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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 2020 ([S/2020/1154](#)). 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. The Central Africa subregion continued to face several political, peace and security challenges. The period under review was marked by the passing of the President of Chad, Idriss Déby Itno and the establishment of a transitional administration in the country; continued violence in Cameroon, the Central African Republic and the Lake Chad basin; and elections in the Central African Republic, Chad and the Congo. Countries of the subregion continued to bolster efforts towards addressing the impact of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, including by maintaining some restrictive measures and launching immunization plans. The subregion has demonstrated some resilience to COVID-19 by keeping the levels of infections and deaths relatively low, but at a high socioeconomic cost. The Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS) advanced its institutional reform and mandate in the area of peace and security.

Political developments and trends

3. Several regional initiatives were taken to address the situation in the Central African Republic. On 26 December, the President of the Congo, Denis Sassou Nguesso, in his capacity as Chair of ECCAS, hosted the tenth extraordinary session of the Conference of ECCAS Heads of State and Government to review the situation



in the country and mobilize regional support ahead of the presidential and legislative elections on 27 December. On 29 January, Angola convened in Luanda a mini-summit of the outgoing, current and incoming Chairs of the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region on the situation in the Central African Republic. On 20 April, a follow-up summit was convened in Luanda. Both meetings were attended by the Presidents of the Central African Republic, Chad, the Congo and Rwanda.

4. In Angola, on 15 January, the leader of the main opposition party, União Nacional para a Independência Total de Angola, called for the holding of municipal elections in 2021. The elections had been initially announced for 2020 before being postponed owing to COVID-19 and the need to put in place the required legal framework. On 18 March, the National Assembly adopted a revised Constitution intended to strengthen the rule of law in the country. The opposition expressed concern that the revision could contribute to postponing the local and general elections. On 12 April, the Supreme Court sentenced Manuel Rabelais, a former communication minister under the former President of Angola, José Eduardo dos Santos, to 14 years' imprisonment for money-laundering and embezzlement.

5. In Cameroon, the Government took steps towards decentralization in line with the recommendations of the major national dialogue, including by holding regional elections on 6 December. The ruling Cameroon People's Democratic Movement won those elections, controlling 9 of 10 regions. The elections were key to the implementation of the "special status" for the North-West and South-West Regions. The opposition Cameroon Renaissance Movement and Social Democratic Front boycotted the elections. On 9 December, the authorities lifted the security measures taken around the residence of the leader of the Cameroon Renaissance Movement, Maurice Kamto, which had been in place since 22 September 2020, and, on 5 February, released from detention the party's first Vice-President, following his arrest on 1 June 2019. On 18 March, the Presidents of the National Assembly and the Senate of Cameroon were re-elected to their positions.

6. Notwithstanding several initiatives, no progress was made on continuing political dialogue to achieve a durable solution to the unrest in the North-West and South-West Regions of Cameroon. From 28 January to 2 February, the Secretary of State of the Holy See visited Cameroon, where he met the President, Paul Biya, in Yaoundé to discuss the crisis in the two Regions and the role of the Catholic Church in addressing it. On 31 January, he called for inclusive dialogue, peace and reconciliation during a mass held in Bamenda, North-West Region. On 9 April, the National Assembly announced the holding of a debate on the crisis in the two Regions during its June session, the first parliamentary debate on the crisis since its onset.

7. In Chad, on 14 December, President Déby promulgated a new Constitution, endorsing recommendations from the "second national inclusive forum", held in 2020. Changes included the establishment of the position of Vice-President and an upper chamber of parliament and the reduction in the minimum age for the presidency from 45 to 40 years.

8. Restrictions on democratic space and political tensions increased in Chad in the lead-up to the presidential election on 11 April. On 28 February, Chadian security forces raided the residence of a declared presidential candidate and former rebel, Yaya Dillo. During the operation, Mr. Dillo's mother was killed. On 3 March, the Supreme Court validated 10 of 17 presidential candidatures, including of the first female presidential candidate. Three validated candidates, including former opposition leader Saleh Kebzabo, announced their withdrawal from the presidential race and campaigned for a boycott of the election. During the weeks leading up to the poll, opposition entities and civil society groups organized weekly protests against President Déby's candidature. Dozens of protestors took to the streets in N'Djamena.

Authorities banned and dispersed those gatherings, citing public health and security reasons.

9. On 19 April, the electoral commission of Chad announced that President Déby had won the presidential election with 79.32 per cent of the votes cast. On 20 April, a military spokesperson announced that the President had succumbed to injuries reportedly sustained in the context of fighting between the army and rebels from the Front pour l'alternance et la concorde au Tchad that had entered Chad on election day. The State funeral for the late President was held in N'Djamena on 23 April and attended by various Heads of State and Government.

10. A 15-member transitional military council, led by the head of the presidential guard, General Mahamat Idriss Déby, took power and vowed to organize a new presidential election within 18 months. The transitional military council issued a transitional charter, which superseded the Constitution. On 26 April, the former Prime Minister, Albert Pahimi Padacké, who had placed second in the presidential election, was appointed transitional Prime Minister. On 2 May, the leader of the transitional military council and the transitional Prime Minister established a transitional Government comprising 31 ministers and 9 secretaries of State. On 27 April and 8 May, civil society groups and opposition political parties organized demonstrations in N'Djamena and other cities to protest against the takeover by the transitional military council. On 7 May, the new Minister of Justice and Human Rights ordered the release of all demonstrators detained after past protests, except those who had committed proven criminal acts against persons or property. The same day, the Minister for Public Security and Migration issued a decree by which peaceful demonstrations that met specific conditions would be authorized. On 3 May, the party of opposition leader Saleh Kebzabo joined the transitional Government and withdrew from the Coordination des actions citoyennes.

