, which includes strengthening mission structure and organization and command and control arrangements, as well as the augmentation of existing capacities. In addition to logistical support requirements, it will be critical to address capacity gaps identified in the substantive components of MISCA in order to ensure that it can successfully implement all of its mandate.

25. The provision of essential logistical support to meet life-support needs, including the provision of rations, fuel, engineering works, communications and medical services, as well as the strategic deployment and rotation of forces and the movement of equipment and supplies, will be vital. Because MICOPAX will be transitioning into MISCA imminently, this critical support will probably need to be provided initially through rapid and flexible bilateral and multilateral arrangements. This could be complemented by United Nations support to augment MISCA civilian capacities, especially with financial, procurement and logistics expertise, should the Security Council authorize such an option, taking into account a required transition period of approximately six months, which is the time necessary to establish and ensure more predictable support.

26. The assessment mission identified five options for the provision of international support to MISCA. The first option pertains to bilateral and multilateral support provided to the African Union for MISCA, as well as direct contributions to troop- and police-contributing countries. The second, third and fourth options combine this direct bilateral and multilateral support with additional enabling support from the United Nations at the appropriate time. It is important to note that the options involving United Nations support do not involve the provision of critical military equipment and enablers, or the performance of substantive civilian tasks assigned to MISCA in its stead. In the case of the second, third and fourth options, a memorandum of understanding would be signed between the United Nations and the African Union defining and governing the roles, responsibilities and obligations of each party in order to ensure accountability and

transparency. The fifth option entails the transformation of MISCA into a United Nations peacekeeping operation.

27. International support would significantly improve the capacity of MISCA to implement its mandated tasks. However, under the first four options, MISCA will still have maximum capability levels that will differ from those of a United Nations peacekeeping operation of a similar size, notably in terms of enablers and civilian capacity.

28. Any United Nations support must also be compliant with the United Nations human rights due diligence policy, the implementation of which will have to be built into and resourced, no matter which of the proposed options is chosen. All options for United Nations support to MISCA will be guided by the principles of the Global Field Support Strategy.

B. Options for international support

Option 1: bilateral and multilateral support

29. The first option would consist of bilateral and multilateral support to the African Union and troop- and police-contributing countries in terms of logistics, troop allowances and equipment reimbursements. Additional critical equipment and enablers could also be provided through this arrangement.

30. On 1 August 2013, the African Union sent a request to its member States and main partners requesting funds to support MISCA. A number of those States and partners have since pledged financial and technical assistance for the mission, albeit limited amounts. France and the United States have also pledged direct support to countries providing contingents to MISCA, while the European Union has pledged to provide significant financial assistance to the African Union through its African Peace Facility.

31. The United Nations would have a limited role, for example in the mobilization of bilateral and multilateral assistance, the provision of planning support to MISCA and coordination with Member States and the African Union. The United Nations could also provide technical assistance to the African Union for the establishment of an African Union-administered trust fund.

32. Direct bilateral and multilateral assistance would allow for an immediate support to MISCA to fulfil identified gaps, notably in terms of life-support services (provision of food, water and fuel). In order to make a difference, however, donors would need to make required funds or logistical support available within a very short period of time and coordinate their assistance to prevent any duplication of efforts. It should also be noted that the support pledged thus far may not be sufficient to cover all the costs associated with MISCA for a full year of operation. In addition, there is no guarantee on the level of future contributions, unless potential donors make long-term pledges.

Option 2: United Nations support funded through a trust fund

33. The second option would involve the provision by the United Nations of logistical support in combination with the bilateral and multilateral support foreseen in the first option. This support, which is required to meet some of the remaining

shortfalls, would be funded through a trust fund administered by the United Nations. It would entail the provision of some equipment and the establishment of an appropriate United Nations mission support capacity, including technical assistance to facilitate the establishment of MISCA mission headquarters, strengthen its command and control and administrative structures, improve communication and information technology infrastructure and provide necessary training.

34. This option would not cover the provision of essential recurring or fixed-cost life-support main commodities (fuel, rations, water) and/or services (such as medical assistance) under voluntary funding. As in the first option, there would be no guarantee on the level of future contributions unless donors make long-term pledges.

Option 3: limited United Nations support funded through assessed and voluntary contributions

35. In the third option, the United Nations would provide a limited support package funded through assessed contributions, in combination with bilateral and multilateral efforts. The support provided by the United Nations under this option would contribute to the execution of a number of specific tasks that are critical for the efficient operation of MISCA. This would include strategic airlift for the deployment and rotation of troops, medical support for evacuations and treatment at level III medical facilities outside of the Central African Republic, the establishment and maintenance of strategic communications between MISCA and the headquarters of the African Union, ECCAS and BINUCA, geographic information system capacity in the form of dedicated products and applications and the secondment of BINUCA military and civilian specialists with specific skills and expertise, including in the area of information analysis and logistics operations.

