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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) every six months. It provides an assessment of the major political and security trends in Central Africa since the report dated 1 December 2022 ([S/2022/896](#)). It 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. The reporting period was marked by the follow-up to the events of 25 November 2022 in Sao Tome and Principe, the aftermath of the deadly protests on 20 October 2022 and preparations for a constitutional referendum in Chad, and tensions around the assassination of a journalist and anti-corruption activist in Cameroon. Those developments underscored the fragility of democratic governance and civic space in Central Africa. Preparations were under way for the 2023 general elections in Gabon, with several core electoral governance issues yet to be addressed. On the security front, non-State armed actors, including violent extremists, continued to destabilize parts of the subregion.

Political development and trends

3. In Angola, the composition of the National Assembly following the general elections of August 2022 has led to increased dialogue between the ruling party, Movimento Popular de Libertação de Angola, and the largest opposition party, União Nacional para a Independência Total de Angola. Disputes over the composition of the Bureau of the Assembly were resolved successfully after the Speaker called upon political parties to reach consensus.

4. At the regional level, Angola continued to play a key role in mediation, in particular regarding the situation in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo,



alongside the East African Community (EAC). On 17 March, the National Assembly approved the deployment of a military unit of 500 personnel, of whom 25 per cent are women, to the Democratic Republic of the Congo for 12 months to secure the cantonment sites of the Mouvement du 23 mars group and to protect the members of the ad hoc verification mechanism established under the Luanda process. As Chairperson of the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region, and with a mandate from the African Union, the President of Angola, João Lourenço, continued to facilitate dialogue between the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Rwanda aimed at de-escalating tensions.

5. In his capacity as EAC Chairperson, the President of Burundi, Evariste Ndayishimiye, continued to lead efforts in support of the Nairobi process, while Burundian military troops continued to be deployed in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo under bilateral arrangements and within the EAC regional force. On 6 May, the President chaired the eleventh high-level meeting of the Regional Oversight Mechanism of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework for the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Region, in Bujumbura. In Gitega, unknown perpetrators vandalized the offices of the main opposition party, Congrès national pour la liberté, on 11 April. On 22 April, the party held its extraordinary congress. Following his arrest on 21 April, the former Prime Minister, Alain-Guillaume Bunyoni, was charged on 5 May with undermining State security and the national economy, personal enrichment, illegal possession of weapons and contempt of the President. Mr. Bunyoni appeared before the Supreme Court in a closed-door hearing on 8 May, during which his pretrial detention was extended.

6. In Cameroon, senatorial elections were held on 12 March. A total of 10 political parties competed in the elections, in which 11,134 regional and municipal councillors elected 70 of a total of 100 senators. The ruling party won all seats. In accordance with the Constitution, the President, Paul Biya, appointed the remaining 30 senators on 31 March, including five from opposition parties. Women's representation in the Senate increased by 7 per cent, from 26 to 33 seats. The elections were held amid an outcry following the assassination of Arsène Salomon Mbani Zogo, also known as Martinez Zogo, an investigative journalist, anti-corruption activist and director of a radio station. Investigations into his killing (see para. 37 below) led to the indictment and arrest of a prominent businessman and other senior officials, including the head of the Directorate General of External Research.

7. In Chad, preparations started for the constitutional referendum scheduled for 19 November 2023, as well as for presidential and legislative elections to be held by October 2024, in a context marked by political and societal tensions. The transitional authorities took some measures to reduce tensions following the deadly protests of 20 October 2022. On 5 December, authorities lifted the state of emergency established after the demonstrations. On 21 January 2023, the Government lifted the suspension of seven opposition parties, including Les Transformateurs, while continuing judicial proceedings against protest organizers. On 25 March, the Transition President, Mahamat Idriss Déby Itno, pardoned 380 previously sentenced fighters from the Front pour l'alternance et la concorde au Tchad (FACT) – the rebel group that had launched the incursion into Chad in April 2021 that culminated in the killing of the former President, Idriss Déby Itno – but not the FACT leader and others convicted and sentenced in absentia. On 27 March, the Transition President also pardoned 259 of the 262 protestors sentenced after the 20 October protests. The leader of Les Transformateurs and the coordinator of the Wakit Tama opposition platform have not returned to Chad since leaving the country following the deadly protests. Opposition segments continued to accuse the transitional authorities of seeking to control the transition process to their benefit and called for more inclusive political dialogue,

adjustments to the transition institutions, more confidence-building measures and increased international community support.

8. The transitional authorities of Chad proceeded with the implementation of recommendations from the inclusive and sovereign national dialogue held in 2022. In late January 2023, they established a commission in charge of organizing the constitutional referendum, led by the Minister of Territorial Administration, Decentralization and Good Governance and comprising five other ministers and 15 representatives of the Conseil national de transition, including five women. The opposition rejected the commission, arguing that it was insufficiently inclusive and lacked independence. On 28 March, the transitional authorities operationalized a political party consultation forum, consisting of the parties that had participated in the national dialogue.

9. The Sant'Egidio Community continued efforts to support the relaunching of dialogue between the transitional authorities of Chad and the 18 politico-military groups that had not signed the Doha Agreement for Peace and the Participation of the Political-Military Movements in the Inclusive National and Sovereign Dialogue. A series of meetings was held with the groups, which renewed their commitment to dialogue through a "peace offer" on 8 March. Some groups that had signed the Agreement complained that the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration programme envisaged therein had not yet been launched.