11. The Peace and Security Council of the African Union issued a communiqué on 23 April, in which it expressed “grave concern” with respect to the establishment of the transitional military council and urged “the Chadian defence and security forces and all national stakeholders to respect the constitutional mandate and order, and to expeditiously embark on a process of restoration of constitutional order and handing over of political power to the civilian authorities, in accordance with the Constitution of the Republic of Chad”. It also called for national dialogue and deployed a fact-finding mission, from 29 April to 9 May, to N'Djamena. On 20 May, the Peace and Security Council, informed by the recommendations of the fact-finding mission, issued another communiqué, in which it requested, among others, an urgent review of the transition charter to ensure it met Chadians’ aspirations “for civilian-led democratic governance”; the completion of the transition to democratic rule within an 18-month period (from 20 April 2021); assurances that members of the transitional military council would not run in the election; and the establishment of a national transition council to serve as an interim legislative body, mandated to draft a new constitution. The Peace and Security Council also requested that the transitional Government organize an inclusive national dialogue within three months and restore civic and political rights immediately. On 24 May, the Chairperson of the African Union Commission appointed Basile Ikouébé of the Congo as his Special Representative in Chad to support the transition process in the country. On 20 May, the head of the transitional military council and its members made statements in which they committed themselves not to running in the upcoming elections, as requested by the Peace and Security Council.

12. In the Congo, President Nguesso won the presidential election on 21 March. On 6 April, the Constitutional Court confirmed that the incumbent had received 88.4 per cent of the votes cast. The main opposition candidate, who, according to official reports, succumbed to COVID-19 after the election, received 7.76 per cent of the vote.

Voter turnout was announced at 67 per cent. The President faced six male candidates, while the main parliamentary opposition party and others boycotted the election. The Episcopal Conference of the Congo voiced serious reservations over the electoral process. The African Union, ECCAS and International Conference on the Great Lakes Region, all of which had sent observers, welcomed what they deemed was a peaceful and orderly election. They provided recommendations to further improve the political and electoral processes. On 16 April, the President was sworn in for a fifth term in office. On 16 May, President Nguesso appointed a new cabinet of 36 members, including 8 women.

13. In Equatorial Guinea, the strategic context remained marked by an economic crisis resulting from the fall in oil prices aggravated by the COVID-19 pandemic. On 11 December, the International Court of Justice ruled in favour of France over the confiscation in 2012 of a mansion in Paris belonging to the Vice-President, Teodoro Nguema Obiang Mangue, as part of a corruption probe. On 22 February, the Third Deputy Prime Minister in charge of human rights addressed the forty-sixth session of the Human Rights Council and reported on an ongoing process in Parliament to abolish the death penalty. He called upon the United Nations to support ongoing national efforts in promoting the human rights agenda. On 28 April, the Senate approved a bill on the prevention of and efforts to combat corruption.

14. In Gabon, authorities focused on governance and economic recovery in the context of the economic and health crises facing the country. On 29 December, Parliament adopted a new Constitution, which was promulgated on 8 January. According to the new Constitution, a triumvirate of the Presidents of the National Assembly and Senate and the Minister of Defence would collectively assume presidential powers during an interim period of a vacancy or temporary incapacity at the presidency. Moreover, a former Head of State would have stronger immunity from judicial proceedings for crimes committed during his or her tenure. Segments of the opposition and civil society criticized the absence of consultations during the process. In line with the new Constitution, on 27 February, the President, Ali Bongo Ondimba, appointed 15 senators, including 7 women. In senatorial elections on 6 February, the ruling Parti démocratique gabonais, won 46 of the 52 remaining seats. On 1 March, the President of the Senate was re-elected for a second term.

15. In Sao Tome and Principe, authorities made progress towards modernizing the justice system, but persisting divisions in the political class regarding an electoral law reform delayed the preparations for the presidential election scheduled for 18 July. On 11 December, the President, Evaristo Carvalho, hosted the second high-level dialogue on justice reform, which approved the country's justice modernization programme. On 30 December, he vetoed an electoral reform bill adopted by the National Assembly on 15 December, citing the ill-timing of and lack of consensus on the reform. Nevertheless, on 12 February, he promulgated it, after the National Assembly had removed contentious provisions. This paved the way for the installation of the National Electoral Commission on 16 February and for preparations to commence for the presidential election. On 29 April, the Government and the European Union held their annual political dialogue.

16. On 5 March, proceedings before the International Court of Justice were jointly instituted by Equatorial Guinea and Gabon concerning the delimitation of their common maritime and land boundaries and sovereignty over several islands. The proceedings were instituted by way of a special agreement, which was signed by the two countries in 2016 and entered into force in March 2020.

Security developments and trends

17. Violence persisted in the Far North, North-West and South-West Regions of Cameroon. In the latter two regions, attacks by separatist armed groups against government officials, traditional leaders and school personnel increased in the run-up to the regional elections and have since continued, also featuring the use of improvised explosive devices.

