

# An Exit Strategy for MINUSCA: Progress and Obstacles

Stimson Center and Better World Campaign, August 2017

This briefing note summarizes the findings of a research team from the Stimson Center and the Better World Campaign, which traveled to the Central African Republic (CAR) in May 2017 to review the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in CAR (MINUSCA). The briefing note focuses on MINUSCA's exit strategy – the mission's efforts now to lay the groundwork that will eventually allow it to draw down and hand over its responsibilities to CAR state authorities. It identifies recommendations from its trip and summarizes key issues related to protection of civilians, the restoration and extension of state authority, the disarmament, demobilization, reintegration, and repatriation of combatants, security sector reform, and the advancement of rule of law and the fight against impunity.



United Nations Department of Field Support, Geospatial Information Section, Map No. 4522 Rev. 9, June 2017.

## Recommendations

- Insecurity in CAR is becoming critical and MINUSCA's force is stretched thin, particularly after the withdrawal of US and Ugandan special forces from the southeast. The UN Security Council should increase the troop ceiling for MINUSCA when it renews the mission's mandate in November, and member states should prioritize provision of quick reaction forces and mobility-enhancing assets to improve rapid responses to attacks against civilians around the country. The US government should uphold its treaty obligations to fund the UN and ensure that MINUSCA has the resources needed to fulfil its mandate.
- Poor perceptions of MINUSCA among the Central African population are undermining the mission's ability to protect civilians and restore stability in CAR. MINUSCA should prioritize efforts to build trust among local communities.
- Efforts to extend state authority are undermined in part by rising intercommunal tensions, yet funding for MINUSCA's local reconciliation activities has been reduced. Funding should be provided for MINUSCA to scale up its reconciliation efforts.
- MINUSCA should work with the government of CAR to develop benchmarks that demonstrate progress towards improving the inclusivity and accountability of state security institutions, and make security sector assistance contingent on progress towards these benchmarks. The mission should also work to combat the FACA-centric mindset of the government and improve the population's perception of the police and gendarmeries.
- Little progress has been made on bringing to justice perpetrators of war crimes and atrocities committed during the 2012-3 violence. The US government and other partners in the international community should continue to support the Special Criminal Court to allow the country to move forward.
- MINUSCA should continue to transparently address sexual abuse and exploitation and hold troop-contributing countries accountable for misconduct, including by repatriating individuals and units.

## Background

CAR has been plagued by instability and military coups since its independence in 1960.<sup>1</sup> In December 2012, marginalized and predominantly Muslim populations in the northeast of the country united under the command of the Séléka militia and marched south, eventually capturing the capital Bangui and overthrowing then-President François Bozizé. In response, predominantly Christian communities took up arms in self-defense under a loose coalition known as the anti-balaka. In December 2013, amid warnings of potential genocide,<sup>2</sup> the UN Security Council authorized two mechanisms: an African-led mission (known as MISCA) to protect civilians and restore security and stability, and Operation Sangaris, a French force with 2,000 troops at its peak, to support MISCA.<sup>3</sup> In April 2014, the Security Council authorized a UN peacekeeping mission, MINUSCA, which replaced MISCA in September that year.<sup>4</sup> In October 2016, France announced the end of Operation Sangaris.<sup>5</sup>

With MINUSCA's support, important steps have been made toward sustainable peace in CAR. In May 2015, a national dialogue process known as the Bangui Forum resulted in a commitment by the government and armed groups on the disarmament, demobilization, reintegration, and repatriation (DDRR) of combatants.<sup>6</sup> In June 2015, the government established a Special Criminal Court to investigate and prosecute those responsible for war crimes and crimes against humanity.<sup>7</sup> In February 2016, free and fair elections led to a peaceful transition of power from interim transitional authorities to a legitimate elected government.<sup>8</sup> Stability been largely restored in the capital, Bangui, and to the southwest of the country.

However, much remains to be done to consolidate these gains before MINUSCA can leave. Violence against the civilian population remains high, creating mistrust in the political process and delaying the extension of state authority and the delivery of basic services. Political disagreements regarding reintegration eligibility and amnesty for armed group leaders have stalled progress on DDRR. The capacity of the state to exercise administrative, judicial, and security functions remains extremely weak. Reconciliation between communities and integration of Muslims into the civil service and the security sector to ensure their representativeness has lagged. If these agendas are not addressed before MINUSCA withdraws, there is a high risk that war will resume and the fragile state apparatus will lose control of the country.

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<sup>1</sup> Dhaneshwar Ghura and Benoît Mercereau, "Political Instability and Growth: The Central African Republic," International Monetary Fund Working Paper, WP/04/80, May 2004.