10. In the Congo, the opposition continued to call for inclusive national dialogue and the release of "political prisoners", including General Jean-Marie Michel Mokoko and the former minister, André Okombi Salissa, who had been imprisoned following the contested 2016 presidential election. On 1 December, the leader of the Mouvement républicain opposition group was arrested in Pointe-Noire after initiating a petition for their release. In January, the Government relaunched the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration programme agreed upon following the violence in the Pool Department between 2016 and 2017. In that regard, the Government paid the first instalment of its contribution to the programme and organized a round table of partners on 25 March to outline the new implementation plan and remobilize the financial support of partners.

11. In Equatorial Guinea, the President, Teodoro Obiang Nguema Mbasogo, was sworn in on 25 January for a sixth term following the general elections on 20 November 2022 and the landslide victory of the ruling Partido Democrático de Guinea Equatorial. On 31 January, the President appointed Manuela Roka Botey as the country's first woman Prime Minister. The son of the President, Teodoro Nguema Obiang Mangue, was reconfirmed as Vice-President of the Republic, in charge of national defence and State security, and a new Government was announced on 3 February. The number of ministries increased from 24 to 32, of which four are led by women.

12. On 11 April, the Office of the Public Prosecutor of Spain requested the National Court of Spain to issue a national and international search and arrest warrant against Carmelo Ovono Obiang, a son of the President of Equatorial Guinea and current Secretary of State for the Presidency in Equatorial Guinea. On 28 March, the Court summoned Mr. Ovono Obiang and two other high-ranking officials to attend a virtual hearing in order to testify regarding their alleged involvement in the kidnapping and torture of four Equatoguinean opposition members, two of whom also held Spanish citizenship. One of the opposition members, Julio Obama Mefuman, died in January 2023 while in Equatoguinean State custody. Mr. Obiang and the other two officials failed to appear at the virtual hearing. In addition, the Court demanded the repatriation to Spain of the body of Mr. Obama Mefuman for an autopsy. This has yet to be carried out.

13. In early January, the Vice-President of Equatorial Guinea launched an anti-corruption campaign against several high-ranking officials, including his half-sister and former Director General of the Equatorial Guinea Maritime Shippers' Council, María Jesús Adá Obiang Mangue, and his half-brother and former Managing Director of the national airline company, Ruslan Obiang Nsue. Mr. Obiang Nsue was also placed under house arrest.

14. The political situation in Gabon was dominated by preparations for the general elections, slated for 2023. On 6 January, the Constitutional Court dissolved the board of the electoral management body, Centre gabonais des élections, following a petition filed by opposition groups stating that the board's mandate had expired in 2020. After the opposition failed to agree on the nomination of members of the two ad hoc commissions in charge of choosing the new head of the body, the Government unilaterally appointed all members of the commissions. The process concluded with the contested election of a former minister as Chair of the body.

15. On 9 January, the President of Gabon, Ali Bongo Ondimba, announced a Cabinet reshuffle, appointing the former Prime Minister, Rose Christiane Ossouka Raponda, as the first woman Vice-President of the country. From 13 to 23 February, the President chaired a political consultation among political parties, which several key opposition parties boycotted. Participants adopted proposals for a constitutional amendment related to fixing the duration of all political terms at five years and the return to a single-round ballot for the presidential election. In addition, they decided to establish a follow-up committee on pending matters, including those related to strengthening the credibility and transparency of elections. The Parliament adopted the proposed amendment of the Constitution on 6 April. Its promulgation by the President will make it possible to apply the amendment to the 2023 general elections. On 27 April, the Prime Minister, Alain-Claude Bilie-By-Nze, announced another Cabinet reshuffle, including the appointment of a new Minister for Foreign Affairs.

16. In Rwanda, the President, Paul Kagame, was re-elected as Chairperson of the Rwandan Patriotic Front ruling party on 2 April with 99.8 per cent of votes. The Government approved an initiative to amend the Constitution in order to combine the legislative and presidential elections in 2024. The amendment needs to be adopted by both chambers of Parliament during a plenary session.

17. In Sao Tome and Principe, the reporting period was marked by the aftermath of the events of 25 November 2022, when the Prime Minister, Patrice Emery Trovoada, announced that the security forces had thwarted an attack on the country's military barracks carried out by four people, in collusion with others, including the former President of the National Assembly, Delfim Neves, and a former mercenary, Arlécio Costa, who had attempted a coup d'état in 2009. Mr. Costa and three other suspects were later reported to have died while in military custody, amid the circulation of images online reportedly portraying cruel and inhuman treatment inflicted upon the alleged perpetrators of the failed coup. On 1 December, the Chief of Staff of the Armed Forces announced his resignation in the wake of calls for clarity around the deaths of the suspects while in custody.

18. On 23 February, the Office of the Attorney General of Sao Tome and Principe concluded its national investigation into the incidents of 25 November. A total of 10 defendants, including one civilian and nine soldiers, were indicted, while Mr. Neves was acquitted. The investigation team determined that the assault on the military barracks had been orchestrated by Mr. Costa with the aim of removing the President, the Minister of Defence and the Chief of Staff of the Armed Forces. On 15 March, following further national investigations, the Office of the Attorney General accused 23 military personnel, including the former Chief of Staff, of being responsible for the torture and death of the four individuals while in military custody. Concurrently,

the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS) conducted a mission to gather information on the events of 25 November. On 25 February, the President of the ECCAS Commission delivered the confidential report of the mission to the President of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, in his capacity as then Chairperson of ECCAS, and to the President of Sao Tome and Principe, Carlos Manuel Vila Nova.

