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## UN Secretary-General Urged to Protect Civilians in Central African Republic Ahead of his Visit and key UN Security Council vote

New York, 10 October 2017 – Today a group of non-governmental organisations welcomed the UN Secretary-General's efforts to address the dire situation in the Central African Republic (CAR). Representatives of the Centre for Civilians in Conflict (CIVIC), CEMUC (CAR Muslim Students Collective), Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect and Norwegian Refugee Council USA met with Antonio Guterres this morning at UN Headquarters in New York, ahead of his visit to CAR later this month. They presented a series of recommendations to strengthen the both UN peacekeeping mission in CAR and the humanitarian response, on behalf of a wider global coalition of NGOs, including International Rescue Committee, International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH) and Invisible Children.

The NGO coalition welcomed the Secretary-General's decision to make the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in CAR (MINUSCA) the first UN peacekeeping mission he visits since taking office. They also shared his assessment that with immediate and achievable steps, the performance of the Mission can be strengthened to better protect civilians and enable the delivery of vital humanitarian assistance.

**AbdoulAziz Sali, coordinator of CEMUC said:** "We shared with the Secretary-General information about the worsening situation in many parts of CAR, where armed groups are terrorising Muslim and Christian civilians. The UN Security Council can save lives in CAR if it increases the number and quality of peacekeepers. The Secretary-General can send a clear message that the competency of troops, and especially their good relations with civil society and the population, is a top priority. The Secretary-General can be a powerful advocate for ending bloodshed across CAR."

The situation in CAR has been deteriorating since late 2016 and well into 2017. Violent clashes between armed groups and targeted violence against civilians, as well as sexual violence towards women and girls, have taken place in Alindao, Bangassou, Batangafo, Bocaranga, Bria and Zemio. As a result, over half a million people have sought refuge in neighbouring states, and 600,000 have been displaced within the country.

**Simon Adams, executive director of the Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect said:** "Civilians in CAR face the daily threat of predatory armed groups. Now is the time for the international community to reinforce the UN peacekeeping mission and to prevent a return to the mass atrocities and political failures of the past."

Humanitarian workers and facilities have been directly targeted, with six local Central African Red Cross volunteers killed in Gambo, and attacks on the Danish Refugee Council's compound and MSF hospital in Batangafo resulting in numerous casualties.

**Joel Charny, director of Norwegian Refugee Council USA (NRC USA), said:** "The situation in CAR is on a knife-edge and the chance that violence will escalate is high. This is a test of the UN's prevention agenda: failure to act could have devastating and far-reaching results. The UN Secretary-General was open to our case, but the proof will be in how the UN Security Council votes next month when it comes time to renew MINUSCA's mandate."

MINUSCA's response to the threat against civilians in Bambari since the end of November 2016 has helped prevent hostilities and avert a large-scale humanitarian crisis. However, the mission's capacity is limited in comparison to the scale of the crisis and efforts are needed to improve the performance of some peacekeepers.

The UN Security Council will vote in early to mid-November on the renewal of MINUSCA's mandate, following recommendations made by the UN Secretary-General. The groups that met with Antonio Guterres and the coalition they represent, are asking him to explicitly recommend that the Security Council mandates additional uniformed and civilian personnel as well as resources to ensure MINUSCA can more effectively protect civilians from further violence.

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