

Joint statement on MINUSCA mandate renewal

The International Non-Governmental Organizations' Coordination Committee (CCO), composed of 50 INGOs operating in the Central African Republic (CAR) welcomes the renewal of the mandate of the Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in CAR (MINUSCA) on 12 November 2020.¹

We, CCO members, representatives of INGO signatories, would like to take the opportunity of the new Security Council resolution to thank both the Security Council members and MINUSCA leadership for taking into account the humanitarian community's main concerns.

While there are commitments and willingness to tackle causes of the current situation, it remains overall unchanged over the last year. Hence, we welcome the new Security Council resolution, retaining the protection of civilians as a priority for the MINUSCA. This prioritization stems from the recognition that the Mission continues to be the primary actor capable of protecting Central African civilians.

Despite the 2019 signing of the peace agreement and recent progress toward holding national elections, civilians in CAR continue to face serious humanitarian and security challenges. The humanitarian situation in the country remains dire. 2.6 million people - more than half of the population - require humanitarian assistance and protection, while some 41% are facing acute food insecurity². Approximately 620,000 Central Africans continue to seek refuge outside the country, while 659,000 people are internally displaced. Furthermore, the COVID-19 pandemic and the measures taken in response have increased existing vulnerabilities. Amid these challenges, the continued attacks against humanitarian workers undermine both access and response capacities.

We also acknowledge the fact that the new resolution underlines the need to address these concerns. However, we encourage MINUSCA to continue strengthening its support to ensuring humanitarian access and security through a variety of strategies beyond the provision of escorts. We recall that escorts are still not considered an acceptable option by INGOs in CAR except in "life-saving" circumstances (either for vulnerable populations or humanitarian personnel).

¹ [http://undocs.org/fr/S/RES/2552\(2020\)](http://undocs.org/fr/S/RES/2552(2020)) .

² <http://www.ipcinfo.org/ipc-country-analysis/details-map/en/c/1152894/?iso3=CAF>

Looking ahead, we recognize that the elections are an important step for a peaceful resolution of the conflict in CAR. At the same time, focusing the limited personnel and equipment capacities of MINUSCA on securing the elections will automatically reduce capacities to protect civilians, particularly outside of the capital, against other risks. Based on the experience of voter registration, civilians have been harassed and targeted on a daily basis. The voting phase is due to coincide with the dry season and cyclic trends of increased protection threats linked to transhumance activities and/or exploitation of mining sites. For this reason, we are particularly worried for civilians living in hard-to-reach areas.

Against this background, we strongly encourage MINUSCA to pre-emptively identify hotspots and prepare to mitigate context-related risks to civilians in different areas.

Moreover – and in light of the experience of recent violent events in several locations, including Batangafo – we urge the Mission to proactively respond to episodes of violence and to implement contingency plans, in close consultation with communities and humanitarian actors.

To this end, we encourage MINUSCA to strengthen forward-looking planning to ensure operational capacity for rapid intervention both to prevent and respond to risks accordingly. These steps are critical to ensuring that MINUSCA is prepared and willing to continue to protect civilians.

The CCO advocates that MINUSCA Leadership:

- Continue to prioritize resources to protect civilians given ongoing threats and instability;
- Identify and anticipate tensions and violence that the upcoming elections could catalyze and increase efforts in integrated operational planning to ensure the Mission dedicates the capacity and personnel needed to identify, address and rapidly respond to threats;
- Intensify efforts to facilitate the creation of safe conditions for independent, impartial, and unhindered humanitarian access for the delivery of humanitarian assistance, and to ensure respect and protection to humanitarian personnel, equipment and installations by all parties;
- Ensure that the Mission requests the resources and capacity it needs to implement its full mandate in addition to securing the elections;
- Ensure rational and transparent use of resources and capacities, adapting intervention modalities to strengthen community outreach and engagement, including with women’s and youth groups, and increase strategic communications, to develop and monitor effective protection strategies;

- Continue the implementation of recommendations of independent investigations to ensure the full accountability of MINUSCA military and civilian personnel as a way to strengthen the Mission's performance on protection of civilians;
- Ensure that MINUSCA is taking steps to mitigate harm to civilians that could result from the Mission's presence, operations, and activities, including those conducted in support of host state security forces, and urge all armed actors to contain potential elections-related disorders without using excessive force or harming civilians;
- Increase the Mission's capacity and commitment to proactively document and record the impacts of the conflict on civilians in order to ensure regular public reporting on violations of international humanitarian and human rights law;
- Continue investing in high level Civil-Military coordination with humanitarian actors, especially on protection of civilians and access issues, facilitating coexistence and mutual understanding.

We stand ready to support efforts to enhance the protection of civilians in CAR and we will continue to support the coordination of efforts to respond and address the longstanding protection crisis affecting Central Africans.

INGO Signatories:

ACTED, Afrique Secours et Assistance (ASA), Catholic Organisation for Relief and Development Aid (CORDAID), Center for Civilians in Conflict (CIVIC), CONCERN Worldwide, Concordis International, Dan Church Aid (DCA), Danish Refugee Council (DRC), Fondation Suisse de Déminage (FSD), Invisible Children (IC), International Medical Corps (IMC), International Rescue Committee (IRC), Médecins du Monde (MDM), Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC), OXFAM, PLAN International, Première Urgence Internationale (PUI), Solidarités International (SI), SOS Village d'Enfants République Centrafricaine (SOS-VDE), Welthungerhilfe (WHH), World Vision International (WVI).