18. On 8 December, the house of the Mayor of Bamenda, North-West Region of Cameroon, was set ablaze. On 13 December, non-State armed groups invaded the palaces of three traditional rulers in the South-West Region and took them hostage. One traditional ruler reportedly died in captivity while the other two were released the following day. On 5 January, non-State armed groups attacked the convoy of the Senior Divisional Officer of Momo Division, North-West Region, killing five members of his delegation. On 9 January, armed secessionists attacked a military checkpoint in Matazem, North-West Region, killing four military personnel and two civilians. On 9 January, armed separatists allegedly killed the principal of a public high school in Ossing, South-West Region. On 23 January, government forces disabled two improvised explosive devices in Limbe, South-West Region, while one device exploded near a stadium, with no injuries reported.

19. On 10 February, government forces launched a military operation against separatist armed groups suspected of fomenting attacks on Kumba, South-West Region of Cameroon. According to the authorities, the operation resulted in the killing of five militants, including the leader of a group that had staged a deadly attack against a school in Kumba last October. On 15 February, the Cameroonian army announced the arrest of two gendarmes, two soldiers and four police officers accused of torturing a separatist fighter in the North-West Region. Between 22 and 26 February, suspected armed men attacked civilians in at least seven villages in Nwa subdivision, North-West Region. At least 8 people were killed, more than 14 injured, some 100 houses and 3 churches looted and burned and approximately 4,200 civilians displaced.

20. In Chad, on 11 April, election day, the Chadian rebel group Front pour l'alternance et la concorde au Tchad launched an incursion from south-western Libya into Tibesti Province, advancing into west-central Chad within a week, with the declared intention of marching to N'Djamena. On 25 April, the transitional military council rejected the offer of a ceasefire made by the Front to allow for a political resolution of the conflict through dialogue. Following confrontations with the Chadian army, the operational capability of the Front was reportedly reduced and some of its fighters withdrew into the Niger. Renewed fighting was reported in Kanem Province on 29 April. On 9 May, the minister of defence declared victory over the Front, stating that the national territory was secure. Meanwhile, in the south, recurrent but intensified clashes between nomadic herders and local agricultural communities resulted in the deaths of at least 170 people during the reporting period.

Boko Haram/Lake Chad basin

21. The reporting period witnessed an increase in reported Boko Haram-related incidents in Cameroon and Chad. Between 1 December 2020 and 30 April 2021, there were 423 reported Boko Haram-related security incidents in Cameroon, with 145 civilian fatalities, and 62 incidents in Chad, with 199 civilian fatalities.

22. In the Far North Region of Cameroon, attacks launched by Boko Haram factions against civilians continued to predominantly affect areas in the Mayo-Tsanaga and Mayo-Sava departments, close to the border with Nigeria. On 4 December, Boko Haram militants attacked the locality of Assighassia, killing three civilians and

injuring three more, and on 10 December, they attacked the locality of Gakara, burning down 14 houses and injuring a member of a local vigilante group. On 8 January, a female suicide bomber detonated an improvised explosive device in Mozogo, killing 17 civilians, including 5 children, and wounding 12 others. On 21 March, Boko Haram militants attacked Bla-Gossi Tourou, reportedly killing three civilians.

23. On 20 March, two Cameroonian soldiers were killed in an attack by a Boko Haram faction in north-eastern Borno State, Nigeria, while lending support to their Nigerian counterparts who were attacked by Boko Haram elements outside the Nigerian town of Wulgo. The Cameroonian support was within the framework of the Multinational Joint Task Force. In December, Boko Haram factions undertook five attacks in Lac Province of Chad, killing 7 civilians and kidnapping 33, including at least 7 women. On 8 April, Boko Haram elements ambushed Chadian soldiers in the Ngouboua area, bordering Nigeria, killing 2 soldiers and injuring 11 others, including 4 civilians. On 27 April, a suspected Boko Haram faction attacked an army position in Litri, killing at least 12 Chadian soldiers. According to the Governor of Lac Province, more than 40 of the faction's fighters were also killed.

Lord's Resistance Army

24. According to the non-governmental organization (NGO) Invisible Children, on 22 January, the Lord's Resistance Army splinter faction led by Achaye Doctor abducted 11 civilians, including 3 women and 2 children, from Biro, east of Zemio, Central African Republic. Subsequently, on 24 January, the armed group released 8 of the 11 civilians, retaining 1 woman and 2 children.

25. According to Invisible Children, attacks by suspected Lord's Resistance Army groups in the Democratic Republic of the Congo also increased in late February as the Owila faction looted and abducted civilians in Haut-Ulélé. Between February and April, at least 23 people were abducted, including 8 children. The surge in attacks mirrors trends in 2019 and 2020, in which Lord's Resistance Army violence in Haut-Ulélé and Bas-Ulélé Provinces spiked between March and May, coinciding with the last few months of the dry season, during which movement is less arduous. Since January 2021, 60 people have escaped or defected from Lord's Resistance Army splinter factions. On 25 February, 21 people, including 2 Congolese combatants, escaped from the Achaye faction and surrendered to Congolese security forces.