36. Due to the availability of regular funding through assessed contributions, this option would provide support in a more predictable and sustainable way than the first two options, but only for the specific and critical tasks identified. The broader range of logistical support, direct cash payments to defray costs of deployment such as troop allowances and reimbursements for contingent-owned equipment would need to be funded through bilateral or multilateral arrangements or through voluntary contributions.

Option 4: comprehensive United Nations support package funded through assessed contributions

37. The fourth option would be the delivery of a comprehensive logistical support package by the United Nations through the establishment of a United Nations support mission along the lines of the model developed for the African Union Mission in Somalia. This would offer significant logistics capability to MISCA. The United Nations support mission would be funded from United Nations assessed contributions and would comprise the equipment and mission support services normally provided for a United Nations peacekeeping operation of the same size, excluding any direct cash payments, such as troop allowances and reimbursements for contingent-owned equipment.

38. This option would utilize the efficiencies delivered through the Global Field Support Strategy, including by leveraging United Nations supply chain arrangements, to provide life-support services (such as rations, fuel and potable water), ensure a light mission support footprint, minimize the environmental impact

and receive support from shared service providers (e.g. the global and regional support centres). The United Nations would support MISCA by extending medical services, including through possible contractual arrangements for medical and casualty evacuations to designated level III and IV medical facilities in the region.

39. Funding would be available from the date of adoption of a Security Council resolution on the matter and facilitate a smooth transition into a possible United Nations peacekeeping operation. Logistical support for the deployment and sustainment of MISCA, however, would be a substantial undertaking. In this option, any shortfalls in the capacity of MISCA to contain threats to main supply routes and an insufficient communications network to meet operational requirements may necessitate additional support by commercial transport or by augmenting military capabilities. Direct cash payments to defray costs of deployment incurred by troop-contributing countries, such as troop allowances and reimbursements for contingent-owned equipment, would still need to be funded through bilateral or multilateral arrangements or through voluntary contributions.

Option 5: possible transformation of the African-led International Support Mission in the Central African Republic into a United Nations peacekeeping operation

40. As requested by the Security Council, the assessment mission also examined the possibility of transforming MISCA into a United Nations peacekeeping operation, subject to appropriate conditions on the ground.

41. Given the complexity and the rapid deterioration of the crisis in the Central African Republic, the assessment mission found that the situation requires a coherent, integrated and multidimensional response that will help to address both the root causes and the present manifestations of the conflict. Such a response would help lay the foundations for transparent, accountable, efficient and resilient institutions governed by the rule of law. Operating under a Chapter VII mandate, a possible United Nations peacekeeping operation could therefore focus primarily on the following: (a) protection of civilians; (b) support to the political process and key elements of the transition, including the restoration of State authority; (c) support for the organization and conduct of elections; (d) the promotion and protection of human rights, including protection from conflict-related sexual and gender-based violence, and child protection; (e) the promotion of a national dialogue and reconciliation; (f) disarmament, demobilization and reintegration of former combatants and repatriation of foreign elements, as well as community violence reduction programmes; (g) security sector reform; (h) support to the police, justice and correctional institutions; (i) mine action, monitoring of weapons and ammunition trafficking and stockpile management; (j) creation of conditions conducive to the delivery of humanitarian assistance and the safe, voluntary and sustainable return of internally displaced persons and refugees; and (k) laying the groundwork for early peacebuilding and socioeconomic recovery. BINUCA would be subsumed into this presence, as would its coordination role with United Nations humanitarian and development agencies in line with their respective mandates and established guiding principles and policies.

42. The United Nations force would operate under robust rules of engagement with a mandate to use all means necessary to deny armed groups freedom of movement and access to the major cities, within its capabilities and its areas of

deployment. In order to support the above-mentioned tasks, the force would have a proposed military strength of approximately 6,000, based on four mobile infantry battalions and two reserve battalions, as well as enablers, taking into account the current geographic environment and threat levels. This would provide for a security presence in the major population areas assessed to be key strongholds of illegal armed groups and in the priority areas for stabilization and the extension of State authority. Should the security situation deteriorate further and the environment become less permissive, the strength of the military component may need to be increased to approximately 9,000, for self-protection and to protect population centres from armed groups. A critical challenge would be the generation of key capabilities, enablers, force multipliers and modern technologies to be fully operational in a country characterized by poor road networks and infrastructure.