<sup>2</sup> Alexis Arieff, "Crisis in the Central African Republic," Congressional Research Service, May 14, 2014, 6.

<sup>3</sup> UN Security Council Resolution 2127, UN Doc. S/RES/2127, December 5, 2013, paras. 28 and 50; Agence France-Presse, "France To Halve Troops in C. African Republic," Defense News, June 4, 2015, <http://www.defensenews.com/home/2015/06/04/france-to-halve-troops-in-c-african-republic/>.

<sup>4</sup> UN Security Council Resolution 2149, UN Doc. S/RES/2149, April 10, 2014, paras 18 and 21.

<sup>5</sup> "France Ends Sangaris Military Operation in CAR," BBC News, October 31, 2016, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-37823047>.

<sup>6</sup> "RCA : Accord de Paix entre Dix Groupes Armés et le Gouvernement," Voice of America, May 11, 2015, <https://www.voafrique.com/a/centrafrique-dix-groupes-armes-signent-un-accord-de-paix/2762633.html>.

<sup>7</sup> International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH), "Central African Republic: Special Criminal Court Officially Created," June 10, 2015, <https://www.fidh.org/en/impacts/central-african-republic-special-criminal-court-officially-created>.

<sup>8</sup> "Central African Republic: Touadera Wins Election," Al Jazeera, February 21, 2016, <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2016/02/central-african-republic-touadera-wins-election-160221044730048.html>.

## Protection of Civilians

Violence against civilians is on the rise in CAR. Armed group activity, ethnic and religious violence, tensions over cattle migration, and criminality and extortion pose serious threats to civilians. Violence in May led to an estimated 300 deaths and 100,000 displaced – the worst displacement since the 2013 civil war.<sup>9</sup> These trends continued into June and July,<sup>10</sup> and the UN recently announced that early warning signs of genocide are present in the country.<sup>11</sup> One in five Central Africans is currently displaced,<sup>12</sup> and 31 percent of attacks against non-governmental organizations in 2016 took place in CAR, making it the most dangerous place in the world for humanitarian actors.<sup>13</sup> MINUSCA's response to threats against civilians has been integrated and increasingly robust. However, the mission is confronting growing violence against civilians that hinders progress towards sustainable peace.

### Threats to Civilians

**Armed group activity**, driven by both political and economic motivations, continues to threaten civilian security across the country. The Popular Front for the Central African Renaissance (FPRC), the Union for Peace in CAR (UPC), and anti-balaka elements have continued to clash in central and eastern CAR. In February, the FPRC attempted to dislodge the UPC from its stronghold in Bambari,<sup>14</sup> threatening the city's population of roughly 42,000,<sup>15</sup> and in June, fighting between FPRC and anti-balaka elements in Bria killed an estimated 100 people.<sup>16</sup> In Ouham and Ouham-Pendé prefectures in the west, clashes involving the Central African Patriotic Movement (MPC), Révolution et Justice (RJ), Return, Reclamation, Rehabilitation (3R), and anti-balaka elements have displaced thousands.<sup>17</sup>

Often this violence corresponds with **armed group efforts to control economically valuable areas**. Repeated FPRC attacks on Fulani communities in the east are driven in part by attempts to seize their resources and cattle.<sup>18</sup> Armed group violence has also centered around mining sites in the east and west of the country. In November, clashes broke out between the FPRC and the UPC in Bria over control of roads leading to

<sup>9</sup> "300 Dead in Central African Republic Militia Violence," Africa News, May 25, 2017.

<http://www.africanews.com/2017/05/25/300-dead-in-central-african-republic-militia-violence//>.

<sup>10</sup> "Violences en RCA: 15 Morts à Kaga-Bandoro," BBC, July 3, 2017, <http://www.bbc.com/afrique/region-40477094>;

Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect, Atrocities Alert No. 62, July 5, 2017.

<http://www.globalr2p.org/publications/500>; Paul-Marine Ngoupana, "At Least 22 Killed in Central African Republic

Clashes," Reuters, June 30, 2017, <https://www.usnews.com/news/world/articles/2017-06-30/at-least-22-people-killed-in-central-african-republic-clashes>;

U.N. Office for Humanitarian Affairs, "CAR: One Month Later, Bria Remains a Ghost City,"

July 7, 2017, <http://www.unocha.org/story/car-one-month-later-bria-remains-ghost-city>.

<sup>11</sup> "UN Sees Early Warning Signs of Genocide in CAR," Al Jazeera, August 8, 2017,

<http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2017/08/sees-early-warning-signs-genocide-car-170807215828039.html>.

<sup>12</sup> UN Security Council, "Report of the Secretary-General on the Central African Republic," UN Doc S/2017/473, June 2,

2017, para. 57 (hereafter UN Doc S/2017/473).