26. On 6 May, the International Criminal Court sentenced Dominic Ongwen, a Lord's Resistance Army commander who surrendered in 2015 to 25 years in prison after he had been found guilty of 61 counts of crimes against humanity and war crimes that had taken place in Northern Uganda between July 2002 and December 2005. Mr. Ongwen was the first member of the Lord's Resistance Army to be tried by the Court and the first person to be convicted by the Court for the crime of forced pregnancy. The sentencing also marked the first time that the crime of forced marriage had been considered by the Court.

Maritime security in the Gulf of Guinea

27. According to the International Maritime Bureau, in 2020, the Gulf of Guinea accounted for 95 per cent of maritime crew members kidnapped worldwide, with an increasing number in the Central Africa maritime domain. The Interregional Coordination Centre for Maritime Safety and Security in the Gulf of Guinea reported 20 security incidents at sea, including 11 in the ECCAS maritime space, between January and March 2021, a decrease compared with the 45 incidents, including 9 in the ECCAS maritime space, reported in the fourth quarter of 2020.

28. On 4 May, the Government of the Congo convened a virtual ministerial meeting of the Council for Peace and Security in Central Africa on maritime security in Central Africa. Ministers agreed to promote the use of existing protocols on maritime security and improve interministerial coordination at the State level. They called upon the ECCAS Commission to mobilize adequate resources to strengthen existing mechanisms in the effort to combat maritime insecurity.

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

29. Some countries in the subregion, including Angola, Burundi and Rwanda, experienced severe drought and renewed cycles of flooding owing to excessive rainfall, which affected more than 1 million people in 2020. The resulting destruction of houses, goods, crops and fields threatened the livelihoods of many communities reliant on rain-fed agriculture, further contributing to food insecurity, forced displacement, natural resource scarcity and intensified land conflicts and accentuating farmer-herder conflicts. Women were often among those hit hardest, given that structural inequalities in income, ownership and access to land, and decision-making power impaired their options to cope with and adapt to the effects of climate change.

B. Humanitarian developments

30. Conflicts, floods and epidemics in various parts of Central Africa, aggravated by COVID-19, continued to have serious consequences for the humanitarian situation in the subregion.

31. There continues to be a highly complex humanitarian context in Cameroon owing to widespread insecurity, epidemics and floods. In 2021, 4.4 million people in Cameroon will need humanitarian assistance. Humanitarian partners planned to target 3 million of the most vulnerable in 2021. The crises in the Far North, North-West and South-West Regions led to the internal displacement of more than 1 million people, along with the return of 466,000 persons. The humanitarian response plan for 2021 requires \$362 million, 18 per cent of which had been funded by mid-May.

32. As at 30 April, Cameroon hosted almost 447,000 refugees and asylum seekers, including almost 322,000 refugees from the Central African Republic and almost 117,000 from Nigeria. As a result of mounting tension and hostilities surrounding the presidential election in the Central African Republic, more than 6,500 new refugees from the Central African Republic arrived in Cameroon as at 30 April, according to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).

33. Pervasive insecurity in the North-West and South-West Regions of Cameroon resulted in further abuses committed against civilians and forced displacements and hampered humanitarian access and access to basic services. As at 30 April, more than 67,000 Cameroonians had sought refuge in Nigeria. More than 409,000 people had been displaced within the two Regions and faced significant protection risks, including high rates of sexual and gender-based violence. As at 30 April, there were more than 409,000 returnees within the two Regions, while an additional 302,000 had been displaced to other regions of Cameroon. An estimated 700,000 children were left out of school owing to the crisis in the two Regions.

34. Attacks against humanitarian, health and education personnel and facilities in the North-West and South-West Regions of Cameroon continued. Armed clashes between non-State armed groups and government forces, the use of improvised explosive devices and the enforcement of lockdowns by non-State armed groups continued to pose security threats and access challenges to humanitarian partners. On 8 January, a truck contracted by the World Food Programme carrying food items was

caught in the crossfire after Government forces had been ambushed at the Metazem checkpoint, North-West Region. The driver and his assistant were both killed. On 4 February, unidentified gunmen fired upon a clearly marked ambulance from a medical NGO, responding to an emergency call, near Muyuka, South-West Region, wounding one aid worker. On 24 April, the vehicle of a national NGO was shot at by a soldier at an official checkpoint near Mamfe town in the South-West region. Two staff members were injured.

35. On 26 March, a United Nations convoy comprising six staff members from the World Food Programme and one from the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs was attacked with stones and gunshots by a non-State armed group at Ikata village, South-West Region of Cameroon. The convoy returned safely to Buea, although two armoured vehicles were severely damaged. The attack on a United Nations convoy was the first of its kind in the North-West and South-West Regions. The United Nations suspended food distribution and humanitarian missions in the area until further notice.

36. On 10 February, the Governments of Cameroon and Nigeria and UNHCR announced the planned voluntary return of 5,000 Nigerian refugees from the Minawao refugee camp in the Far North Region of Cameroon. As at 30 April, 3,880 Nigerian refugees had been voluntarily returned to Banki and Bama, Borno State, Nigeria.

37. In Chad, multiple crises, compounded by COVID-19, continued to affect several areas, exacerbating malnutrition and food insecurity. The revised humanitarian response plan for 2021 requires \$617.5 million targeting 4 million of the 5.5 million people in need of emergency humanitarian assistance. As at 14 April, some 4,754 new refugee arrivals from the Sudan were reported in eastern Chad, following attacks by armed militias in West Darfur.