43. The United Nations police component, comprising approximately 1,700 police personnel, including formed police units and individual officers, would also form part of the peacekeeping operation and contribute to the protection of civilians and support the resumption and development of the national policing and other law enforcement services. A corrections component comprising 60 personnel would also be established to support, advise and assist Central African authorities in the re-establishment of their corrections programmes. Resources would be needed to fund the rehabilitation of basic infrastructure, provide equipment and facilitate capacity-building of key government personnel in the criminal justice chain.

44. Specific arrangements would need to be developed with France and the African Union to ensure effective coordination and mutual support between the United Nations peacekeeping operation, the French Boali detachment and the Regional Task Force of the African Union Regional Cooperation Initiative against the Lord's Resistance Army, respectively. Appropriate coordination arrangements would also be needed with the tripartite military force established by the Central African Republic, Chad and the Sudan, which operates in the north-east of the country.

45. In keeping with established doctrine and practice, a number of conditions on the ground would need to be present in order for a United Nations peacekeeping mission to deploy and operate successfully. It would be important for the political framework for the transition to remain in place and for the transitional government to demonstrate its commitment to the process and take concrete steps to implement the framework. This would include measures by the transitional government to ensure that democratic elections are held within the time frame agreed to by ECCAS leaders in the Libreville Global Peace Agreement and the N'Djamena Declaration. While the security environment is likely to remain precarious and unpredictable, it would also be important for the transitional government to immediately distinguish between those forces officially representing the State security apparatus and those forces acting outside of any legal framework. In particular, the transitional government should clearly articulate its vision with regard to the reconstitution of security and rule of law institutions throughout the country, the future composition of its armed forces, including the criteria for any integration of new members, and how the current political framework will set the stage for the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration of former combatants, as well as the repatriation of foreign elements. Clarity on these issues will be necessary for the United Nations to operate with the consent required.

46. Both the African Union and ECCAS have indicated that they would support the eventual transformation of MISCA into a United Nations peacekeeping operation, but not in the immediate future. The Prime Minister indicated to the assessment mission that he would welcome the urgent deployment of a United Nations peacekeeping operation, while the Head of State of the Transition stated that he viewed the support of the United Nations positively and that he would not oppose the deployment of a United Nations peacekeeping operation, just as he did not oppose the deployment of MISCA, as long as such deployment was part of a process that would first involve the deployment of MISCA.

47. Should the Security Council request that MISCA be transformed into a United Nations peacekeeping operation, a number of conditions would also need to be met with respect to the operational readiness and operating standards of MISCA. All military and police contingents in a United Nations peacekeeping mission covering the entire territory of the Central African Republic would need to be capable of operating in adherence to minimum United Nations standards and have sufficient capabilities. Bilateral and multilateral support and training would need to be provided to countries contributing troops and police to MISCA ahead of a transformation, as would a plan to equip all forces to United Nations standards. All personnel serving in the United Nations peacekeeping mission would also be subject to the United Nations human rights screening policy.

IV. Observations

48. I am increasingly concerned by the deepening crisis in the Central African Republic. The people of the Central African Republic are confronted with a complex and multilayered emergency and protection crisis. This crisis stems from long-standing sociopolitical, structural and governance deficiencies such as weak State institutions, poor management of natural resources, fragile social cohesion and deep-seated feelings of marginalization among some communities, in particular communities in the northern part of the country, which have felt discriminated against by the central Government.

49. The Central African Republic does not have a cohesive national authority capable of guaranteeing the security of the State and its people. The ex-Séléka combatants, who have de facto assumed the functions of State security forces, are responsible for most of the exactions and human rights violations committed against the population throughout the country. But atrocious human rights violations are also committed by the anti-balaka groups. The population lives in fear, and the ongoing insecurity has a disastrous impact on the humanitarian and socioeconomic situation. The continued erosion of the social and economic fabric could have long-term implications for the stability of the country. Already, the rapidly growing phenomenon of local self-defence groups constitutes a risk for the further fracturing of the State, with parallel administrations proliferating across the country, widespread violence and a possible spillover into neighbouring countries.

50. It is imperative that the main security threat posed by armed groups be addressed urgently through measures such as disarmament, demobilization and reintegration. The risk that a further deterioration in the situation would represent for the entire subregion should not be underestimated, given the complex relations between States in the region, the presence of numerous foreign elements in the ranks

of the ex-Séléka forces and the potential for transnational criminal activities. The authorities of the Central African Republic have the primary responsibility for ensuring that the situation does not deteriorate further and that progress is made, without delay, on all aspects, including on both the political and the security fronts. At the same time, it should be recalled that the authorities currently lack the capability to guarantee the security of the population.