Security development and trends

19. The security situation in the subregion was marked by continued activities of non-State armed groups, in particular in Cameroon and the Lake Chad basin. In Cameroon, Senator Honorine Wainachi Nentoh of the Front social démocrate opposition party was kidnapped on 5 February, in Mezam Division, North-West Region, and released eight days later. On 10 February, unidentified individuals shot at a truck carrying Cameroon Development Corporation employees in Tiko, South-West Region, killing five and injuring more than 40. On 25 February, several explosive devices were detonated during the Mount Cameroon Race of Hope in the Fako Division of the South-West Region, killing one woman and injuring 18 people, including at least three children. Separatist armed groups claimed responsibility for the attacks on social media. The armed groups had declared a lockdown for 24 and 25 February to prevent the race from taking place.

20. In Chad, on 8 January, the transitional authorities signed a peace deal with the self-proclaimed “Self-Defense Committee of Miski”, a group active in the gold-rich Tibesti Province. The transitional authorities committed to advancing development and stabilization in the area. Also in January, a group of several thousand Chadians that had expressed hostile intentions against the transitional authorities established itself in the north-western Central African Republic. In this context, on 9 February, the President of Angola convened a meeting in Luanda with the President of the Central African Republic, Faustin-Archange Touadera, and the Transition President of Chad to discuss the security of the border between both countries. Further to that meeting, on 3 March, Chadian authorities announced that the former President of the Central African Republic and leader of the rebel group Coalition des patriotes pour le changement, François Bozizé, had left Chad for Guinea-Bissau. On 15 May, a joint Chad-Central African Republic military operation dismantled the camp and dislodged members of the Chadian armed group from Lim-Pendé Prefecture in the north-western Central African Republic. Attacks, often connected with intercommunal tensions, continued to be perpetrated on the Chadian side of the border in Logone Oriental Province, resulting in dozens killed and injured and leading to population displacement. Following the onset of fighting in the Sudan on 15 April, at least 600 Sudanese soldiers had reportedly fled into Chad, where they were disarmed.

Lake Chad basin crisis

21. Between 1 December 2022 and 30 April 2023, 135 Boko Haram-related security incidents resulting in 40 civilian fatalities were confirmed and reported by the United Nations in Cameroon, compared with 75 incidents resulting in 30 civilian fatalities for the same period one year before. Also between 1 December 2022 and 30 April 2023, 23 Boko Haram-related security incidents resulting in 30 civilian fatalities were confirmed and reported by the United Nations in Chad, compared with 53 incidents resulting in 86 civilian fatalities for the same period one year before. The Jama'atu Ahlis Sunna Lidda'awati Wal-Jihad armed group and Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP) were mostly engaged in robberies or looting activities, targeting isolated civilians or entire localities in Cameroon and Chad.

22. In the Far North Region of Cameroon, eight fishermen were killed near Blaram on 6 February. ISWAP militants reportedly abducted 20 fishermen in Blangwa,

Logone-et-Chari Department, on 8 February because they had refused to comply with the illegal taxation levied by the group.

23. Also on 8 February, heavily armed ISWAP militants attacked a military outpost in Tourou, in the Mokolo district of the Far North Region. The fighters reportedly stole military equipment. The number of victims was not reported. On 21 March, six soldiers were injured when their car reportedly hit a mine on the Kolofata-Am Chidé road in Mayo-Sava Department of the same region.

Lord's Resistance Army

24. The Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) continued to target civilians in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. On 27 and 28 February, the group reportedly abducted more than 28 people, including 20 children, in a series of attacks on communities in Bas-Uélé Province. On 4 March, LRA reportedly conducted a raid on two villages north-west of Banda, during which they abducted four boys and one girl. On the following day, also in Bas-Uélé Province, LRA fighters reportedly abducted two pastoralists for ransom.

Maritime security in the Gulf of Guinea

25. Three incidents of maritime crime in ECCAS waters were reported by the International Maritime Bureau of the International Chamber of Commerce during the reporting period, contrasting with the previously observed downward trend in acts of piracy and armed robbery at sea in the Gulf of Guinea. On 31 January, armed pirates attempted to board a Cameroonian-flagged fishing vessel off Idenao, South-West Region of Cameroon, but left after exchanging fire with security guards who were on board. On 1 March, unidentified individuals boarded a container vessel in the Soyo outer anchorage, Angola, threatened a crew member with a knife and raided the container before escaping. On 25 March, armed pirates attacked a Danish-owned and Liberian-flagged oil tanker 140 miles west of Pointe-Noire, the Congo. Contact with the 16 crew members on board was lost. On 30 March, the French navy found the tanker off the coast of Sao Tome and Principe, although six crew members had been kidnapped by the pirates. On 8 May, the shipowner announced that the crew members had been rescued from Nigeria. In addition, on 2 May, pirates reportedly attacked a Marshall Islands-flagged bulk carrier off the port of Owendo, Gabon, and kidnapped three crew members.

Effects of climate change, ecological changes and natural disasters on regional stability, including farmer-herder dynamics in Central Africa

26. The region's exposure to the effects of climate change was further demonstrated by the heavy floods that affected Kinshasa on 13 December, resulting in at least 120 fatalities, and the heavy rainfall in the Kalehe region of South Kivu Province in the Democratic Republic of the Congo on 4 May, which caused rivers to overflow and triggered landslides, reportedly killing more than 400 people. On 2 and 3 May, floods killed almost 130 people and destroyed thousands of homes and plantations in the Northern and Western Provinces of Rwanda. On 18 March, heavy rainfall led to flooding and landslides in Buea, South-West Region of Cameroon, reportedly leaving two people dead and dozens of buildings and homes destroyed or damaged. In contrast, southern Angola continued to face the worst drought in 40 years, with 1.58 million people facing acute food insecurity according to the World Food Programme.