38. In December, the Congo saw an influx of new refugees from the Central African Republic, following the elections. As at 30 April, 8,500 new refugees had been recorded, including 2,700 biometrically registered. The Congo hosted some 361,000 refugees, asylum seekers, internally displaced persons and others of concern to UNHCR as at 30 April.

39. In Equatorial Guinea, on 7 March, a series of explosions at military barracks in Bata left 107 people killed and more than 700 injured, including women and children, with extensive destruction. The only COVID-19 testing laboratory in Bata was significantly damaged in the incident.

Boko Haram/Lake Chad basin

40. The Lake Chad basin crisis has led to the internal displacement of more than 321,880 Cameroonians and some 401,510 Chadians and forced almost 129,000 Nigerians to seek refuge in Cameroon and Chad. People in the Lake Chad basin continued to suffer from epidemics, including cholera, measles and polio, as well as destruction due to heavy flooding.

41. In the Far North Region of Cameroon, activities of Boko Haram factions, 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 April, there were approximately 112,700 Nigerian refugees, more than 321,880 internally displaced persons and more than 123,000 returnees in the Region, who faced significant protection risks. Heavy rainfall since July 2020 caused widespread flooding, affecting more than 162,000 people. The loss of livelihoods due to conflict and floods and the impact of COVID-19 led to increased food insecurity.

42. More than 16,290 Nigerian refugees, some 401,510 internally displaced persons and more than 30,160 Chadian returnees from the Niger and Nigeria were recorded

in the Chadian provinces affected by Boko Haram as at 30 April. More than half of the population in Lac Province remained displaced owing to insecurity and flooding. Protection concerns persisted, with women and girls facing higher rates of sexual and gender-based violence and limited access to health care. Insecurity, flooding and COVID-19-related movement restrictions in the province continued to affect access to livelihoods, leading to increased food insecurity and the vulnerability of local populations.

C. Human rights trends

43. In Angola, protests continued over demands for better living conditions, good governance and alternation of power. Civil society organizations complained about the excessive use of force by security forces during those protests. On 30 January, a demonstration organized by the Lunda Tchokwe Protectorate Movement was violently dispersed by the police in Cafunfo, Lunda Norte Province. At least six individuals were killed and several others injured. Authorities opened investigations into the incident.

44. In the North-West and South-West Regions of Cameroon, non-State armed groups continued to attack government forces and civilians, perpetrating killings, torture and ill-treatment against civilians, abducting for ransom, enforcing lockdowns and detonating improvised explosive devices. On 12 March, Human Rights Watch issued a statement in which it accused armed separatists of perpetrating abuses against the civilian populations in the two regions.

45. Reports of alleged abuses by government forces against civilians in the North-West and South-West Regions of Cameroon also continued. On 10 January, at least 10 people, including civilian women and children, were reportedly killed by government forces in Mautu, South-West Region. On 23 January, government forces reportedly killed four teenagers during a raid in Bamenda, North-West Region. The Government claimed that they were members of non-State armed groups.

46. In Chad, between December 2020 and April 2021, authorities restricted democratic space, arresting members of opposition parties, human rights activists and journalists, and banning gatherings organized by opposition parties and civil society organizations to demand the opening of political space, citing public health and public order reasons. The investigation into the death in custody of 44 of 58 suspected Boko Haram members in March 2020 has not concluded. The 14 survivors continue to be held in the high-security prison of Koro Toro awaiting trial. On 27 April, the police violently repressed protests, which had been prohibited by the authorities, against the takeover by the transitional military council, in N'Djamena and a few towns in southern Chad, including by using live ammunition. At least six people were reportedly killed, while several dozen were injured and many more arrested. The transitional military council announced a judicial inquiry into the events.

47. In the Congo, on 12 December, the human rights organization, Observatoire congolais des droits de l'homme, called upon the authorities to release the coordinator of the Congolese platform of human rights NGOs, arrested in Brazzaville on 11 March, following accusations that he had sought to interfere in the electoral process. On 3 May, the editor-in-chief of *Sel-Piment*, arrested on 5 February on libel charges involving a key government official, was sentenced to six months in prison. The coordinators of the civil society movements Tournons la page and Ras-le-bol were arrested on 11 and 25 March, respectively, and have been in detention since then. Opposition figures Jean-Marie Michel Mokoko and André Okombi Salissa remained in detention, notwithstanding calls by the United Nations Working Group on Arbitrary Detention for their release.

48. In Gabon, on 18 February, two curfew violators were shot dead during violent demonstrations against COVID-19 restrictions in some neighbourhoods of Libreville.

D. Socioeconomic trends

49. Governments continued to invest critical resources to mitigate the impact of COVID-19, while facing calls for enhanced social and economic measures and the opening of political space. The regional economy in the Central African Economic and Monetary Community (CEMAC) area was projected to rebound moderately to 2.6 per cent of gross domestic product in 2021, before stabilizing to 2.4 per cent in 2022, according to the International Monetary Fund.

50. In the ECCAS region, the economic impact of COVID-19 continued to affect oil-exporting countries and those with large tourism sectors disproportionately. Prospects for an asymmetric economic rebound challenged efforts towards greater regional economic integration in the ECCAS region.

51. On 24 February, the Presidents of the ECCAS and CEMAC Commissions met in Libreville as part of a dialogue between the two institutions to develop synergies towards facilitating regional integration, accelerating economic transformation and promoting subregional economic and social development.