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, para. 59.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, para. 10.

<sup>15</sup> "UN Relief Official Urges Calm Amid Fears of Fresh Violence in Central African Republic Town," UN News Centre,

January 25, 2017, <http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=56038#.WUqQAzIrdV>.

<sup>16</sup> "100 Said Killed as Christian Militia, Muslim Rebels Clash," CBS News, June 21, 2017,

<http://www.cbsnews.com/news/central-african-republic-christian-anti-balaka-militia-seleka-muslim-rebels/>.

<sup>17</sup> UN Security Council, "Report of the Secretary-General on the Central African Republic," UN Doc S/2017/94, February 1,

2017, para. 15; UN Doc S/2017/473, para. 18.

<sup>18</sup> UN Doc S/2017/473, para. 3.

diamond mines around Kalaga. The fighting left at least 14 civilians dead, 76 civilians wounded, and displaced up to 10,000 people.<sup>19</sup>

**Ethnic and religious tensions** drive much of the violence in CAR, and many analysts are concerned that these tensions have recently worsened. In particular, some believe that anti-Fulani sentiment is growing and being manipulated by both Christian and Muslim armed group leaders. Fulani communities have been targeted for their perceived affiliation with the Fulani-dominated UPC.<sup>20</sup> Anti-Fulani rhetoric is widespread and reminiscent of the situation in 2014, when negative discourse against Chadian Muslims led to the targeting of the Muslim community as a whole.<sup>21</sup> In the west, the 3R armed group formed as a self-defense force protecting Fulani communities from anti-balaka violence, and also committed violence against civilians. Tensions between Christian and Muslim populations also persist. Attacks by anti-balaka elements in Bakouma in March primarily targeted Muslims,<sup>22</sup> and in May, suspected anti-balaka elements attacked a predominantly Muslim neighborhood in Bangassou, killing at least 115 people and displacing thousands.<sup>23</sup> Reprisal attacks by Arab elements in Bria against the anti-balaka killed 49 and displaced over 38,000.<sup>24</sup>

Tensions related to the **seasonal migration of cattle** also pose a serious threat. In the northwest, armed group efforts to control livestock drive insecurity, ethnic tensions, and retaliatory attacks.<sup>25</sup> For example, anti-balaka groups controlled by the Ndalé brothers have stolen cattle from Fulani communities during attacks that have also involved killings, kidnappings, and sexual abuse.<sup>26</sup> Members of the 3R group attacked civilians perceived to be supporters of the Ndalé brothers in Bocaranga in February and in Niem in May.<sup>27</sup>

**Criminal violence and extortion** also impact civilians throughout the country, even in areas where active armed group violence has diminished. Although Bangui remains relatively calm, armed gangs in the PK5 neighborhood loot shops and exact illegal taxes and fees from vendors with impunity. In the town of Kaga Bandoro, ex-Séléka and anti-balaka elements extort and threaten some 9,000 internally displaced persons living around the MINUSCA base.<sup>28</sup> In areas where armed groups have established parallel administrations, armed elements illegally detain, sentence, and extort payments from persons accused of committing crimes.<sup>29</sup>

In addition to these current threats, there is a risk of **rising violence in the southeast** of the country. In April, both U.S. and Ugandan forces that had been deployed to combat

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<sup>19</sup> "Central African Republic: People with Disabilities at High Risk," Human Rights Watch, June 21, 2017, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2017/06/21/central-african-republic-people-disabilities-high-risk>.

<sup>20</sup> UN Doc S/2017/473, para. 3.

<sup>21</sup> Romain Esmenjaud, Melanie De Groof, Luis Benavides, Ilyas Oussedik, and Paul-Simon Handy, Letter Dated 26 July 2017 from the Panel of Experts on the Central African Republic Extended Pursuant to Security Council Resolution 2339 (2017) Addressed to the President of the Security Council, UN Doc S/2017/639, July 26, 2017 (hereafter "UN Doc S/2017/639"), para. 63.

<sup>22</sup> UN Doc S/2017/473, para. 12.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, para. 14.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, paras. 3 and 14.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, para. 18.

<sup>26</sup> UN Doc S/2017/639, para. 119.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>28</sup> UN Doc S/2017/473, para. 15.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, para 16.

the Lord's Resistance Army and capture Joseph Kony began to withdraw from the area.<sup>30</sup> Ugandan withdrawal completed May 18 and the US drawdown process is due to conclude in September,<sup>31</sup> leaving a new security vacuum that ex-Séléka elements are likely to fill. For now, MINUSCA plans to cover the gap by redeploying a Moroccan battalion to the Obo area, stretching the mission's force even thinner on the ground.