27. Clashes between farmer and herder communities continued unabated in Chad, a situation compounded by a southward shift in transhumance patterns due to climate change. On 27 February, intercommunal violence caused at least 14 fatalities in

Mangalmé, Guéra Province. On 19 April, authorities reported that clashes between herders and farmers in Mont de Lam Department, Logone-Oriental Province, had left at least 22 people dead. In early May, intercommunal tensions in the Goré area of the same province reportedly left about 30 people dead and several dozen injured.

28. On 1 and 2 March, the President of Gabon, Ali Bongo Ondimba, and the President of France, Emmanuel Macron, jointly hosted the sixth edition of the One Planet Summit, this year entitled the One Forest Summit, in Libreville. Some 20 countries gathered to discuss the conservation and sustainable management of tropical forests, including of the Congo basin. A key outcome was the creation of a 100-million-euro fund to finance “biodiversity certificates” for countries that have safeguarded their forests and biodiversity stocks. Participants also aimed to create 10 million jobs in activities related to sustainable forest management and value chains that benefit local and indigenous communities.

B. Humanitarian developments

29. Armed clashes, intercommunal violence, food insecurity and malnutrition, as well as natural hazards including floods and droughts exacerbated by climate change, continued to drive humanitarian needs in Central Africa.

30. As at 30 April, Cameroon was hosting more than 488,000 refugees and asylum seekers and over 1 million internally displaced persons and had some 557,890 returnees. In the North-West and South-West Regions, some 1.7 million people needed humanitarian aid, including around 628,190 internally displaced persons. As at the same date, some 86,980 Cameroonians were seeking refuge in Nigeria owing to the crisis in those regions, and Cameroon was hosting some 349,400 refugees from the Central African Republic. Across Cameroon, almost 4.7 million people need humanitarian assistance in 2023, up 17.5 per cent from 2022.

31. Chad was hosting 641,275 refugees and asylum-seekers and around 381,290 internally displaced persons as at 30 April. The impacts of climate change continued to affect the country, where a total of 1.7 million people were expected to be food-insecure during the 2023 lean season, compared with 2.1 million in 2022. Some 6.9 million people need humanitarian assistance, compared with 6.1 million in 2022, and the 2023 humanitarian response plan, requiring \$674.1 million, is targeted at helping 4.1 million people among the most vulnerable, compared with 3.5 million in 2022. Following the outbreak of fighting in the Sudan, some 61,095 Sudanese refugees and 20,000 Chadian returnees had crossed into Chad by mid-May.

32. The Congo was hosting some 61,105 refugees and asylum-seekers as at 31 March, and Angola around 55,870 as at 30 April. Also as at 30 April, around 259,715 Burundians were refugees in the region, mostly in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Rwanda, Uganda and the United Republic of Tanzania.

Lake Chad basin crisis

33. Violence in the Lake Chad basin continued to take a heavy toll on communities. Across the Lake Chad basin, 11 million people need humanitarian assistance, more than 4.1 million people are urgently food-insecure, and around 758,000 children are estimated to be severely malnourished. Some 1,038 schools remained non-functional owing to armed violence, depriving thousands of children of education.

34. The Far North Region of Cameroon was hosting over 385,000 internally displaced persons and almost 127,000 refugees as at 30 April. Some 25,600 Cameroonians were refugees in Chad owing to the crisis in that region. Although humanitarian partners have scaled up urgent response activities such as the provision

of shelter, food, health care, education, water, hygiene services and sanitation, as well as protection services for the most vulnerable displaced people, numerous needs remain uncovered. The Lac Province of Chad was hosting around 381,290 internally displaced persons and 21,070 refugees as at the same date.

C. Human rights trends

35. The human rights situation in the subregion was marked by a shrinking civic space due to continued restrictions, suggesting that more efforts were needed to ensure the protection and promotion of human rights.

36. In Burundi, five members of civil society organizations were arbitrarily arrested on 14 and 15 February by the National Intelligence Service on charges of “undermining the internal security of the State, rebellion, and undermining the proper functioning of the national economy”. Three of the five members were acquitted on 28 April, while the other two were convicted of rebellion and sentenced to a fine and a two-year suspended sentence. On 2 May, the Court of Appeal in Bujumbura sentenced a journalist to a fine and 10 years in prison on charges of undermining the internal security and national integrity of the State.

37. In Cameroon, the radio journalist known as Martinez Zogo was kidnapped on 17 January in Yaoundé and found dead on 22 January, allegedly with signs of severe torture. On 27 January, the President instructed relevant authorities to investigate the case. National and international actors widely condemned the killing, while several high-profile military and civilian figures were arrested and detained. On 2 February, the journalist, radio animator and priest of the Orthodox Church in Cameroon, Reverend Father Jean-Jacques Ola Bébé, was also found dead in Yaoundé. On 20 April, the Cameroon Human Rights Commission condemned statements stigmatizing certain groups, tribes, ethnicities and regions of Cameroon reportedly made by participants in a live broadcast television programme on 16 April. On 7 May, the Cameroonian journalist, Anye Nde Nsoh, was killed in Bamenda, North-West Region, by alleged armed separatists.