52. The protracted health and economic crises could have longer-term effects on regional growth, given that the subregion faces the effects of higher debt loads on economic and social investment. The crises could accentuate poverty and inequality and worsen the livelihoods of vulnerable populations, especially women and young people.

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

A. Good offices, preventive diplomacy and mediation

Cameroon

53. 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.

54. From 17 to 20 March, the Special Representative travelled to Cameroon at the request of the authorities. During his visit, he met the Prime Minister, the Secretary-General at the Presidency and the Minister Delegate to the Minister of External Relations in charge of Relations with the Commonwealth. He also met with bilateral and international partners and civil society organizations. In his meetings, the Special Representative discussed ways of resolving the crisis in the North-West and South-West regions peacefully and addressing its root causes and socioeconomic consequences. He also maintained channels of communications with diaspora-based leaders of armed groups.

Central African Republic

55. Working closely with the Special Representative for the Central African Republic and senior officials at the Secretariat, the Special Representative for Central Africa continued to mobilize regional support for the implementation of the Political Agreement for Peace and Reconciliation in the Central African Republic. From 10 to

13 December, he undertook, with the President of the ECCAS Commission, a visit to the country, to engage in broad consultations with political actors ahead of the elections.

Chad

56. From 7 to 13 March, UNOCA dispatched a team to Chad to undertake a gender and human rights assessment and support the finalization of the national action plan on Security Council resolution [1325 \(2000\)](#) on women and peace and security. From 7 to 13 April, UNOCA deployed a working-level mission to Chad to support the resident coordinator and the United Nations country team in the context of the presidential election.

57. From 23 to 27 April, the Special Representative travelled to Chad to represent the Secretary-General at the State funeral of President Déby. He took the opportunity to meet with Chadian stakeholders, notably with the transitional military council leader, the President of the dissolved National Assembly and key opposition leaders, to promote a peaceful, inclusive and consensual process to return to constitutional order and civilian rule. The Special Representative also maintained close contact with the African Union and ECCAS to coordinate efforts.

Congo

58. On 18 and 19 February, the Special Representative travelled to Brazzaville for consultations with the Government, political leaders, the national electoral commission and the diplomatic community. He urged interlocutors to remain committed to a peaceful electoral process and respect for the rule of law. From 15 to 29 March, UNOCA deployed a working-level mission at the request and in support of the resident coordinator and the United Nations country team. From 14 to 17 April, the Special Representative travelled to Brazzaville to participate in the swearing-in ceremony of President Nguesso and hold consultations with the authorities.

59. From 22 February to 6 March, UNOCA supported a series of workshops for some 100 journalists on conflict awareness-raising reporting with a focus on the electoral process. The workshops were organized by the office of the resident coordinator and funded by the United Nations Development Programme-Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs Joint Programme on Building National Capacities for Conflict Prevention. The workshops mobilized facilitators and resource persons from various United Nations entities, in liaison with national authorities.

60. The United Nations country team adopted joint programming intended to prevent a relapse into conflict in Pool department, broaden the space for political solutions and strengthen peacebuilding. United Nations agencies were working on a community violence reduction approach in Pool department to mitigate the risk of ex-combatants remobilizing and rearming owing to frustrations over the stalled disarmament, demobilization and reintegration programme.

Equatorial Guinea

61. In response to the Government's call for international support in the aftermath of the Bata explosions, the United Nations coordinated a multidimensional humanitarian response. The Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs mobilized a humanitarian team through the United Nations Disaster Assessment and Coordination Team mechanism, and a security team was deployed under the umbrella of the United Nations Regional Centre for Peace and Disarmament in Africa to look at unexploded ordnance risks. The office of the resident coordinator presented the Government with recommendations in relation to the humanitarian situation and ammunition management.

62. From 16 to 20 April, UNOCA and the ECCAS Commission deployed a joint technical mission to Malabo, in response to a request from the Government for assistance in the development of its national action plan on the implementation of Security Council resolution [1325 \(2000\)](#) on women and peace and security.

Gabon

63. On 9 December, President Bongo Ondimba and the Special Representative had an exchange on the legacy of Gabon's ECCAS chairmanship, including the successful completion of the institutional reform process, and recent developments in the subregion, focusing on the crisis in the Central African Republic.

Sao Tome and Principe

64. From 25 January to 1 February, an electoral needs assessment mission was deployed to Sao Tome, in response to a request for United Nations assistance for the presidential election. Following approval of the mission's recommendations, resource mobilization is ongoing to provide electoral assistance.

65. The Special Representative visited Sao Tome from 16 to 20 May to advocate a peaceful and inclusive electoral process.

66. From 25 to 29 April, UNOCA and the ECCAS Commission conducted a joint visit to Sao Tome and Principe to provide technical support for the preparation of the country's national action plan for the implementation of Security Council resolution [1325 \(2000\)](#) on women and peace and security.

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

United Nations Standing Advisory Committee on Security Questions in Central Africa

67. From 4 to 12 March, UNOCA dispatched an advance team to Bujumbura to assist the Burundian authorities in the preparations for the fifty-first ministerial meeting of the Committee, scheduled to be held from 24 to 28 May.

68. From 25 to 30 April, the Bureau of the Committee conducted a visit to Bangui within the framework of the Political Agreement on Peace and Reconciliation in the Central African Republic and the disarmament, demobilization, rehabilitation and reintegration programme in the country.

