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The situation in Central Africa and the activities of the United Nations Regional Office for Central Africa

Report of the Secretary-General

I. Introduction

1. The present report is submitted pursuant to the statement of the President of the Security Council dated 10 August 2018 ([S/PRST/2018/17](#)), in which the Council requested the Secretary-General to keep it informed about the activities of the United Nations Regional Office for Central Africa (UNOCA). It provides an assessment of the major political and security trends in Central Africa since the report dated 29 May 2020 ([S/2020/463](#)), and an update on progress in the implementation of the mandate of UNOCA, as adjusted following the strategic review of UNOCA, the conclusions of which had been welcomed by the Council in the statement of its President dated 12 September 2019 ([S/PRST/2019/10](#)). The report also provides an update on the situation in the Lake Chad basin region, pursuant to Council resolution [2349 \(2017\)](#).

II. Major developments in the Central Africa subregion

A. Political, peace and security developments and trends

2. Political developments in the subregion remained framed by the electoral cycles taking place in 2020 and 2021 in 8 of the 11 Central African countries and the multidimensional impact of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic. The pandemic placed considerable constraints on electoral preparations and funding, while political tensions surfaced in several countries entering elections. Despite the Secretary-General's appeal for a global ceasefire to focus on fighting the pandemic, violent extremism and activity by armed groups in the region continued unabated.

3. The COVID-19 caseload continued to increase slowly but steadily across Central Africa, with countries seeking to balance COVID-19 mitigation measures with the need to foster economic recovery. On 30 July, the Heads of State and Government of the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS) adopted the COVID-19 regional response strategy for Central Africa.

4. The subregion advanced with the ECCAS institutional reform agenda under the chairpersonship of Gabon. A milestone was achieved with the installation of the new ECCAS regional peace and security architecture at the seventeenth ordinary session of the Conference of ECCAS Heads of State and Government, held virtually on 30 July.



The establishment of the new ECCAS Commission was endorsed on that occasion. The new ECCAS treaty entered into force on 28 August and the new Commission was sworn in on 1 September by the President of Gabon, Ali Bongo Ondimba, who is scheduled to hand over the chairpersonship of ECCAS to the President of the Congo, Denis Sassou Nguesso, at the end of November. From 13 to 16 October, the new President of the ECCAS Commission, Gilberto Da Piedade Veríssimo of Angola, led a strategic retreat of the Commission to define its peace and security priorities.

Political developments and trends

5. The political landscape in Central Africa was shaped by steps taken by countries to strengthen their response to COVID-19, enhance their bilateral relations and prepare for elections. Equatorial Guinea, Sao Tome and Principe, Gabon and Chad reshuffled their Governments. Electoral preparations were under way in Cameroon, Chad, the Central African Republic and the Congo.

6. Progress continued to be made towards improved relations among the countries of the subregion. On 7 October, the Presidents of Angola, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Rwanda and Uganda attended a virtual mini-summit on the Great Lakes region, organized by the Democratic Republic of the Congo. In the final communiqué, they undertook to eradicate armed groups and strengthen existing mechanisms to eliminate their sources of financing, fight criminal networks, establish a COVID-19 cross-border plan to enhance surveillance and control measures, and explore further regional economic opportunities.

7. On 20 October, the Ministers for Foreign Affairs of Burundi and Rwanda expressed a willingness to normalize their bilateral relations during a meeting held at their shared border. On 5 October, the Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Democratic Republic of the Congo met with her Burundian counterpart in Bujumbura, where they agreed to establish a framework to facilitate the exchange of information and to initiate regular military and police peer meetings. On 18 September, in Brazzaville, the Governments of the Congo and the Central African Republic reviewed progress in the implementation of their bilateral agreements signed during the fifth session of the joint bilateral commission, held on 5 August 2019. In June, also in Brazzaville, Mr. Sassou Nguesso met with the former President of the Central African Republic, François Bozizé, and the former President of the Central African National Assembly, Karim Meckassoua, as part of efforts to advance political dialogue in the Central African Republic. On 7 November, the President of Burundi, Evariste Ndayishimiye, concluded a five-day State visit to Equatorial Guinea, during which six cooperation agreements were signed between the two countries.

8. On 16 September, in Luanda, the Governments of Angola and the Democratic Republic of the Congo signed agreements on security and public order, cross-border movement of people and goods and the creation of a permanent joint commission on defence and security. On 26 August, the chiefs of the military intelligence services of Burundi and Rwanda met at their shared border to discuss the causes of cross-border security incidents and future collaboration. The meeting was facilitated by the Expanded Joint Verification Mechanism, a security organ of the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region. On 22 July, in Malabo, the Governments of Cameroon and Equatorial Guinea signed a cross-border security cooperation agreement following border tensions. A follow-up committee held its first meeting on 3 and 4 September. On 4 June, the Ministers for Foreign Affairs of Rwanda and Uganda attended the fourth meeting of the Ad Hoc Commission on the Implementation of the Luanda Memorandum of Understanding, which was held virtually. The meeting was also attended by the Minister of External Relations of Angola and the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of the Interior of the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

9. In Angola, the fight against corruption continued to dominate political developments, with judicial proceedings against several high-profile figures charged with major financial crimes. On 14 August, a court sentenced the son of the former President, José Eduardo dos Santos, to five years in prison for fraud, money-laundering and corruption committed during his management of the Angolan sovereign fund. On 8 September, addressing the Council of the Republic, the President of Angola, João Lourenço, reiterated the Government's resolve to fight corruption. On 9 September, he announced that local elections would not be held in 2020, citing delays in the adoption of the relevant legal framework. The opposition party União Nacional para a Independência Total de Angola criticized the decision. On 24 October, violent protests over demands for better living conditions and dates for local elections erupted in Luanda.