38. In the North-West and South-West Regions of Cameroon, allegations continued to be made regarding human rights violations and abuses perpetrated by security and defence forces and armed separatist groups against civilians, including killings and the destruction of property. In addition, forced lockdowns, the use of improvised explosive devices and the kidnapping of civilians by armed groups limited the delivery of much-needed humanitarian assistance. In the Far North Region, the increasing use of improvised explosive devices and mines by Boko Haram-affiliated and splinter groups and raids on civilian communities continued to cause displacement and led to human rights abuses.

39. In Chad, following the events of 20 October 2022, 621 demonstrators, including minors, were arrested and transferred to the high-security prison of Koro Toro, in northern Chad. On 5 December, the public hearing of 401 of those arrested concluded with 262 being convicted and sentenced to jail terms for participation in an unauthorized gathering, the destruction of property, arson and public disorder. Most of them were later pardoned by the Transition President (see para. 7 above). Meanwhile, 80 others were convicted and received suspended sentences, and 59 were acquitted. The Chadian Bar Association boycotted the trial, denounced what it characterized as the unlawful detention of prisoners and stated that the deportation of minors to a high-security prison was akin to mistreatment. On 11 December, 139 of those who had received suspended sentences or been acquitted after the mass trial were released.

40. From 13 February to 21 March, the trial was held of more than 400 members of the FACT group, accused of having killed the former President of Chad in April 2021. Most were convicted and sentenced to life imprisonment for acts of terrorism, mercenary acts, recruitment of child soldiers and assault of the Head of State, while 24 were acquitted. The leader of FACT was also convicted and sentenced in absentia to life imprisonment. On 25 March, the Transition President pardoned 380 of those sentenced (see para. 7 above).

41. On 21 February, the National Human Rights Commission of Chad published the findings of its investigation into the protests of 20 October. It found that 128 people had been killed, 518 injured and 943 arrested, compared with 73, 300 and 621 reported by the Government, respectively; in addition, 12 people had disappeared. According to the Government, at least 15 members of the defence and security forces had been killed. The Commission attributed the main responsibility for the human rights violations to those forces. The Commission recommended that the Government identify and prosecute perpetrators or instigators of acts of torture, killings and abductions and release all persons arrested during the events of 20 October. On 13 December, an ECCAS delegation deployed a mission to Chad to investigate the events of 20 October. The report of the mission, which is expected to remain confidential, is awaiting endorsement by ECCAS member States.

42. In Rwanda, 86 civil society organizations and media associations called for a prompt, independent, impartial and thorough investigation into the death of the journalist, John Williams Ntwali, in a road accident in Kigali on 18 January. On 31 January, Rwandan authorities announced that the driver of the car involved in the accident had been convicted of manslaughter and unintentional bodily harm following a court session held on the same day. On 24 March, the Government announced the commutation by presidential order of the prison sentences of the President of the Rwandan Movement for Democratic Change-National Liberation Front, Paul Rusesabagina, as well as the spokesperson and 18 other members of the movement, who had been convicted of terrorism-related offences in 2021. Another 361 individuals convicted of various offences reportedly also saw their sentences commuted.

43. In the aftermath of the events of 25 November 2022 in Sao Tome and Principe, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights conducted a mission to the country from 12 to 14 December to assess the human rights situation and advocate investigations into the incidents. As a follow-up to the mission, the High Commissioner for Human Rights addressed a confidential letter to the President.

D. Socioeconomic trends

44. Countries of the subregion continued to grapple with the effects of global inflation, notably the rise of oil prices, with fuel subsidies exerting growing pressure on State budgets. Authorities in Cameroon and the Congo announced increases in fuel prices of 20.5 per cent effective 1 February and 6 per cent effective 31 January, respectively. In Cameroon, authorities adopted mitigation measures, including raising the salaries of civil servants and the minimum wage rate. On 3 January, authorities in the Central African Republic announced a significant increase in the price of petrol amid widespread fuel shortages that were affecting the delivery of humanitarian aid and the ability of national security forces to conduct operations. Following the outbreak of the recent fighting in the Sudan and the closure of the country's border with Chad, there were petrol shortages and rising prices in the east of Chad. There were also increases in commodity prices and shortages of fuel in the north-eastern Central African Republic, although the border with the Sudan remained open.

45. On 4 April, Burundi announced that it had reached an agreement with the International Monetary Fund to receive an Extended Credit Facility loan of \$260 million over a period of 40 months, at a time when the country faces higher levels of inflation and a depletion of foreign currency reserves. The loan will support the country in undertaking foreign exchange market and fiscal governance reforms.

46. On 17 March, the fifteenth ordinary session of the Conference of Heads of State of the Central African Economic and Monetary Community was held in Yaoundé. The leaders discussed the economic consequences of the war in Ukraine and the impact of regional security developments. The chairpersonship of the body was transferred to the Central African Republic.

47. On 11 January, authorities in Equatorial Guinea announced an outbreak of Marburg virus disease and declared a health alert in Kié-Ntem Province, in the border area with Cameroon and Gabon. According to the Government, there were 17 laboratory-confirmed cases in the country, with a total of 12 reported deaths, as well as 23 probable cases, all deceased. The World Health Organization and the United Nations Children's Fund provided support to the Government. On 15 May, the Vice-President of Equatorial Guinea declared that the outbreak had ended.

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

A. Good offices, preventive diplomacy and mediation

Angola

48. On 1 December, while in Luanda for the meeting of United Nations special representatives and special envoys in Central Africa, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Central Africa and Head of the United Nations Regional Office for Central Africa met with the President of Angola to discuss key issues of peace and security in the subregion.