Collaboration with regional, subregional and intergovernmental organizations

69. The Special Representative held regular meetings with the President of the ECCAS Commission to discuss key issues of peace and regional stability and the need to further strengthen ECCAS preventive diplomacy and for ECCAS to continue to work in synergy with regional and international partners.

70. On 12 January, UNOCA met the ECCAS Commissioner for Gender and Social Affairs to discuss partnership between the two offices in support of ECCAS efforts to promote women's participation in governance and mediation structures and in gender-sensitive civil society platforms for early warning and conflict prevention.

71. On 29 March, the Special Representative and the President of the ECCAS Commission co-chaired a virtual UNOCA-ECCAS joint retreat. The two offices endorsed their joint strategic plan for the period 2021–2025 focusing on collaborative efforts to advance national and regional governance; an integrated approach to

transnational security challenges; management of armed groups and rule of law deficits; partnerships with women, young people and civil society for conflict prevention; and strategic planning, resource mobilization and communication.

72. On 30 April, the Special Representative met, virtually, the Regional Vice-President of the World Bank for Western and Central Africa, at his request. They agreed to coordinate their analyses and activities in several countries in Central Africa.

Climate security

73. UNOCA completed the first phase of a two-year project on climate security, which has been implemented since October 2020. The first phase identified key pathways linking the effects of climate change to peace and security challenges in the subregion, such as land conflict, pastoralism-related insecurity, maritime insecurity, unregulated urbanization and the rise of non-State armed groups. The findings will inform a comprehensive assessment of climate-related security risks in Central Africa, to be conducted with subregional partners.

Boko Haram

74. Between 21 February and 1 May, UNOCA and the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS) conducted joint working-level missions to Cameroon, Chad, the Niger and Nigeria, to assess the impact of Boko Haram in those countries, the humanitarian needs, the impact on the human rights situation and regional and national capacities to address security threats and respond to the needs on the ground.

75. On 18 March, UNOCA participated in the first meeting of the governance cluster of the regional task force on the Regional Stabilization, Recovery and Resilience Strategy for Areas Affected by Boko Haram in the Lake Chad Basin Region. Facilitated by the secretariat of the Regional Strategy, the meeting was also attended by various United Nations entities and the European Union, among others. Participants were updated on the activities of the Lake Chad Basin Commission and its partners.

76. From 29 to 31 March, UNOCA participated in a regional expert consultation on the gender dimensions of prosecution, rehabilitation and reintegration approaches for persons associated with Boko Haram, co-organized by the Lake Chad Basin Commission, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, the Office of Counter-Terrorism and the Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate. The consultation yielded recommendations designed to strengthen the gender dimension of prosecution, rehabilitation and reintegration approaches in the Lake Chad basin.

Maritime security in the Gulf of Guinea

77. On 18 March, the Special Representatives for Central Africa and West Africa and the Sahel facilitated a virtual high-level meeting on maritime security in the Gulf of Guinea, attended by the Presidents of the ECCAS and ECOWAS Commissions and the Executive Secretary of the Gulf of Guinea Commission. Participants agreed to establish a plan in support of the functioning and operationalization of related regional coordination mechanisms, convene the fourth annual meeting of heads of institutions of the Interregional Coordination Centre for Maritime Safety and Security in the Gulf of Guinea, undertake joint high-level advocacy missions to Member States and intensify joint advocacy with international partners in order to address the challenges to peace and security in the Gulf of Guinea.

Transhumance and farmer-herder dynamics

78. On 10 March, the Special Representative for Central Africa, the Special Coordinator for Development in the Sahel and the Deputy Special Representative for West Africa and the Sahel met to galvanize United Nations system action to strengthen joint analyses and integrated operational responses to the farmer-herder dynamics in West and Central Africa, in collaboration with the relevant resident coordinators, United Nations country teams, regional offices and peace operations.

C. Enhancing United Nations coherence and coordination in the subregion

79. On 23 February, the Special Representative participated in the first virtual meeting of the Senior Policy Group for the implementation of the United Nations Strategy for Peace Consolidation, Conflict Prevention and Conflict Resolution in the Great Lakes Region, chaired by the Special Envoy for the Great Lakes Region. Participants discussed the Group's terms of reference with a view to adopting, in June, the action plan for the implementation of the Strategy.

80. On 4 March, the Special Representatives for Central Africa and the Central African Republic and the Special Envoy for the Great Lakes Region met virtually, at the latter's initiative, to coordinate their approach with regard to regional initiatives in support of the peace consolidation efforts in the Central African Republic, in which they reiterate that regional initiatives should be in support of the Political Agreement for Peace and Reconciliation in the Central African Republic.

81. On 23 March, the Special Representative for Central Africa convened a meeting with United Nations resident coordinators and heads of several United Nations regional offices in Central Africa, at which he introduced the President of the ECCAS Commission. Participants were briefed on peacebuilding funding for cross-border initiatives in support of ECCAS and reviewed the situation in Central Africa and the partnership between UNOCA and ECCAS.

82. On 29 April and 6 May, UNOCA held virtual meetings with UNOWAS, the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women) and the Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs to review the situation of women in Chad and prospects for their participation in the political transition process. Participants discussed coordinated United Nations action in support of Chadian women and explored avenues for championing a gender agenda and ensuring women's meaningful participation in the transition.