10. In Cameroon, despite some advances by the Government towards dialogue and decentralization in the North-West and South-West Regions, violence continued unabated. On 3 September, the Prime Minister chaired the first meeting of the follow-up committee established to monitor the implementation of the recommendations of the major national dialogue. Women's civil society groups called on the Government and separatist armed groups to end the fighting and engage in peace negotiations. On 17 September, the Court of Appeal upheld the life sentences given to the separatist leader Julius Ayuk Tabe and nine others.

11. On 7 September, the President of Cameroon, Paul Biya, set 6 December as the date for holding the first-ever regional elections in Cameroon. Two opposition parties, the Cameroon Renaissance Movement and the Social Democratic Front, called for a boycott of all elections until a political solution to the crisis in the North-West and South-West Regions is reached and consensual reform of the electoral code is undertaken. On 22 September, the Cameroon Renaissance Movement staged demonstrations, during which security forces arrested several dozen individuals, including party members and journalists. The leader of the party, Maurice Kamto, was subsequently subjected to restrictions of movement. On 4 November, a military court in Yaoundé sentenced nine members of the Cameroon Renaissance Movement to six months in prison in connection with the September demonstrations.

12. In Chad, preparations for the upcoming electoral cycle commenced against the background of COVID-19, which is accentuating security and socioeconomic fragilities. On 4 July, the National Independent Electoral Commission issued a new electoral timetable, according to which the presidential election will take place in April or May 2021, followed by legislative elections in October 2021 and communal elections in April 2022. Some 1.3 million voters were registered from 1 to 20 October. On 14 July, the President of Chad, Idriss Déby Itno, reshuffled his Government by including additional political parties and younger ministers. The representation of women in the Government remained at 26 per cent. On 10 August, the President was inaugurated as Marshall of Chad, a title attributed to him by the National Assembly.

13. On 1 September, the President of Chad reshuffled the national political dialogue framework, expanding membership to broader segments of the opposition and increasing the number of women. However, opposition parties not aligned with the official leader of the opposition continued to reject the dialogue framework. From 29 October to 1 November, the Government convened the second inclusive national forum, mainly to review the 2018 Constitution. Several opposition groups boycotted the forum, while others were not invited to participate. On 12 November, the Government adopted a constitutional bill creating the position of Vice-President, to be appointed by the President, and re-establishing a senate and a court of auditors, all recommendations of the inclusive national forum.

14. In the Congo, the ruling party, the Parti congolais du travail, began preparations for the presidential election, scheduled for March 2021. On 12 August, the National Assembly amended the electoral law, establishing special voter lists for the defence and security forces and authorizing early voting for them. Subsequently, segments of the opposition criticized the amendment of the electoral law and called for an inclusive national dialogue on electoral governance. On 22 October, the Government announced that political consultations would take place in November, and on 26 October, it issued a revised list of 45 authorized political parties, including opposition platforms, that could take part in the dialogue. Several opposition groups claimed that conditions were not in place for an inclusive and meaningful dialogue.

15. In Equatorial Guinea, the President, Teodoro Obiang Nguema Mbasogo, reshuffled the Government on 20 August, and reappointed as Prime Minister Francisco Pascual Obama Asue, in the context of an economic crisis aggravated by COVID-19. On 13 July, the Government adopted a decree on the fight against corruption.

16. In Gabon, the authorities focused on addressing the socioeconomic impact of the health and oil crises, while taking steps to improve public governance and fight corruption. On 16 July, the President appointed Rose Christiane Ossouka Raponda as Prime Minister, making her the first woman premier of Gabon. On 17 July, a new cabinet composed of 32 members, including 10 women, was announced, with a mandate to prioritize economic recovery, good governance and social cohesion. On 13 October, Gabon was elected to the Human Rights Council for the term 2021–2023. On the same day, the Gabonese chapter of the African Women Leaders Network was established.

17. In Sao Tome and Principe, efforts to restore confidence among political stakeholders based on a national commitment to judicial reform remained tenuous owing to the polarized political context. On 31 July, the National Assembly rejected a motion of no confidence in the Government, tabled by the opposition party Acção Democrática Independente of the President, Evaristo do Espírito Santo Carvalho, which claimed that the Government had mismanaged the response to COVID-19. On 18 September, the President reshuffled the Government, increasing it from 14 to 16 members, including three women. During the swearing-in ceremony of the Cabinet, on 21 September, both the President and the Prime Minister, who represent different political parties, underscored the need to enhance cooperation among State institutions and preserve institutional stability.

Security developments and trends

18. Violence persisted in the Far North, North-West and South-West Regions of Cameroon. In the latter two regions, there were continued reports of attacks against civilians perpetrated by non-State armed groups and security forces, including extrajudicial killings, torture, arbitrary arrests, property destruction, retaliatory attacks, abductions, rape and other forms of sexual violence. On 31 July, clashes between two rival separatist armed groups for the control of Lebialem, South-West Region, resulted in 4 people being killed and 50 abducted. On 13 August, three suspected secessionists were arrested in connection with the murder on 11 August in Muyuka, South-West Region, of a woman accused of collaborating with the defence and security forces. On 1 September, a police officer was killed by suspected armed separatists, and on 2 September, security forces and separatists exchanged fire in the centre of Bamenda, North-West Region. On 8 September, the authorities launched a major security operation to secure the city, which is still ongoing. On 25 October, 7 schoolchildren were killed and 12 injured, and on 3 and 4 November, 6 more children were abducted along with 11 teachers in armed attacks on schools in the North-West and South-West Regions.