49. From 13 to 15 March, the Assistant Secretary-General for Africa, Martha Ama Akyaa Pobee, visited Luanda, where she met with the President, the Minister for Foreign Affairs, members of the diplomatic community, representatives of women's groups and university students. In addition to raising regional issues, she stressed the importance of Angola continuing on its democratic path and called for strengthened anti-corruption efforts, the holding of the first-ever local elections, and progress on women and peace and security priorities.

Burundi

50. From 20 to 22 March, the Special Representative visited Bujumbura, where he met with the President to discuss regional peace and security issues and the mediation efforts of Burundi regarding the situation in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Cameroon

51. On 29 March, the Special Representative met with the President in Yaoundé. Discussions were focused on the internal situation and on the contributions of Cameroon to peace and security efforts in the subregion. The Special Representative also met with other senior officials, members of the diplomatic community and the United Nations country team.

Central African Republic

52. From 12 to 15 April, the Special Representative visited the Central African Republic, where he met with the President and other senior officials, the diplomatic community, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for the Central African Republic and Head of the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic, and the United Nations country team. In close coordination with the Special Representative for the Central African Republic, the Special Representative for Central Africa urged national authorities, countries of the region and international partners to remain committed to the peace process in the country, including within the framework of the joint bilateral commissions and through support for good governance and local elections.

Chad

53. From 6 to 17 March, UNOCA participated in an electoral needs assessment mission to Chad following a request by the transitional authorities for United Nations electoral assistance with the organization of the constitutional referendum and the presidential and legislative elections.

54. On 26 and 27 April, the Special Representative visited N'Djamena, where he met with the Transition President and other senior officials. He also met with political parties, as well as with the High Representative of the African Union for Chad, the Special Representative of ECCAS for Chad and members of the diplomatic community. On 2 May, the Special Representative participated in a meeting, organized in Kinshasa by the President of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Félix-Antoine Tshisekedi Tshilombo, in his capacity as ECCAS facilitator for Chad, with the leader of the Chadian opposition party Les Transformateurs, Succès Masra, at the latter's request. The two ECCAS Special Envoys for Chad also participated.

The Congo

55. On 15 January, on the margins of the fifty-fourth meeting of the United Nations Standing Advisory Committee on Security Questions in Central Africa, in Kintele, the Congo, the Special Representative met with the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Francophonie and Congolese Abroad of the Congo, with whom he discussed the security context in the subregion. He also met with representatives of the diplomatic community.

Democratic Republic of the Congo

56. On 25 February, the Special Representative met with the Vice-Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs in Kinshasa on the margins of the twenty-second ordinary session of the Conference of the ECCAS Heads of State and Government. They discussed regional dynamics and the country's achievements during its presidency of ECCAS.

Equatorial Guinea

57. From 8 to 12 May, the Special Representative visited Malabo, where he met with the President and other senior officials, as well as with the diplomatic community and the United Nations country team. Discussions with the President covered challenges pertaining to youth unemployment, maritime security in the Gulf of Guinea and the Marburg virus disease outbreak. The Special Representative encouraged the authorities to continue to collaborate with relevant United Nations entities on addressing the outbreak.

Gabon

58. The Special Representative held several meetings with Gabonese political actors, including representatives of the ruling party and the opposition. The Special Representative stressed the need for a calm political and social atmosphere in order for the upcoming elections to be held in optimal conditions and welcomed the political consultation launched by the President. He highlighted the importance of promoting better political participation and representation of women and young people.

Rwanda

59. From 6 to 7 March, the Special Representative visited Kigali, where he met with the Minister for Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation to discuss regional dynamics, socioeconomic development and the support provided by Rwanda to ECCAS. The Special Representative also met with the United Nations country team and the diplomatic community.

Sao Tome and Principe

60. Upon the request of the President for the support of the United Nations and ECCAS in strengthening the security and justice sectors, UNOCA and the ECCAS Commission, in collaboration with the Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs, the Department of Peace Operations and the United Nations Development Programme and with the support of the Resident Coordinator Office, jointly deployed a strategic assessment mission to Sao Tome from 11 to 18 April to identify strategies for justice and security sector reforms. During the reporting period, UNOCA provided technical support to the newly established Ministry of Women's Rights, including for the development of its workplan.

B. Enhancing subregional capacities for conflict prevention and mediation**Collaboration with regional, subregional and intergovernmental organizations, including support provided to the Economic Community of Central African States**

61. UNOCA and ECCAS continued high-level and technical-level engagements to advance joint efforts for peace and security in Central Africa. The Special Representative held monthly strategic coordination meetings with the President of the ECCAS Commission. UNOCA continued to support ECCAS in key priority areas, including the prevention of hate speech, youth participation and women's political engagement.

62. On 25 February, the Special Representative attended the twenty-second ordinary session of the ECCAS Conference of Heads of State and Government, in Kinshasa, during which leaders of the subregion welcomed engagement by ECCAS in Chad and Sao Tome and Principe. They instructed the President of the ECCAS Commission to continue his good offices between the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Rwanda and to strengthen his participation as observer in the Luanda and Nairobi processes, as well as in the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework Agreement for the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Region. During the session, the President of the Democratic Republic of the Congo transferred the ECCAS presidency to the President of Gabon.