IV. Observations and recommendations

83. Elections were organized by several countries in Central Africa. In some instances, however, there were significant restrictions on the exercise of civil and political rights and growing grievances against the management of elections. That situation frustrated democratic aspirations and led several political actors and parties to not take part in or withdraw from electoral processes. States of the subregion are encouraged to actively promote the civil and political rights and freedoms of their people, to hold elections in accordance with constitutional timelines and to implement, through inclusive dialogue, consensual electoral reforms nurturing peaceful, inclusive and credible elections that sustain peace and contribute to the attainment of the Sustainable Development Goals.

84. The United Nations encourages the promotion of regional platforms for the sharing of best practices in the area of democratic elections and the promotion of rules that govern and enforce credible, transparent, inclusive and peaceful elections in line with relevant continental and international standards. My Special Representative will continue to mobilize all relevant United Nations entities to support efforts in this area, including through implementation of the Malabo Declaration on democratic and peaceful elections as a means of strengthening stability and achieving sustainable development goals in Central Africa and the African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance. In that context, the continued engagement of the African Union, ECCAS and the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region, as well as the support of international partners, is critical, and enhanced coordination among all partners is necessary.

85. Notwithstanding important efforts made to date, the COVID-19 pandemic continues to affect the political stability and economic progress of Central African States. Measures adopted by Governments to contain the spread of COVID-19, while critical in stemming the health impact of the virus, challenged basic liberties and accentuated poverty and inequality, especially among women and young people. ECCAS member States are encouraged to ensure that response strategies are in line with their human rights obligations and promote recovery strategies, prioritizing vulnerable populations, including women and young people.

86. The persistence of armed violence, including internal and cross-border movements of armed groups, in various parts of Central Africa poses a serious threat to the stability of the entire subregion, with grave consequences adding to an already precarious humanitarian situation, exacerbated by the impact of COVID-19. Terrorist attacks by Boko Haram in Cameroon and Chad continue to take a heavy civilian toll. Coordination among countries and partners of the Lake Chad basin region is crucial to addressing the threat of Boko Haram, its root causes and its impact on the affected populations and countries. Joint efforts of UNOCA, UNOWAS and other United Nations entities in the region, including joint analysis, advocacy and programming, remain key to addressing the impact of Boko Haram. All stakeholders should implement the Regional Stabilization, Recovery and Resilience Strategy for Areas Affected by Boko Haram in the Lake Chad Basin Region, including through the finalization and implementation of the territorial action plans.

87. I condemn the continued violence against civilians, schools and United Nations and humanitarian personnel and assets in the North-West and South-West Regions of Cameroon. There is no military solution to the crisis in the two Regions. The Cameroonian authorities are encouraged to prioritize and promote inclusive dialogue and reconciliation and further implement the recommendations of the major national dialogue. In line with those recommendations, the Cameroonian authorities are also encouraged to reach out to members of the Cameroonian diaspora, who did not participate in the dialogue and continue to reject its outcome, to address outstanding issues underlying the crisis.

88. I reiterate my profound condolences to the people and the Government of Chad on the passing of President Déby. All stakeholders in Chad should pursue a peaceful, inclusive and consensual process towards a rapid return to constitutional order and civilian rule. It is my hope that Chadian stakeholders will have the vision, devotion to the national interest, courage and determination to transform this pivotal moment for Chad into an opportunity for all Chadians to advance towards sustainable peace and inclusive development. I call upon all actors to respect the territorial integrity of Chad and refrain from the use of violence for political gain. Chad remains bound by its obligations under international law to fulfil, protect and respect human rights, including the rights to life, freedom of expression and peaceful assembly. The United Nations stands with the Chadian people and will continue to work closely with the

African Union and ECCAS to support the country in building a peaceful and prosperous future.

89. The United Nations welcomes regional initiatives in support of the peace process in the Central African Republic. The coordinated engagement of regional actors, in close cooperation with the United Nations and other relevant stakeholders, remains essential to fully implement the peace process. Continued improvement in bilateral and regional cooperation between the Central African Republic and countries in the region, including its neighbours, is encouraged.

90. International mobilization in the fight against the Lord's Resistance Army remains crucial, given that the armed group continues to pose a threat to peace and security across Central Africa and beyond. Regional partners, including the African Union and ECCAS, with the support of international partners, should bolster efforts and synergies to address this threat.

91. The notable contributions of ECCAS to peace and stability in Central Africa and the adoption of its joint strategic plan with UNOCA for the period 2021–2025 are commendable. The United Nations remains determined to assist the subregion in its efforts towards greater stability. I call upon ECCAS member States to continue to promote and consolidate regional integration as a driving factor for sustainable peace and prosperity.

92. To support these efforts, UNOCA will bolster its partnership with ECCAS to prevent conflicts and sustain peace in Central Africa, strengthen national and regional governance, address cross-border security challenges, and promote the participation of women, young people and civil society in early warning, peacebuilding and sustaining peace.

93. Notwithstanding noticeable progress and institutional gains made over the past few years, the persistent fragility of peace and security in Central Africa necessitates continued United Nations support, especially in the areas of preventive diplomacy and peace consolidation. I therefore recommend that the mandate of UNOCA be extended for another three years, from 1 September 2021 to 31 August 2024.

94. 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 and support to 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 to and cooperation with UNOCA.

95. Lastly, 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.