## MINUSCA's Efforts to Protect Civilians

In recent months, MINUSCA has demonstrated a more robust and integrated approach to civilian protection. Learning from previous violent incidents, notably the attacks in Bria in the fall of 2016, MINUSCA's civilian and military components collaborated to prevent civilian casualties in Bambari in February. The force established a "red line" outside Bambari and warned the FPRC not to cross it. When the FPRC advanced, MINUSCA's Portuguese rapid response unit deployed attack helicopters to enforce that red line. Meanwhile, the mission negotiated the peaceful departure of Ali Darassa, leader of the UPC, from Bambari, allowing the CAR government to assume control of the town. In the west, MINUSCA established a buffer zone in March to halt clashes between anti-balaka and MPC fighters in Ouham-Pendé prefecture.<sup>32</sup>

MINUSCA's protection efforts have become increasingly forward-looking and mobile. The mission has improved its ability to anticipate likely scenarios that might threaten civilians and conducted contingency planning exercises for Bambari and Bangassou.<sup>33</sup> The force has been using transport and attack helicopters to increase mobility – in March, a platoon was rapidly airlifted from Bangui to protect civilians under threat 850km away in Bakouma.<sup>34</sup>

However, the mission's protection resources are stretched thinly over a country roughly the size of France. Some personnel observed that while the mission concentrates its efforts on stabilizing Bambari and responding to growing violence around Bria and Bangassou, violent clashes that continue to threaten civilians in other areas go unaddressed. Moreover, MINUSCA's efforts to remove threats to civilians in Bambari have led to the migration of those threats to other areas. For example, when MINUSCA negotiated the departure of Ali Darassa from Bambari, Darassa and his followers relocated south and east and continued to conduct human rights violations and exact illegal taxes from the population. These dynamics have created a perception among the population that MINUSCA is biased, and have sparked false but widespread rumors that the mission is actively supporting armed groups. Poor public perceptions of MINUSCA have seriously undermined the mission's ability to protect civilians across the country.

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<sup>30</sup> "Uganda troops announce withdrawal from the CAR," Africa News, April 16, 2017, <http://www.africanews.com/2017/04/16/uganda-troops-announce-withdrawal-from-the-car/>; Ryan Browne, "US military ending role in hunt for elusive African warlord Joseph Kony," CNN, May 2, 2017, <http://www.cnn.com/2017/05/02/politics/us-military-quits-hunt-joseph-kony/index.html>.

<sup>31</sup> UN Doc S/2017/473, para. 17; Ryan Browne, "US Military Ending Role in Hunt for Elusive African Warlord Joseph Kony," CNN, May 2, 2017, <http://www.cnn.com/2017/05/02/politics/us-military-quits-hunt-joseph-kony/index.html>.

<sup>32</sup> UN Doc S/2017/473, para. 18.

<sup>33</sup> Interview with MINUSCA Representative, May 15, 2017, Bangui, Central African Republic.

<sup>34</sup> UN Doc S/2017/473, para. 24.

MINUSCA's operations have become riskier as armed groups and civilians grow increasingly resentful and hostile toward the mission. In 2017, MINUSCA has suffered more peacekeeper fatalities from malicious acts than any other UN peacekeeping mission worldwide.<sup>35</sup> Attacks against the mission further undermine MINUSCA's ability to protect civilians. During an attack by anti-balaka in Bangassou in May, peacekeepers who were protecting Muslim IDPs in a Catholic Church returned to repel violence against MINUSCA's base, leaving the Muslim community there without protection.<sup>36</sup>

MINUSCA's work to protect civilians from violence is a moral imperative, but it is also vital for the broader effort to bring stability to CAR. Violence perpetrated along ethnic or religious lines perpetuates grievances, mistrust, and cycles of revenge. This in turn prevents CAR from reaching critical milestones necessary for the mission's exit, such as an agreement on DDDR and the formation of a representative and accountable security sector. Continued violence and insecurity also interrupts people's regular livelihoods, prolonging a humanitarian crisis, and prevents state authorities from taking up posts in many parts of the country, creating dangerous vacuums in formal governance, as discussed in the next section. Finally, when the mission fails to prevent violence against civilians, it loses credibility and legitimacy, undermining its ability to facilitate a political settlement to the conflict.

## Restoration and Extension of State Authority

Central African state authority outside of Bangui is weak or absent. MINUSCA has prioritized the restoration and extension of state authority in CAR, viewing this as a crucial step in its eventual exit: if MINUSCA leaves before at least a minimal legitimate state presence is established in the country, CAR may find itself facing the same type of governance vacuum that partially caused the 2012-3 crisis. However, the mission's efforts are undermined by the

## Sexual Exploitation and Abuse

MINUSCA's efforts have been tarnished and undermined by sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA) of the population by peacekeepers. The UN Security Council and the mission have taken several important steps to ensure accountability for those responsible, justice for victims, and the prevention of future violations of the UN's zero-tolerance policy. The mission's former Special Representative to the Secretary-General was dismissed in response to SEA allegations against the mission, and in 2016, the complete repatriation of all troops from the Democratic Republic of Congo marked the first time an entire country's troops were repatriated in response to allegations of SEA.