United Nations Standing Advisory Committee on Security Questions in Central Africa

63. From 24 to 28 April, the Bureau of the United Nations Standing Advisory Committee on Security Questions in Central Africa led a field visit to the Congo to assess the situation of refugees and displaced persons in the Ngabe and Bouemba sites, situated in the border areas with the Central African Republic and the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Partnerships with civil society and support to civil society networks

64. From 24 to 26 January, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crimes (UNODC) and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) organized a cross-border forum between Cameroon and Chad on peace and security in Ébolowa, Cameroon. Local and national authorities from both countries, UNOCA, the Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs and civil society organizations attended the meeting. Under the framework of the UNODC-UNESCO *Tisserands de la Paix* project, funded by the Peacebuilding Fund, the forum served to assess and analyse the security, political and development situation in the targeted cross-border regions and helped to identify areas in those regions in which cross-border cooperation and support should be strengthened.

65. In Gabon, 148 youth representatives from Woleu-Ntem Province were trained on mediation, conflict prevention and management efforts as part of the *Tisserands de la Paix* project. In addition, a Joint Sustainable Development Goals Fund project implemented by the Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations and the United Nations Development Programme to promote the resilience of women and young people led to the creation of 1,000 direct and 300 indirect jobs in the province.

66. The United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women) started implementing a \$10 million regional project to strengthen the role of women's organizations in the return of peace and security to the Sahel region. In Chad, 20 women's organizations will receive technical and institutional support for three years in that regard.

67. On 7 and 8 December, UNOCA and the ECCAS Commission participated in a forum on the theme "Strengthening the women's movement to end violence against women and girls in West and Central Africa", organized by UN-Women in Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire. Participants adopted a declaration that lists coordinated actions between civil society and State actors for the elimination of violence against women and girls in both subregions.

68. On 26 January, UNOCA facilitated a workshop between ECCAS and the regional Coalition of Civil Society Organizations for Peace and Conflict Prevention in Central Africa to develop a joint strategic plan containing definitions of missions and actions to be implemented at the national and regional levels.

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

Lake Chad basin crisis

69. The International Organization for Migration, in collaboration with the Department of Peace Operations, organized a workshop in N'Djamena, from 5 to 9 December, to support the development of the national disengagement, disassociation, reintegration and reconciliation strategy for former associates of Boko

Haram-affiliated and splinter groups. A follow-up conference was held with national authorities, also in N'Djamena, from 27 to 31 March.

Maritime security in the Gulf of Guinea

70. On 25 February, the ECCAS Heads of State and Government adopted a revised protocol relating to the strategy for the safety and security of vital interests at sea and in continental waters of ECCAS member States, as well as a protocol relating to the strategy for the development of the sustainable blue economy in Central Africa.

Climate, peace and security

71. UNOCA continued its engagement with the ECCAS Commission on the development of a conflict-sensitive regional strategy on climate change and resilient development, the draft regional protocol on transhumance and the proposed regional consortium on climate change and biodiversity, peace and security, transhumance, climate finance and sustainable development. UNOCA continued efforts to mainstream gender and human rights perspectives in the context of these initiatives.

D. Enhancing United Nations coherence and coordination in the subregion

Internal United Nations exchanges, collaboration, coordination and joint initiatives

72. On 1 December, UNOCA concluded a two-day meeting of the special representatives and special envoys of the Secretary-General in the Central African subregion, in Luanda. The meeting was attended by the Special Representatives for Central Africa, the Central African Republic and the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Special Envoy for the Great Lakes Region. Participants coordinated United Nations engagement with relevant partners and subregional organizations and identified key priority areas for strengthened partnership and concerted actions, including on women and peace and security; youth, peace and security; climate, peace and security; natural resource management; and preventing and addressing misinformation and hate speech.

Partnerships with and support to United Nations resident coordinators and country teams

73. On 31 January, the Special Representative convened a virtual meeting with the Resident Coordinator in Cameroon, the UNESCO Regional Director for Central Africa and the Director of the United Nations Subregional Centre for Human Rights and Democracy in Central Africa (also referred to as the Regional Office for Central Africa of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights) to discuss developments in Cameroon. Participants reflected on ways to remobilize common action at the strategic and operational levels in order to ensure respect for the freedom of the press.

74. From 14 to 17 March, in Libreville, UNOCA held its annual meeting of peace and development advisers and political advisers in Central Africa and its annual meeting of heads of United Nations presences in Central Africa, to discuss current peace and security challenges and identify opportunities and entry points for conflict prevention. Participants agreed to enhance efforts towards information-sharing and to develop thematic modular approaches on joint priorities such as women and peace and security; youth, peace and security climate, peace and security; and political economy analysis.

IV. Observations and recommendations

75. Despite commendable efforts towards political dialogue and the active engagement of partners, including ECCAS, the democratic gains achieved so far remain fragile, as demonstrated by increased restrictions on human rights and fundamental freedoms.

76. I welcome the positive trends in the subregion. In this regard, I welcome the appointment of women to key political positions in Equatorial Guinea and Gabon and commend the transitional authorities in Chad for adopting their national action plan on the implementation of Security Council resolution [1325 \(2000\)](#) on women and peace and security. Nevertheless, I further encourage all regional stakeholders, including subregional organizations and forums, to facilitate the active and meaningful participation of women and young people in political and decision-making processes.

77. Dialogue remains paramount to addressing the crisis in the North-West and South-West Regions of Cameroon. I am concerned about the continued humanitarian impact of the crisis. I encourage all actors to resort to dialogue to resolve the crisis, protect civilians and ensure that humanitarian operations are unhindered. The United Nations stands ready to support nationally owned and led inclusive dialogue and reconciliation processes, with the support of the international community, as necessary.