19. The security context in the border areas of Chad remained fragile, accentuated by instability in several neighbouring countries. In the north, on 7 September, the self-proclaimed “Self-Defence Committee of Miski” withdrew from an agreement signed with the Government in late 2019, which was intended to ensure a more consensual exploitation of local gold resources. On 3 September, unidentified gunmen reportedly killed three Chadian soldiers in Kouri Bougoudi, Tibesti Province, an area near the border with Libya where artisanal gold miners were active. On 8 October, the Government ordered the closure of illegal gold mining operations and the eviction of illegal gold miners. In the east, tensions between Arab herders and non-Arab agricultural communities persisted, albeit at a reduced level compared with 2019. Between 1 July and 30 September, violent clashes between farmers and herders resulted in 36 people being killed and 99 injured.

20. In the Pool Department of the Congo, stabilization efforts based on the 2017 ceasefire agreement between the Government and the Ninja rebel group, led by Frédéric Bintsamou, alias Pasteur Ntumi, continued to stall. In the absence of government funding, the reintegration phase for disarmed and demobilized former combatants had not commenced.

Boko Haram/Lake Chad basin

21. Cameroon and Chad continued to face sporadic, deadly attacks by Boko Haram factions. Between 1 June and 30 September, there were 310 reported Boko Haram-related security incidents in Cameroon, with 148 civilian fatalities, and 26 such incidents in Chad, with 61 civilian fatalities. In September, 49 of the 108 civilian fatalities registered across the Lake Chad basin region were in Cameroon. Similar to trends observed during the second quarter of 2020, some 89 per cent of all attacks in Cameroon were against civilian targets. In Chad, attacks targeted civilians and the military in equal proportions. Women and girls continued to face a heightened risk of conflict-related sexual violence, including abduction, rape, sexual slavery and forced marriage.

22. Boko Haram factions launched attacks against human settlements and humanitarian hubs. On 1 August, in the Far North Region of Cameroon, Boko Haram militants attacked a camp for displaced persons in Nguetchewe, killing 18 civilians. On 1 September, 7 civilians were killed and 14 injured in a suicide bomb attack in Koyape, which hosts internally displaced persons. On 11 September, a suicide bomb attack by a Boko Haram militant killed five civilians, including a village chief, in Zeleved. On 31 July, in the Lac Province of Chad, Boko Haram attacked a camp for internally displaced persons in Kalam, killing 10 and abducting 7 more.

Lord's Resistance Army

23. According to the non-governmental organization Invisible Children, between June and October, activity by the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) decreased, coinciding with the rainy season, during which LRA factions remain near their primary base camps. However, 19 people, including two children, were abducted by LRA during this period. Between June and October, 19 long-term abductees escaped. On 11 October, three boys reportedly escaped and were taken into custody by security forces in Zangabai, Democratic Republic of the Congo, and on 12 October, a girl reportedly escaped after five years in captivity and fled to Mboki, Haut-Mbomou, in the Central African Republic.

24. A series of LRA attacks was reported in the Democratic Republic of the Congo in late May and throughout the month of June. All the attacks, including an ambush that led to the abduction of five civilians and the injury of another, took place in Bas-Uélé and Haut-Uélé.

25. Attacks by suspected LRA groups were also reported in the Haut-Mbomou prefecture in the Central African Republic. On 24 September, a suspected LRA group briefly ambushed two traders along the Obo-Bambouti axis. On 28 September, a suspected LRA group attacked and looted the village of Ligoua, abducting an unspecified number of people. The group also abducted three men, one woman and her child in Koumboli on 30 July, a young man with disabilities in the same area on 2 August, and nine men and six women in Obo on 27 September.

Maritime security in the Gulf of Guinea

26. According to a report by the Interregional Coordination Centre for Maritime Safety and Security in the Gulf of Guinea, issued in October, a total of 17 security incidents at sea, including 2 in the ECCAS maritime space, were registered between July and September, a decrease compared with the 27 incidents, including 10 in the ECCAS maritime space, reported for the second quarter of 2020. While criminal groups continued to focus on abductions for ransom, measures taken by countries to contain the spread of COVID-19 appeared to have led to a decrease in maritime criminality.

27. On 23 September, the Government of Gabon announced that 115 irregular migrants, including 30 unaccompanied minors, travelling from Nigeria, together with their traffickers, had been intercepted by the gendarmerie at Cap Esterias, north of Libreville. The traffickers were brought before the Prosecutor's Office. On 30 September, 30 additional migrants, mostly young girls and women, were intercepted. Of the 145 migrants, 34 unaccompanied minors were placed in transit centres for children in Libreville with the support of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF). The remaining migrants were repatriated to their respective countries. At the Government's request, the United Nations was providing protection mechanisms for vulnerable migrants and strengthening the fight against human trafficking.

28. From 23 to 25 September, Gabon held a national workshop on preventing and responding to the threat of piracy in its territorial waters. The workshop participants recommended establishing a mechanism for coordinating the country's strategy at sea and strengthening cooperation with the authorities of the States of departure or origin of perpetrators of maritime crime.

Effects of climate change, ecological changes and natural disasters on the stability of Central Africa

29. Across Central Africa, the effects of climate change continued to exacerbate existing fragilities and underlying drivers of conflict, including by contributing to natural resource scarcity, a reduction in livelihoods and forced displacement and by intensifying conflicts between farmers and herders. Parts of the subregion once again experienced severe flooding due to excessive rainfall. The resulting destruction of houses, goods, crops and fields threatened the livelihoods of many communities reliant on agriculture and further undermined resilience.