Instances of SEA in CAR catalyzed reform initiatives within the mission and the UN system. The new UN Secretary-General has made the issue a clear priority by establishing a high-level task force to develop a strategy to achieve visible and measurable improvement in the UN's approach to preventing and responding to SEA.

At the mission level, MINUSCA's Conduct and Discipline Team has increased trainings for both uniformed and civilian personnel. Allegations of SEA by MINUSCA soldiers have declined significantly. There were seven accusations of SEA against MINUSCA peacekeepers in the first half of 2017, compared to 53 allegations in 2016. MINUSCA is also working with UN agencies to sensitize victims on their rights and avenues for reporting allegations, and to provide medical and psychological services.

<sup>35</sup> UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations, *Fatalities by Year, Mission, and Incident Type*, [http://www.un.org/en/peacekeeping/fatalities/documents/stats\\_5amay.pdf](http://www.un.org/en/peacekeeping/fatalities/documents/stats_5amay.pdf).

<sup>36</sup> UN Doc S/2017/639, para. 87.

volatile security situation, parallel administrations installed by armed groups, bias or misconduct on the part of state authorities, and deep social cleavages.

## Bambari: A Stabilization Priority

Bambari is one of the largest population centers in CAR. In February this year, the FPRC faction of the ex-Séléka advanced toward Bambari in an attempt to wrest control of the town from the UPC. MINUSCA anticipated that clashes between the two groups would cause high numbers of civilian casualties. The mission used force to repel the FPRC advance, and gave Ali Darassa, leader of the UPC, 48 hours to leave Bambari peacefully. Since then, it has embarked on a comprehensive project to restore stability and state authority to the town.

The mission's Bambari strategy involves four phases: 1) the restoration of core state functions (public administrators, security forces, and justice actors); 2) the restoration of social services (health, education, electricity, water, and sanitation); 3) the revitalization of socio-economic activities; and 4) reconciliation and the return of displaced persons.

MINUSCA has applied an integrated approach to its efforts in Bambari, incorporating input and funding from all sections of the mission and the UN country team. The mission has also worked closely with local leaders and community representatives to ensure the process is locally-owned. If the strategy is successful in Bambari, the mission is considering replicating it in other population centers. However, the gains made remain fragile, and the central government has delayed in providing a list of state authorities to be deployed to Bambari.

If its efforts in Bambari are successful, the mission is considering whether it can scale up or replicate its approach. The UN developed ad hoc mechanisms to coordinate different UN actors in Bambari, and mobilized short-term emergency funding from various partners. These structures were relatively limited and localized in scope, and some UN personnel expressed skepticism that donors would maintain their commitment to extend the approach to other parts of the country.

## Gaps and Challenges

The volatile security situation continues to hinder MINUSCA's efforts to extend state authority. Members of parliament are reluctant to visit their constituencies and judicial authorities fear redeployment outside the capital.<sup>37</sup> The prefect in Kaga Bandoro, a city in northern CAR, was absent for months after he was kidnapped twice and one of his aides was killed in October.<sup>38</sup> Banking services are also unavailable in many areas outside the capital, forcing local administrators to return to Bangui on a regular basis to receive their salaries.

Adding further to the challenge, state authorities themselves sometimes undermine peace and social cohesion. For example, the mayor and sub-prefect in Kaga Bandoro give preferential treatment to the town's Christian population including anti-balaka

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<sup>37</sup> International Legal Assistance Consortium, "ILAC Rapport d'évaluation de l'état de droit: République Centrafricaine 2017," 2017, 33 (hereafter "ILAC Rapport").

<sup>38</sup> Interview with MINUSCA representative, May 11, 2017, Kaga Bandoro, Central African Republic.

elements, while neglecting the needs of Muslim communities. The population also mistrusts the police and gendarmerie, which have engaged in racketeering and harassment.

MINUSCA has been undertaking important local-level efforts to encourage reconciliation and social cohesion among communities, including through supporting local peace committees and facilitating local dialogue. However, funding for these initiatives has been reduced at a time when inter-ethnic and inter-religious violence is reaching a crisis point. Unless these societal cleavages are addressed, efforts to extend state authority and build the formal capacity of the state are unlikely to be effective or sustainable. Local reconciliation efforts are vitally important to prevent a deterioration in security and provide a firm foundation for the extension of state authority.