51. The security imperative should not detract from the need to address the situation in a comprehensive manner. I urge the transitional government to fulfil its responsibilities in this regard. Any delay in the implementation of the road map for the transition would have significant political fallout, as well as serious security implications, and would jeopardize the assistance that the international community could provide to the Central African Republic to emerge from the crisis.

52. The humanitarian and human rights situations continue to worsen, with a dramatic and disproportionate impact on vulnerable populations, in particular with regard to sexual violence targeting women and the recruitment of children. A large-scale humanitarian crisis is looming, as access to the population in need is increasingly limited by the continuing violence.

53. I am particularly concerned by growing tensions between communities. While the conflict was not, at its origin, a religious or ethnic one, the increasing attacks and indiscriminate retaliations have created a climate of deep suspicion between Christians and Muslims in some areas of the country. Further tensions between communities, including through the political manipulation of these fears, might well lead to uncontrollable sectarian violence with untold consequences for the country, the subregion and beyond. I call upon the national authorities, as well as religious and community leaders, to do their utmost to address these tensions and enhance national cohesion, including through calls for interreligious dialogue and coexistence.

54. In parallel, urgent measures must also be taken to put an end to the pervasive impunity and to ensure accountability. I call on all stakeholders to support the national authorities in devising creative ways to hold perpetrators of human rights violations to account. I ask the Security Council to pay particular attention to this point and to consider measures, including sanctions, that may increase accountability for such crimes.

55. I am convinced that there is urgent and growing need to address the crisis before it spirals out of control and leads to the loss of even more lives. Failure to act decisively now to break the cycle of violence, stop human rights violations and re-establish a minimum degree of security throughout the country would not only further endanger the population of the Central African Republic, but also make any future intervention more complex and costly. Member States have the opportunity, and I firmly believe the responsibility, to prevent a situation that has the high potential to result in widespread atrocities. On the basis of the options presented in the present report, I call upon the Security Council to authorize immediate and collective action to protect the civilian population from further violence and attacks.

56. The authorities of the country will need significant support from the international community to achieve these objectives. I commend in this regard the significant investment that ECCAS has made so far in support of the country's stabilization, including through the deployment of additional MICOPAX troops in

recent months. The recently approved strengthening of BINUCA will also contribute to supporting progress on the political, rule of law and human rights fronts. The involvement of the African Union is also welcome. I am grateful to the African Union and ECCAS for having developed in close consultation the concept for an African-led peace operation, building on the achievements of MICOPAX. There is an urgent need to deploy an effective force, with a predictable and sustainable funding source, to protect civilians, deter human rights violations and abuses, help restore security and the observance of the rule of law, and prevent the possible occurrence of mass violence in the Central African Republic, as well as a regionalization of the conflict. I welcome the position of the African Union and ECCAS that MISCA should eventually be transformed into a United Nations peacekeeping operation. I have instructed the Secretariat to prepare plans accordingly, pending a decision of the Security Council.

57. In order to implement its mandate with the maximum chance of success, it is critical that MISCA be supported from the start in as comprehensive and predictable a manner as possible. In this report, options are presented for providing support to MISCA so that it can fill critical gaps identified jointly by the African Union, ECCAS and the United Nations. The provision of such support would contribute to the implementation of the highly ambitious but essential mandate of MISCA, including through its possible transformation into a United Nations peacekeeping operation. Should there be a precipitous deterioration in the situation in the Central African Republic, the United Nations could also respond on an emergency basis, once authorized by the Security Council, by drawing on assets and troops from neighbouring peacekeeping missions and by placing those assets and troops under the immediate command of my Special Representative for the Central African Republic and Head of BINUCA.

58. I am grateful to the countries and organizations that have already pledged support to MISCA, either through bilateral assistance to troop- and police-contributing countries or through direct support to the African Union. The United Nations stands ready to provide additional support, based on a decision of the Security Council. I urge Council members to consider these options quickly and to respond in a manner commensurate with the complexity of the crisis and the desperate protection needs of the population.

59. The way forward and the resolution of the crisis in the Central African Republic will depend on the commitment and concrete action of the national authorities and the international community to address not only the current consequences of the events of the past year, but also the root causes of the conflict. These have long been neglected. This will require close cooperation between all actors involved in the Central African Republic, including the countries of the region, subregional and regional organizations and the broader international community. The issues at stake will require a long-term investment, but one that would be minor compared with the risks for the population and the entire region of not acting now.