B. Humanitarian developments

30. In Cameroon, mounting violence in the North-West, South-West and Far North Regions, combined with the impact of COVID-19, increased the number of people in need of humanitarian assistance from 3.9 million before the pandemic to 6.2 million at present. Humanitarian partners planned to target 3.4 million of the most vulnerable in 2020. As at 30 September, Cameroon was hosting almost 435,000 refugees and asylum seekers, including 312,750 refugees from the Central African Republic and over 116,400 from Nigeria. The country also had over 1 million internally displaced

persons and over 484,000 returnees, mainly in the North-West, South-West and Far North Regions. The revised humanitarian response plan for 2020 required \$391 million, of which 43 per cent had been received by mid-November.

31. Widespread insecurity in the North-West and South-West Regions of Cameroon resulted in further abuses against civilians, led to forced displacements and constrained humanitarian access. As at 30 September, 61,000 Cameroonians had sought refuge in Nigeria. There were approximately 409,000 internally displaced persons in the two regions, who continued to face significant risks, including high rates of sexual and gender-based violence. There were also almost 361,000 returnees in the two affected regions, and an additional 302,000 people had been displaced to other regions of Cameroon. It is estimated that the crisis in the North-West and South-West Regions has left around 700,000 children out of school. Amid increased risks and threats facing students and teachers, humanitarian partners continued to support children sitting for general exams before the full reopening of schools on 5 October.

32. Attacks against humanitarian, health and education personnel and facilities in the North-West and South-West Regions of Cameroon have increased since June. On 30 June, security forces reportedly damaged a health facility in the North-West Region, and arbitrarily arrested seven health workers in the South-West Region on 6 July. In July and August, non-State armed groups killed at least two aid workers, abducted several others, and interrupted food distribution in the two regions, prompting aid organizations to temporarily discontinue humanitarian assistance in the regions.

33. In Chad, multiple crises, compounded by COVID-19, continued to affect several parts of the country, exacerbating malnutrition, food insecurity and an ongoing chikungunya epidemic. Humanitarian partners estimated that 6.4 million people would need assistance in 2020 and planned to target 3.8 million of the most vulnerable, almost double the number of people targeted in 2019. The revised consolidated humanitarian response plan required \$664 million for 2020, of which about 41 per cent had been received as at 5 November. As at 31 October, Chad was hosting more than 484,000 refugees, including 95,000 from the Central African Republic and over 336,100 internally displaced persons.

34. In the Congo, the United Nations pursued its humanitarian response to the flood-affected departments of Likouala, Cuvette, Sangha and Plateaux, and established a humanitarian corridor to ensure the transport of humanitarian supplies and personnel in support of the COVID-19 response. In October, floods caused by heavy rainfall affected at least 81,000 people in the four departments. The Government declared a state of emergency in those departments and requested support from the United Nations. Food insecurity worsened owing to the impact of COVID-19, with 700,000 people, including one third of the inhabitants of Brazzaville, classed as food insecure.

35. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) facilitated the return of Burundian refugees who took an informed decision to be repatriated. Since repatriations resumed from Rwanda on 27 August and from the United Republic of Tanzania on 2 July, 24,606 Burundian refugees have been assisted to return home: 4,950 from Rwanda in 10 convoys, 18,502 from the United Republic of Tanzania in forty-two convoys and 1,154 from the Democratic Republic of the Congo in four convoys. The return movements took place in the framework of tripartite repatriation agreements concluded between the Government of Burundi and UNHCR and the Governments of Rwanda, the United Republic of Tanzania and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, respectively. All returnees were subject to COVID-19 testing or screening and received counselling prior to departure.

Boko Haram/Lake Chad basin

36. The Lake Chad basin crisis has led to the internal displacement of almost 322,000 Cameroonians and some 336,100 Chadians, as well as the flight of more than 130,000 Nigerian refugees to Cameroon and Chad. People in the Lake Chad basin continued to suffer from epidemics, including cholera, measles and polio, as well as destruction of land and property due to heavy flooding.

37. In the Far North Region of Cameroon, Boko Haram activities, compounded by chronic vulnerability and the growing impact of climate change, left 1.2 million people in need of urgent humanitarian assistance. As at 30 September, there were about 114,500 Nigerian refugees, 322,000 internally displaced persons and 123,000 returnees in the Far North Region, who faced significant protection risks. Local communities were also significantly affected.

38. Over 15,800 Nigerian refugees, 336,100 internally displaced persons and 57,300 returnees were recorded in the Lac Province of Chad as at 31 October. Half of the population of the Lac Province was displaced due to insecurity and flooding. Protection concerns also surged, with women and girls facing higher rates of sexual and gender-based violence and limited access to health care in the COVID-19 context. The number of food insecure people in the Lac Province reached over 231,000 by September.

C. Human rights trends

39. Despite steps taken by most States of the subregion to heed the call by the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights to decongest prisons in the context of COVID-19, prisons in Central Africa were yet to implement the United Nations Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners (the Nelson Mandela Rules). Prison overcrowding, ill-treatment and torture, as well as arbitrary arrests, abductions and forced disappearances, were reported in several countries.

40. Human rights organizations documented abuses by national defence and security forces in enforcing compliance with measures to contain the spread of COVID-19. In that regard, in Chad, on 30 July, the National Human Rights Commission urged the Government to take steps to stop abuses by defence and security forces. In Angola, on 25 August, human rights organizations reported the killing of at least seven young men by security forces between May and June. Angolan authorities cited isolated incidents and stated that the perpetrators had been sanctioned.

41. In Cameroon, between August and October, the United Nations received credible reports of killings, torture and ill treatment against civilians by both non-State armed groups and security forces. On 25 October, 7 schoolchildren were killed and 12 injured in an armed attack on a school in Kumba, South-West Region. The Government announced the launch of an investigation. On 3 and 4 November, 11 teachers and 6 children were briefly abducted in armed attacks on four schools in Limbe and Kumbo, South-West Region, and Bamenda and Fundong, North-West Region. On 5 November, Cardinal Christian Tumi was kidnapped by alleged separatist fighters in the North-West Region and released the following day. A traditional leader abducted alongside Cardinal Tumi was released on 11 November.