## Disarmament, Demobilization, Reintegration, and Repatriation

With armed groups continuing to control significant swaths of the Central African territory and challenge state authority, DDRR is a critical step towards the stabilization of the country and MINUSCA's eventual exit. The country's 14 major recognized armed groups agreed to collaborate with the government to develop an agreement on DDRR at the Bangui Forum in May 2015. However, little progress has been made toward finalizing and implementing a DDRR agreement. This is due to political disagreement among the conflict parties regarding eligibility requirements and reintegration assurances, as well as immunity for armed group leaders. MINUSCA continues to encourage parties to develop a consensus on the implementation of DDRR, and has developed and implemented some stopgap measures to keep the armed groups invested in the process and deter violence in the absence of a DDRR agreement.

### Consultative Committee

To facilitate an end to the political stalemate, MINUSCA is supporting the government's Consultative Follow-up Committee on DDRR. This committee, envisaged at the November 2016 Brussels Pledging Conference, convenes armed groups on a regular basis to continue the dialogue on implementing DDRR. MINUSCA provides transportation to armed group leaders to participate in this dialogue. The committee has met five times,<sup>39</sup> with the fourth meeting in April convening all 14 armed groups for the first time.<sup>40</sup> While armed groups recently agreed to participate in a "mixed DDR company"<sup>41</sup> pilot project targeting 560 participants from all 14 groups, political deadlock persists surrounding the validation of the national DDRR program.<sup>42</sup> The inability of conflict parties to adhere to past ceasefire agreements has eroded trust among the armed groups, delaying and undermining progress on reaching a consensus regarding DDRR.

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<sup>39</sup> UN Doc S/2017/639, para. 19.

<sup>40</sup> UN Doc S/2017/473, para. 2.

<sup>41</sup> UN Doc S/2017/639, para. 26.

<sup>42</sup> UN Doc S/2017/473, para. 41.

## Pre-DDRR and Community Violence Reduction

In the meantime, MINUSCA has developed a pre-DDRR program as a stopgap measure. Pre-DDRR began in 2015 as cash-for-work activities to occupy combatants during the elections and until the DDRR process was finalized. The mission's attitude has since shifted away from a short-term model towards a longer-term approach. Beneficiaries now receive livelihoods training in trades like construction, veterinary skills, and agriculture. In addition, the program helps former fighters invest in their communities by building businesses and rebuilding government offices and structures, including houses that were destroyed during the 2012-3 violence. A total of 4,324 ex-combatants, including 737 women, are currently participating in MINUSCA's pre-DDRR programs in eight locations, with a ninth in progress.<sup>43</sup>

As a complement, MINUSCA is also simultaneously implementing Community Violence Reduction (CVR) programs. CVR activities target armed fighters and other vulnerable community members who will likely not qualify for DDRR. This includes armed self-defense fighters not operating under a command and control structure, as well as other vulnerable populations who have assisted armed fighters or are at risk of being recruited or contributing to an atmosphere of instability. CVR projects in Bangui and in Ouham-Pendé provinces have served over 8,000 beneficiaries,<sup>44</sup> although the mission estimates that between 40,000 and 50,000 people are eligible for CVR throughout the country.

MINUSCA's pre-DDRR and CVR programs prioritize local ownership by involving host communities in decision-making. For example, in Kaga Bandoro, pre-DDRR beneficiaries develop proposals for the type of skills and training they wish to learn, which are reviewed for viability by local leaders and civil society groups. MINUSCA's DDRR activities also facilitate trust-building between the mission and armed groups, which provides an avenue for conflict prevention.

Although this stopgap measure has given many armed group members an incentive not to resume violence, patience regarding the official implementation of DDRR is wearing thin. There is an urgency for the government to define DDRR eligibility requirements and formalize the DDRR process so that MINUSCA can move forward with its disarmament and demobilization work.

## Security Sector Reform

A critical part of MINUSCA's exit strategy is ensuring that the CAR security sector is capable of managing the country's security without international assistance, but at present the capacity of the CAR security sector is very weak. MINUSCA worked with the CAR government to develop and implement a nationally-owned security sector reform (SSR) strategy, which was finally adopted in March. MINUSCA has been collaborating

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<sup>43</sup> UN Doc S/2017/473, para. 42; Interview with MINUSCA representative, May 10, 2017, Bangui, Central African Republic.