78. The determination of the transitional authorities of Chad to proceed with the preparations for the constitutional referendum and the general elections is welcome. I am concerned that those preparations are taking place in a context marked by political and societal tensions, and I encourage the transitional authorities to pursue dialogue efforts with all key stakeholders in order to promote a more inclusive political environment conducive to a peaceful return to constitutional order. At the same time, I call upon opposition actors to put the national interest first and refrain from any actions that could further heighten tensions in the months ahead. I encourage partners to increase their support for peacebuilding efforts in the country, including at the subnational level.

79. I welcome the recent confidence-building measures taken by the transitional authorities in Chad, notably the pardoning of those convicted following the events of 20 October. I am, however, concerned about allegations of violations of due process rights during the trials and other human rights violations, and I call upon the transitional authorities to promote, respect and protect all human rights.

80. I thank countries in the region for welcoming those fleeing the fighting that erupted in the Sudan on 15 April. I plead with international partners to provide increased funding to help the neighbours of the Sudan to address the resulting additional humanitarian challenges and prevent destabilization in fragile border areas. I further call upon those neighbours to take all possible measures to help de-escalate the situation in the Sudan, contribute to political solutions and prevent the conflict from spreading to the broader region.

81. Countries of the subregion, many of which are facilitators of the Political Agreement for Peace and Reconciliation in the Central African Republic, should continue to support the peace process in the country. Progress within the framework of joint bilateral commissions is essential for durable border management in the interests of peace and development in the country and the wider region.

82. I welcome dialogue efforts between the Heads of States of the Central African Republic and Chad under Angolan facilitation. I reiterate the necessity of promoting continued dialogue and enhanced coordination to address cross-border issues

affecting peace and security in the border area between the Central African Republic and Chad.

83. The events of 25 November 2022 in Sao Tome and Principe and their aftermath are concerning. I condemn the alleged use of torture that led to the death of individuals in military detention and commend the Government and its partners for their prompt investigations into the matter. I encourage efforts by the Santomean authorities towards the reform of the justice and security sectors and reiterate the availability of the United Nations to accompany that endeavour.

84. As key electoral milestones are approached in the subregion, I urge Governments to ensure inclusive, credible and peaceful elections, with the effective participation of women and young people. I welcome the holding of a political dialogue between the ruling party and members of the political opposition in Gabon. I encourage the Government to strengthen the political and democratic processes and its outreach to the opposition and civil society.

85. I am particularly concerned by the growing trend of imposing restrictions on human rights and fundamental freedoms throughout the subregion, including the freedom of expression, as well as threats to the safety of journalists. I call upon States to respect, protect and promote all human rights and to ensure accountability for all violations and abuses, including gender-based violence. The protection of human rights and the promotion of inclusive, credible and democratic political processes are the main foundations for sustained peace, stability and development in the subregion. Efforts towards countering hate speech and misinformation should also be sustained. In this regard, I encourage the adoption of the draft regional strategy and action plan for preventing and combating hate speech in Central Africa.

86. I commend ECCAS for its active engagement in Chad and Sao Tome and Principe, which demonstrates its resolve to promote peace and security in Central Africa. I am encouraged by the willingness expressed by ECCAS to work closely with UNOCA, as demonstrated by the joint visit led by the Special Representative and the President of the ECCAS Commission to Sao Tome and Principe. To that end, I reiterate the commitment of the United Nations system, led by UNOCA, to supporting ECCAS.

87. Developments during the reporting period once again highlighted the severity of the impacts of climate change in the region, including mass flooding, displacement and the exacerbation of intercommunal tensions. These have been further compounded by activities of violent extremist and other armed groups, including in the Lake Chad basin. The groups continue to exploit intercommunal clashes, weak governance and deep-rooted grievances to expand their areas of influence. I encourage Governments to strengthen efforts to address the root causes of these issues, including through the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Agenda 2063 of the African Union, create an environment conducive to social cohesion and ensure the adequate provision of basic social services to ensure a safe return of displaced communities. Terrorism and violent extremism are a common regional threat, and Governments should coordinate efforts to prevent their spread in the subregion.

88. As the tenth anniversary of the Yaoundé Architecture approaches, I am encouraged by efforts, led by ECCAS, the Economic Community of West African States and the Gulf of Guinea Commission, on maritime safety and security. Continued incidents, however, demonstrate that maritime security enforcement capabilities should be strengthened, including through the criminalization of acts of piracy and the establishment of universal jurisdiction over such acts under national law, in accordance with the relevant provisions of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea of 1982. I encourage greater cooperation and coordination on

maritime security between regional economic communities in Central and West Africa, with the support of UNOCA, UNODC, UNOWAS and other relevant United Nations entities, to accelerate the full operationalization of the regional maritime security architecture.

89. While the subregion continues to grapple with the socioeconomic impact of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic and the armed conflict in Ukraine, the recent outbreak of Marburg virus disease in Equatorial Guinea necessitates increased vigilance and regional cooperation among States, as the COVID-19 outbreak has demonstrated that a national response alone is not sufficient to address such a threat.

90. I would like to express my appreciation to the Governments of the subregion, the African Union, ECCAS, the Economic and Monetary Community of Central Africa, 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 gratitude to the Multinational Joint Task Force and its troop-contributing countries for their commitment to the service of peace and stability. I am equally grateful to the Government and people of Gabon for their generous hospitality and support for UNOCA.

91. Lastly, I would like to thank my Special Representative, Abdou Abarry, and the staff of UNOCA for their continuing support to regional efforts to advance the cause of peace and security in Central Africa.