42. In Chad, citing a need to prevent the circulation of hate speech, the Government restricted Internet access in parts of the country from July to September. On 7 August, the National Human Rights Commission announced that the 44 prisoners who had been found dead in their prison cell in N'Djamena in April had not been Boko Haram fighters but civilians, and that they had died due to inadequate detention conditions. The Government announced that an investigation would be conducted to determine those responsible. On 10 August, the President pardoned 538 detainees, including former rebel leader Baba Laddé.

43. In the Congo, the opposition figure Jean-Marie Michel Mokoko remained in detention in the military hospital of Brazzaville following his return from Turkey, where he had been temporarily evacuated to receive medical treatment following the deterioration of his health in prison. Calls by political and social actors for his release from detention continued.

44. On 24 and 29 June, respectively, the National Assembly and the Senate of Gabon passed a government-sponsored bill revising the Penal Code and, among other things, decriminalizing homosexuality.

45. Conflict-related sexual violence, perpetrated primarily by non-State armed actors, continued unabated across Central Africa, especially in areas most affected by humanitarian access restrictions and poor security service coverage, amplified by the aggravating impact of COVID-19. The pandemic disproportionately affected the economic and productive lives of women and girls, who were exposed to high levels of sexual and gender-based violence, including early and forced marriages.

D. Socioeconomic trends

46. Governments diverted critical resources to scale up spending for mitigating the impact of COVID-19. The pandemic amplified political and socioeconomic grievances, while compounding existing macroeconomic fragilities. The regional economy in the Central African Economic and Monetary Community (CEMAC) area was projected to contract by 5.3 per cent of gross domestic product (GDP) in 2020, according to the Bank of Central African States. The International Monetary Fund revised downward growth prospects for 9 of the 11 ECCAS countries compared with the projections made in April 2020, with countries dependent on natural resources and tourism expected to register deeper recessions.

47. On 9 June, the Paris Club of Industrial Country Creditors granted Chad and the Congo debt service relief for the period from 1 May to 31 December 2020, and recommended that both countries devote the financial means made available as a result to increase spending on measures aimed at mitigating the impact of COVID-19.

48. On 10 July, the Central African States Development Bank approved the disbursement of \$280 million in development projects for Cameroon, Chad, the Congo and Gabon to support their responses to COVID-19. On 22 July, the Bank of Central African States announced measures to maintain financial and monetary stability in the context of the pandemic.

49. On 10 August, CEMAC ministers held the thirty-fifth ministerial session of the Central African Economic Union. The President of the CEMAC Commission warned member States of an economic recession of 4–6 per cent of GDP if measures recommended by experts to address the economic impact of the pandemic were not implemented. On 19 September, at a ministerial session of the Central African Monetary Union, participants agreed on the need for advocacy with international financial institutions to secure emergency funding to address the economic impact of COVID-19.

III. Activities of the United Nations Regional Office for Central Africa

A. Good offices, preventive diplomacy and mediation

Cameroon

50. The Special Representative for Central Africa continued to engage with key actors in Cameroon and abroad on the need for all stakeholders to engage in dialogue

for a peaceful and lasting resolution of the crisis in the North-West and South-West Regions. To that end, on 20 July, he travelled to Yaoundé, where he met with the Prime Minister and other senior Government officials as part of efforts to engage with national stakeholders. On the same day, the Under-Secretary-General for Political and Peacebuilding Affairs, the Chairperson of the African Union Commission, the Secretary-General of the Commonwealth and the Secretary-General of the International Organization of la Francophonie held a telephone discussion on the renewal of joint efforts in support of the United Nations Secretary-General's global call for a ceasefire and dialogue among the parties. The outcome of that discussion was communicated to the President of Cameroon by letter. From 31 October to 7 November, the Special Representative was in Yaoundé to follow up with national actors on the situation in the country.

51. On 23 and 24 July, in Paris, the Special Representative met with the Secretary-General of the International Organization of la Francophonie and officials from the Ministry of Europe and Foreign Affairs of France, respectively. He called for increased coordination and international engagement on Cameroon with a view to accompanying national efforts towards a peaceful resolution of the crisis in the North-West and South-West Regions through dialogue.

52. In September, UNOCA, UNICEF, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), with support from the Government, held two workshops in Krabi and Douala on the protection of journalists, for media professionals and for members of the Cameroonian defence and security forces. The workshops were part of a regional initiative to improve the protection of journalists in countries facing political crises or armed conflicts.

Central African Republic

53. Working closely with the Special Representative for the Central African Republic and senior officials at the Secretariat, UNOCA continued to promote the implementation of the Political Agreement for Peace and Reconciliation in the Central African Republic at the regional level. During a meeting of the ECCAS Council of Ministers held on 3 and 4 June, the Special Representative stressed the importance of broadening the scope of support for the Agreement to create an enabling environment for peaceful elections.

54. On 21 September, the Special Representative, the President of the ECCAS Commission and the ECCAS Commissioner for Political Affairs, Peace and Security reviewed recent political developments in the Central African Republic, with a view to harmonizing approaches. From 27 to 30 October, a senior-level delegation composed of African Union, ECCAS and United Nations officials visited Bangui as part of efforts to support the peace and electoral processes in the country.

Chad

55. The Special Representative for Central Africa and the United Nations Resident Coordinator in Chad, in coordination with the Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs, pursued efforts to increase the coherence and effectiveness of United Nations political and programmatic engagement in support of the Government's priorities for sustaining peace. The United Nations worked with the Government and partners towards the establishment of a national peacebuilding steering committee. The United Nations also contributed to the World Bank's ongoing risk and resilience assessment for Chad and engaged in discussions with the Bank on its envisaged prevention and resilience allocation for the country.