<sup>44</sup> UN Doc S/2017/473, para. 43.

with the European Union (EU), bilateral partners, and the UN Development Program (UNDP) to build the capacity of CAR's security forces.<sup>45</sup>

The EU has focused its efforts on the military (the Forces Armées Centrafricaines, or FACA). The US, France, and China are contributing bilateral support to equip the FACA, and the mission estimates that the first capable FACA troops will be operational before the end of year. MINUSCA has been working to develop a vetting procedure for security forces to combat human rights violations by the FACA.<sup>46</sup> Additionally, the mission is working with the Minister of Finance to operationalize a process of identification for the military to reduce corruption and mismanagement of funds.

MINUSCA is also working to build the capacity of the internal security forces, helping the government to recruit and vet new police officers and coordinating with the Peacebuilding Fund and UNDP to cover costs of police and gendarmerie academies.<sup>47</sup> UNPOL included in its 2017-8 budget five civilian specialist advisors to assist in reforming the police and gendarmerie. UNDP has been working to rehabilitate police stations throughout the country.

Despite this work, SSR progress faces several challenges. Very little has been done to operationalize and implement the national SSR strategy. The government and the population maintain a "FACA-centric mindset" and the military-to-internal-security-force ratio is concerning: there are approximately 8,000 FACA, but fewer than 3,000 gendarmes and 2,000 police officers.<sup>48</sup> The government has expressed its intention to reintegrate former combatants from the DDR process into the FACA as well, which would only exacerbate this imbalance. Moreover, government officials have demonstrated a reluctance to prioritize inclusivity, particularly of Muslims, in the reform of the security sector. An ethnically and religiously unrepresentative FACA may be more prone to abuses and is unlikely to inspire the trust of the population, which would encourage some communities to rely on self-defense militias or armed groups for their security instead.

## Rule of Law and Combatting Impunity

MINUSCA's final strategic objective is to provide assistance to advance rule of law institutions and combat impunity. This work is important to address grievances that could provoke a recurrence of violence. MINUSCA has pursued this objective by supporting the Special Criminal Court (SCC) and using the powers granted under its "urgent temporary measures (UTMs)" mandate to maintain basic law and order and fight impunity. However, these efforts have been undermined by slow progress on the part of the government, the mission's capacity constraints and risk aversion, and the inadequate state of CAR's judicial institutions. To capitalize on MINUSCA's efforts to advance the rule of law and fight against impunity, and ensure gains are cemented upon the drawdown of the mission, the CAR government and external partners will

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<sup>45</sup> UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic, *Security Sector Reform*, accessed July 31, 2017, <https://minusca.unmissions.org/en/security-sector-reform>.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> UN Doc S/2017/473, para. 48.

<sup>48</sup> UN Security Council, 7901<sup>st</sup> Meeting, UN Doc S/PV.7901, March 16, 2017, 3; ILAC Rapport, 23.

need to complement the mission's work by building the capacity and accountability of the nation's judicial institutions.

## Special Criminal Court

In June 2015, the transitional government established the SCC to investigate and prosecute those responsible for war crimes and crimes against humanity committed in the country since 2003.<sup>49</sup> MINUSCA has supported the CAR government in allocating a building to house the SCC, adopting the necessary decrees and establishing the necessary committees to move forward with its implementation, and raising funds.<sup>50</sup> MINUSCA's Human Rights Division also recently released a report documenting human rights abuses in the country since 2003 to support the work of the court's Special Prosecutor.<sup>51</sup> However, progress remains slow. The Special Prosecutor arrived in Bangui in May, nearly two years into its five-year mandate.<sup>52</sup> CAR authorities have yet to select judicial police officers to serve on the team of investigators, and only three of the six international judges have been appointed.<sup>53</sup>

## Urgent Temporary Measures

MINUSCA is authorized to conduct arrests and detentions to maintain basic law and order and fight impunity, especially of those engaging in or providing support for acts that undermine the peace, stability or security of CAR.<sup>54</sup> However, capacity constraints, concerns over collateral damage, and risk aversion have meant that the mission has made limited use of this power. Two attempts to detain high-profile criminals resulted in civilian casualties and criticism of the mission by human rights groups.<sup>55</sup> Conversely, some mission personnel and outside groups criticized the mission's decision not to conduct arrests when high-profile ex-Séléka members gathered in October 2016 in the town of Bria.<sup>56</sup> Critics noted that the armed group leaders were violating the mission's designation of Bria as a weapons-free zone, and the decision not to conduct arrests undermined the mission's credibility as well as being a missed opportunity to weaken

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<sup>49</sup> International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH), "Central African Republic: Special Criminal Court Officially Created," June 10, 2015, <https://www.fidh.org/en/impacts/central-african-republic-special-criminal-court-officially-created>.

<sup>50</sup> Amnesty International, "The Long Wait for Justice: Accountability in Central African Republic," 2017 (hereafter Amnesty International, "The Long Wait for Justice,") 38.