56. From 21 to 25 October, a UNOCA delegation visited Chad to assess the political and security landscape ahead of the second national inclusive forum and the elections. UNOCA engaged with the Government, the opposition, civil society and regional and international stakeholders. The visit highlighted the need for a more meaningful and inclusive political dialogue and the easing of restrictions on freedom of speech ahead of the 2021 elections.

Congo

57. UNOCA continued to engage in broad consultations with the relevant United Nations entities to advance joint efforts for sustaining peace in the Congo, including in the Pool Department, in the context of the upcoming elections. From 14 to 19 November, the Special Representative was in Brazzaville for consultations ahead of the March 2021 presidential election.

Equatorial Guinea

58. On 5 October, the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution [1373 \(2001\)](#) concerning counter-terrorism finalized and approved its country visit report for Equatorial Guinea. The visit was conducted by the Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate, on behalf of the Committee, from 24 to 26 February 2020. Equatorial Guinea provided comments on the report and agreed with the Committee's recommendations aimed at strengthening its counter-terrorism response.

59. As a follow-up to the universal periodic review recommendations, the United Nations supported the Government to build the capacity of civil servants to identify victims of human trafficking and to launch a national awareness-raising campaign on human rights and human trafficking.

Gabon

60. On 6 October, the Special Representative for Central Africa and the new Prime Minister discussed the ECCAS reform, the response to COVID-19, environmental protection and preservation, maritime security in the Gulf of Guinea, and the political and security situation in the subregion. On 23 October, the Special Representative met separately with the Minister of the Interior and the Archbishop of Libreville to promote dialogue and address the impact of COVID-19 on the reopening of places of worship.

61. From 28 September to 2 October, UNOCA, OHCHR and UNDP held an online training course for members of the National Human Rights Commission on principles and other international instruments on the protection of the rights of detainees.

Sao Tome and Principe

62. The United Nations country team and UNOCA worked with the Government to advance national dialogue for promoting social cohesion. They also worked towards the establishment of a national chapter of the African Women Leaders Network.

B. Support to the United Nations, regional and subregional initiatives on peace and security

United Nations Standing Advisory Committee on Security Questions in Central Africa

63. In its capacity as secretariat to the United Nations Standing Advisory Committee on Security Questions in Central Africa, UNOCA discussed with the Governments of Angola and Equatorial Guinea the modalities for holding the fiftieth meeting of the

Committee, which was originally scheduled to be held in Malabo in May 2020, but was postponed owing to COVID-19 travel restrictions. A virtual meeting was being planned for 2–4 December.

64. Responding to the request made by the Standing Advisory Committee at its forty-ninth meeting, UNOCA, in collaboration with the Climate Security Mechanism of the United Nations and partners in the subregion, developed a two-year project to strengthen the knowledge base regarding the interlinkages between climate change and security in Central Africa and the capacity of subregional actors to develop effective risk prevention and mitigation strategies.

Collaboration with regional, subregional and intergovernmental organizations

65. On 18 June, UNOCA met with the ECCAS early warning mechanism unit and the secretariat of the Regional Stabilization, Recovery and Resilience Strategy for Areas Affected by Boko Haram in the Lake Chad Basin Region. The meeting focused on how UNOCA could facilitate greater synergy between the Lake Chad Basin Commission and ECCAS to enhance the role of Central Africa in advancing the Strategy.

66. On 18 September, UNOCA met with the ECCAS Commissioner for Political Affairs, Peace and Security to take stock of progress made in the partnership between the two entities. On 25 September, UNOCA met with the ECCAS Commissioner for Gender and Social Affairs to review priorities on the women and peace and security agenda. A joint retreat was scheduled to be held before the end of 2020.

Boko Haram

67. On 15 July, the Special Representative for Central Africa hosted a virtual meeting between United Nations entities in Central Africa and the Lake Chad Basin Commission on the Regional Stabilization, Recovery and Resilience Strategy for Areas Affected by Boko Haram in the Lake Chad Basin Region. The meeting was intended to promote greater mobilization of United Nations presences in Central Africa on the Strategy.

68. On 9 September, the Special Representative addressed a virtual meeting convened by the Peacebuilding Commission on the impact of COVID-19 in the Lake Chad basin, in which he called for a regional response to the pandemic, building on strategies developed by ECCAS and the Economic Community of West African States.

69. UNOCA further strengthened its cooperation with the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS) to harmonize approaches on the Lake Chad basin and to support the implementation of the Regional Stabilization, Recovery and Resilience Strategy for Areas Affected by Boko Haram in the Lake Chad Basin Region, including through the convening of joint monthly meetings, expanded to include other relevant actors, and the submission of joint monthly analytical code cables. On 19 August, UNOCA and UNOWAS were designated to co-lead the governance cluster of the regional task force for the implementation of the Strategy.

Regional integration

70. On 30 July, the Special Representative addressed the seventeenth ordinary session of the Conference of ECCAS Heads of State and Government. He commended ECCAS and its member States on the institutional reform and reiterated the readiness of the United Nations to accompany the subregion on its path towards greater regional integration to better address peace, security and stability challenges.

71. On 13 and 23 September, the Special Representative and the President of the ECCAS Commission co-chaired a meeting of UNOCA and the ECCAS Commission to review priority areas of United Nations support to the Commission. UNOCA and the Commission agreed on the importance of aligning United Nations and external partner support to ECCAS with the implementation of the Commission's five-year strategic vision, and of fostering joined-up efforts in conflict prevention and good offices in countries holding elections in late 2020 and early 2021.