<sup>51</sup> Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, "Report of the Mapping Project Documenting Serious Violations of International Human Rights Law and International Humanitarian Law Committed within the Territory of the Central African Republic between January 2003 and December 2015," May 2017.

<sup>52</sup> "CAR's Special Criminal Court Prosecutor in Bangui to Take Office," APA News, May 26, 2017, <http://apanews.net/en/news/cars-special-criminal-court-prosecutor-in-bangui-to-take-office>; U.N. Doc. S/2017/473, para. 49.

<sup>53</sup> UN Doc S/2017/473, para. 49.

<sup>54</sup> UN Security Council Resolution 2301, UN Doc S/RES/2301, July 26, 2016, para. 34(d)(i-ii).

<sup>55</sup> While conducting an arrest operation in PK5 in August 2015, MINUSCA peacekeepers accused of raping a 12-year-old girl and of shooting indiscriminately throughout a civilian neighborhood, killing two civilians. These allegations were later found to be false by an internal review. One peacekeeper was killed and nine were wounded in the operation (Amnesty International, "CAR: UN Troops Implicated in Rape of Girl and Indiscriminate Killings Must Be Investigated," August 11, 2015, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2015/08/car-un-troops-implicated-in-rape-of-girl-and-indiscriminate-killings-must-be-investigated/>; Interview with MINUSCA Representative, May 15, 2015, Bangui, Central African Republic). In February 2017, MINUSCA's mission to arrest Youssouf Malinga, a warlord operating in PK5, yielded an exchange of fire that led to the deaths of two civilians and reprisal attacks by Malinga's men that killed 11 people ("Militia Chief Among Five Killed in Central Africa Clash," *Daily Nation*, February 9, 2017, <http://mobile.nation.co.ke/news/africa/Militia-chief-among-5-killed-in-C-Africa/3126394-3805784-l8qwt0/index.html>; UN Doc S/2017/473, para. 19).

<sup>56</sup> Center for Civilians in Conflict, "The Primacy of Protection: Delivering on the MINUSCA Mandate in the Central African Republic," 2017, 33.

the armed groups. Proponents of the decision argue that any operation in Bria would have risked causing high levels of civilian casualties.

Moreover, without a functioning judicial system in place to hold these criminals accountable, the contribution of these arrests towards achieving justice is limited. The capacity of CAR's judicial institutions is severely deficient. The country currently has just 182 judges, of whom only around ten are women.<sup>57</sup> Judicial personnel are hesitant to leave the capital due to security threats – 150 of CAR's 182 judges are in Bangui.<sup>58</sup> Victims and witnesses also fear retaliation and are hesitant to testify in court cases in the absence of any legal protective framework.<sup>59</sup> Many of CAR's judicial buildings were destroyed during the conflict or remain occupied by armed groups.<sup>60</sup>

MINUSCA's inability or unwillingness to arrest key war criminals and armed group leaders has eroded the population's trust in the mission, undermining other objectives. Armed groups, free from fear of being held accountable, continue to operate with impunity throughout the country, threatening civilians and challenging state authority. Furthermore, many Central Africans believe wrongly that the mission is actively supporting armed groups. Armed groups manipulate mistrust of MINUSCA to mobilize youth against the mission, which has increased the risk and cost of operations.

## Conclusion

MINUSCA's efforts in CAR are critical to maintaining stability in the country and the region and enabling legitimate and effective governance. As concerns grow about rising insecurity and possible genocide, MINUSCA should focus on protecting civilians from violence, facilitating local reconciliation, rectifying its poor perception among Central Africans, and encouraging the government and armed groups to implement their Bangui Forum commitments in order to pave the way for the mission's eventual drawdown. The UN Security Council and member states should provide sustained political and financial support for MINUSCA and the CAR government to prevent the country from slipping back into conflict and protect the important gains made.

## About This Briefing Note

This briefing note is based on research conducted from May 9-19, 2017, by the Stimson Center and the Better World Campaign. The research team (Aditi Gorur, Madeline Vellturo, Chandrima Das, and Micah Spangler) met with over 50 representatives of different sections within MINUSCA, UN agencies, non-governmental organizations, and Central African civil society to discuss challenges and the way forward for MINUSCA. For more information, please contact Aditi Gorur ([agorur@stimson.org](mailto:agorur@stimson.org)) or Chandrima Das ([cdas@betterworldcampaign.org](mailto:cdas@betterworldcampaign.org)). The research team would like to express its gratitude to MINUSCA and to Search for Common Ground for their logistical support to facilitate the team's research. The team is grateful to the many people who took time out of their busy schedules to meet with them and participate in an open and honest discussion.

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<sup>57</sup> ILAC Rapport, 23.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> Amnesty International, "The Long Wait for Justice," 26.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 28 and 30.