72. The Peacebuilding Fund approved a new cross-border project between Gabon, Chad and Cameroon to support the involvement of over 1,800 young people in early warning mechanisms at the borders of the three countries to prevent instability and conflicts stemming from illicit activities and taking into full consideration the impact of COVID-19.

73. UNOCA assisted ECCAS in developing a COVID-19, women, peace and security programme for Central Africa, intended to support ECCAS to empower women's organizations to address the impact of the pandemic on women and girls and inform the national action plans on Security Council resolution [1325 \(2000\)](#) for Chad, Equatorial Guinea and Sao Tome and Principe.

Maritime security in the Gulf of Guinea

74. On 30 September, during a meeting with the Minister of National Defence of Gabon, which co-chairs the secretariat of the Group of Seven Group of Friends of the Gulf of Guinea, the Special Representative stressed the urgency of reconvening key meetings between the Central and West Africa subregions aimed at enhancing cooperation.

Regional strategy and plan of action on counter-terrorism and the non-proliferation of small arms and light weapons in Central Africa

75. At its seventeenth ordinary session, held on 30 July, the Conference of ECCAS Heads of State and Government adopted the regional strategy on counter-terrorism. UNOCA continued to engage with the ECCAS Commission in efforts towards the effective implementation of the Lomé Declaration on Peace, Security, Stability and the Fight Against Terrorism and Violent Extremism.

Transhumance and farmer-herder conflicts

76. UNOCA and ECCAS planned a regional workshop on pastoralism and transhumance, which was delayed owing to the pandemic. On 22 June, UNOCA and UNOWAS held a virtual meeting of their joint working group on farmer-herder conflicts with a view to enhancing coordination on transhumance-related initiatives in Central and West Africa.

C. Enhancing United Nations coherence and coordination in the subregion

77. Between June and September, the Special Representative for Central Africa and the Special Representative to the African Union participated in four high-level meetings, chaired by the Special Envoy for the Great Lakes Region, to enhance United Nations coordinated engagement on Burundi. On 27 August, the Special Representative for Central Africa and the Special Envoy for the Great Lakes Region held a meeting on the United Nations regional strategy for peace consolidation, conflict prevention and conflict resolution for the Great Lakes region, on which UNOCA provided substantive comments.

78. On 21 September, the Special Representative for Central Africa, the President of the ECCAS Commission and the Regional Director of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) participated in a joint virtual celebration of the International Day of Peace. The event highlighted the need to strengthen dialogue between Central African States, civil society and the United Nations, particularly with regard to stabilizing border areas during the pandemic.

79. On 30 September, the Special Representative addressed a virtual forum of ministers in charge of social development in Central Africa on the impact of COVID-19 on poverty in the subregion. Jointly organized by the Government of Gabon and UNESCO, in partnership with ECCAS, the forum endorsed a subregional programme to combat poverty in the context of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and Agenda 2063, and invited the ECCAS Commission to work closely with UNESCO on efforts to strengthen national action plans to prevent and combat violence against women and girls in the context of COVID-19.

IV. Observations and recommendations

80. Despite a slow, albeit steady, increase in the number of COVID-19 cases across Central Africa, the pandemic has challenged the political, security, economic and social stability of the subregion. I commend all countries of the subregion for taking swift measures to mitigate the pandemic's multidimensional impact. As countries continue to battle this unprecedented crisis, regional solidarity will be crucial. Several countries have already shown some encouraging signs of drawing lessons from the pandemic in order to recover better. I express my appreciation to all partners on the ground, who, despite the challenging context, continued to deliver. The adoption by ECCAS of a COVID-19 regional response strategy for Central Africa is commendable, as are the efforts of CEMAC, the Bank of Central African States, the Central African States Development Bank and the Paris Club of Industrial Country Creditors to preserve macroeconomic stability in the subregion. It is important to continue supporting these efforts in order to address the impact of the pandemic. It is equally important to strengthen efforts to address the scourge of malaria, polio, measles, cholera and other public health challenges affecting the subregion.

81. I encourage ECCAS member States to accelerate their efforts to achieve inclusive political, social and economic reforms. Stronger subregional institutions remain key to assisting countries in implementing such reforms. In this regard, I commend ECCAS member States for completing a crucial institutional reform and establishing a promising peace and security architecture for Central Africa. The United Nations will continue to support the efforts of the ECCAS Commission to consolidate regional integration, prevent conflicts and promote lasting peace and development in Central Africa. Member States across the region, as well as subregional, regional and international organizations, are encouraged to join these efforts.

82. The new peace and security architecture of ECCAS provides a sound basis for it to play a greater role towards ensuring stability in Central Africa, working closely with other relevant regional bodies. My good offices will continue as needed, through my special envoys and representatives in the subregion, to assist ECCAS and Member States in this endeavour.

83. Armed violence in Central Africa continued unabated, with serious implications for the subregion's stability and the humanitarian situation, which has worsened dramatically, aggravated by the impact of COVID-19. Unhindered humanitarian access and enhanced donor coordination are crucial to meeting the needs of affected populations. I reiterate my call for an immediate global ceasefire to enable peaceful

cooperation to fight COVID-19. My Special Representative for Central Africa will continue to urge conflict parties in the subregion to heed my call to create the conditions for dialogue and minimize the impact of the pandemic on the most vulnerable groups.

84. Continued armed attacks by Boko Haram remain of great concern. I reiterate my solidarity with the Governments and people of Cameroon and Chad for the losses incurred. Advancing the implementation of the Regional Stabilization, Recovery and Resilience Strategy for Areas Affected by Boko Haram in the Lake Chad Basin Region remains a priority for the United Nations. UNOCA, UNOWAS and other United Nations entities in the region will continue to reinforce coordination.

85. Persistent threats from internal and cross-border armed groups have continued to challenge calls to silence the guns. International mobilization in the fight against LRA under the African Union's Regional Cooperation Initiative for the Elimination of the Lord's Resistance Army remains crucial. I encourage the ECCAS Commission to play an active role in galvanizing support towards ending the threat of the group, including by engaging with all relevant partners, in particular the African Union, on convening the Joint Coordination Mechanism of the Regional Cooperation Initiative to operationalize the transfer of authority over the African Union Regional Task Force to ECCAS.

86. In Cameroon, continued violence in the Far North, North-West and South-West Regions remains of serious concern. The persistence of forced displacements, human rights violations and abuses, and attacks against civilians, including schoolchildren and humanitarian workers, as well as continued impediments to humanitarian access, is deplorable. I call on all concerned to renounce violence, silence the guns and cease all attacks against civilians and civilian infrastructure, including education facilities. Only a cessation of hostilities and a political dialogue to end the crisis in the North-West and South-West regions can create an environment conducive to the protection of civilians, respect for human rights and sustainable peace and development. The implementation of the recommendations from the major national dialogue, in addition to continued dialogue with all parties, remains crucial to building lasting peace and development. I appeal to the Government of Cameroon to expedite this process with a view to addressing the core issues raised by such dialogue.

87. I welcome the initiatives spearheaded by Angola and the Democratic Republic of the Congo to strengthen relations between countries in the Great Lakes region. All parties concerned should support these initiatives and include women in their peacebuilding efforts. The steps taken by Equatorial Guinea and Cameroon, on the one hand, and by Angola and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, on the other, to enhance cooperation on cross-border issues are welcome.

88. Despite the impact of the pandemic on electoral preparations and funding, I am pleased that the ECCAS member States concerned have worked towards maintaining upcoming elections. Should it prove necessary to consider the postponement of elections due to COVID-19, it is important that this be based on consensus among all concerned national stakeholders. Governments are also called upon to protect and promote human rights in the region, including in the context of upcoming elections.

89. In the Central African Republic, joint efforts to advance the electoral process and ensure the holding of credible and inclusive elections, within the constitutional timelines, are welcome. However, the disfranchisement of over 250,000 Central African refugees living in neighbouring countries is regrettable. I encourage efforts to ensure that all segments of society can participate effectively in consolidating peace and democracy. The continued violence by armed groups, despite their commitments under the Political Agreement for Peace and Reconciliation in the Central African Republic, remains of concern. Enhanced regional engagement,

including from ECCAS, the African Union and neighbouring countries, in support of the electoral process and the implementation of the Political Agreement remains crucial to sustaining peace and stability in the Central African Republic and the region. UNOCA will continue to engage with all stakeholders in the region.

90. The announcement of a new electoral calendar in Chad, including for the long-postponed legislative elections, is a welcome development. I encourage the authorities to use the upcoming elections to promote increased inclusivity and dialogue, including by advancing the participation of women and young people in the electoral process. The World Bank's increased engagement on conflict prevention in Chad and the enhanced cooperation between the World Bank and the United Nations in this respect are positive developments. The fragile security situation in the border areas, which is closely interlinked with conflict dynamics in several neighbouring countries, remains of concern. Bilateral and multilateral partners are encouraged to support the efforts of Chad to provide key public services and address development needs throughout its territory.

91. The announcement by the Government of the Congo that it plans to hold political consultations on electoral governance is a welcome development. I reiterate my call for the authorities to engage in inclusive and meaningful political dialogue ahead of the presidential election, including by ensuring the effective participation of women and young people in those discussions. The sustainable stabilization of the Pool Department is of importance, particularly in the context of the upcoming election. I encourage the Government to disburse its contribution to the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration programme in order to enable the launch of the reintegration phase, which is essential. Bilateral and multilateral partners are also encouraged to support stabilization efforts in the Pool Department.

92. I commend the key political actors in Sao Tome and Principe for their joint efforts to calm the political environment. Political actors should renew their commitment to the country's political stability in the lead-up to the upcoming elections. The United Nations reiterates its readiness to support efforts to promote an inclusive and meaningful national dialogue.

93. Partnerships between Governments and political and social actors, including civil society, women and young people, remain essential to credible and peaceful elections. The renewed commitment by the ECCAS Heads of State and Government to operationalize the Coalition of Civil Society Organizations for Peace and Conflict Prevention in Central Africa and to implement Security Council resolution [1325 \(2000\)](#) in Central Africa is welcome. I encourage ECCAS and its member States to work with the United Nations, the African Union and other relevant partners to develop viable strategies that strengthen their capacity for conflict prevention, including with a gender perspective, building on partnerships with civil society. I further encourage them to invest in partnerships with young people with a view to forging more inclusive societies in Central Africa.

94. Progress made by UNOCA and partners towards integrating a climate security perspective into conflict analysis in Central Africa is a welcome development. The adoption of a subregional regulation on pastoralism and transhumance will be instrumental in reducing farmer-herder conflicts. UNOCA and partners will continue to work closely with ECCAS in that regard.

95. I would like to express my appreciation to the Governments of the subregion, the African Union, ECCAS, CEMAC, the Lake Chad Basin Commission, the Gulf of Guinea Commission and other regional and subregional institutions for their continued collaboration with UNOCA. I also wish to express my appreciation to the Multinational Joint Task Force and the troop-contributing countries for their dedication and commitment to the service of peace and stability. I am grateful to the

Government and people of Gabon for their generous hospitality to and support for UNOCA. I would like to thank the various entities of the United Nations system working in Central Africa, including the heads of United Nations peace operations, regional offices, country teams and other entities, for their support for and cooperation with UNOCA.

96. Finally, I would like to thank my Special Representative, François Louncény Fall, and the staff of UNOCA for their continuing support for regional efforts to advance the cause of peace and security in Central Africa.
