MEMORANDUM TO UNITED NATIONS SPECIAL REPRESENTATIVE OF THE SECRETARY GENERAL MR. MANKEUR NDIAYE

FROM: Alexandra Lamarche, Advocate, Refugees International

RE: New MINUSCA Leadership Must Seize Opportunity for Progress in CAR

Context

February 2019 was an important month in the Central African Republic’s (CAR) troubled road to stability. The government and 14 armed groups signed a peace accord, and Mankeur Ndiaye was appointed by the UN Secretary General to replace Parfait Onanga-Anyanga as the Special Representative of the Secretary General (SRSG) and to head the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA).1

During Refugees International’s (RI) most recent field mission to CAR in November–December 2018, RI witnessed the many challenges MINUSCA faces in Bangui, Paoua, and Bangassou. However, our team also found that, in many areas, these challenges lend themselves to effective solutions. To enhance opportunities for success, Refugees International offers the following analysis and recommendations as he takes command of the mission.

Background

The Central African Republic has been wracked by instability for decades. In 2013, the country once again descended into civil war when the Muslim-majority Séléka group staged a coup against the Christian-dominated government. In response, Christian Anti-Balaka self-defense...
groups rose to defend the government’s control. Clashes between the groups resulted in a vicious cycle of revenge attacks. The state largely collapsed, including the armed forces, the police, and other public security institutions.

In December 2013, the French military launched Operation Sangaris to stop the slide onto chaos. While Sangaris may well have helped to stop a potential genocide, it was unable to bring an end to the fighting between armed groups. More than one million people were forced to flee their homes. A year later, the UN Security Council established MINUSCA and Sangaris began to phase down. National reconciliation efforts helped bring the civil war to an end in 2014. By August 2015, MINUSCA had nearly 11,000 troops on the ground and hopes for peace continued to grow after the country’s peaceful 2015 elections.

Since these elections, the return of state authority has been limited. The government is largely unable to protect its citizens, and responsibility for public security has largely fallen to MINUSCA forces. Armed groups control most of the territory outside the capital city of Bangui, where they compete for CAR’s natural resources.

Under the former SRSG, instances of sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA) in CAR prompted widespread reform initiatives within the mission and the UN system. Prioritization of transparency and accountability allowed MINUSCA to improve its work to effectively prevent and respond to SEA. Such efforts have increased MINUSCA’s acceptance by the local population. While MINUSCA continues to support the Central African Armed Forces (known as the FACA) to redeploy the state’s security infrastructure throughout CAR, efforts are slow moving. Given the relative absence of the state, UN peacekeepers still shoulder much of the responsibility to secure and stabilize troubled areas.

**Challenges**

**Support for the FACA:** The UN Security Council extended MINUSCA’s mandate at the end of last year until November 15, 2019. The Security Council also amended the resolution in important ways. For example, it calls on the peacekeeping mission to expand its provision of support for the FACA. This will be no small task, given the weaknesses of the FACA and their lack of resources, but it is vital to the re-establishment of state authority. Providing technical and logistical assistance, such as access to fuel, water and food rations, and transportation support will be challenging for MINUSCA especially given significant concerns within mission that they would not receive new resources to fulfill these tasks. In light of this increased role in supporting the FACA, MINUSCA’s ongoing work to assist the national forces in vetting its members and promoting accountability for human rights should also be strengthened.

**National Reconciliation:** In addition, the new mandate tasks MINUSCA with a bigger role in supporting reconciliation efforts at the national level. In February 2019, the CAR government and 14 armed groups signed an African Union-brokered peace accord, known as the African Initiative. MINUSCA can and should do more to support that agreement, which needs all the support it can get. Indeed, some of its signatories have already withdrawn from the accord. This new responsibility should not lead the mission to abandon its efforts to broker agreements at the local level. Those efforts have helped to reduce violence in communities in key areas and have
resulted in tangible improvement in the humanitarian situation, allowing hundreds of thousands to return to home.

**Elections:** The new mandate raises questions not only for the new responsibilities it assigns to MINUSCA, but also for at least one key issue that it fails to clearly address: support for elections in 2020-2021. MINUSCA played an important role in the presidential and legislative elections held in 2015-2016. Early drafts of the mandate for 2019 called for the establishment of an electoral affairs unit inside the mission to begin support work for this year’s elections. However, this language was stripped out of the final draft of the resolution. The mandate only tasks MINUSCA with providing “good offices and technical expertise in support of […] the preparation and conduct of an inclusive and transparent electoral process.” As a result of this vague language, it is not clear that the mission will receive the assessed contributions it needs to pay for critical technical assistance and other forms of support for the next round of elections.

**Protecting Civilians:** MINUSCA staff signaled to RI that much of the mission’s time is spent protecting state institutions and escorting humanitarian convoys. These remain essential priorities. However, these priorities leave MINUSCA with relatively few resources to dedicate to the protection of Central African civilians outside the capital and a few other population centers. Despite being mandated to protect civilians, MINUSCA is not currently funded or equipped to do so effectively.

**Troop Rotations:** Throughout CAR, contingents from troop-contributing countries rotate in and out on different schedules and at different frequencies. As a MINUSCA staff member told RI “some contingents rotate too frequently, and armed groups know when they do,” and often plan attacks at these vulnerable moments. RI was alarmed to see that this was the case in Bangassou, where Moroccan units spend a mere three months in-country before leaving and being replaced by the next contingent of Moroccan troops. On the other hand, some contingents stay too long, and fatigue weakens their performance. Additionally, when troops arrive for their tour, they can spend up to four weeks in Bangui being on-boarded before deploying to their duty stations, thus shortening their field time.

**Chain of Command:** In most UN peacekeeping missions, chain of command can be an issue. The official chain of command runs from the SRSG to the Force Commander down to the troop contingents. However, troop contingents often maintain a reporting line back to their respective national military commands. CAR is no different. However, in MINUSCA, competing reporting lines and conflicting directives have slowed down the speed with which some contingents have responded to security incidents in their areas of responsibility. In both 2017 and 2018, the UN Security Council used the occasion of the mandate renewal to highlight the problem of “undeclared national caveats, lack of effective command and control, refusal to obey orders, [and] failure to respond to attacks on civilians.”

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Recommendations

Despite these challenges, the next few years offer important opportunities for progress. As the country prepares for its next election, it is vital that the peacekeeping force not lose momentum. To this end, we urge Mr. Ndiaye to take the following steps:

1. **Request that the budget committee of the General Assembly provide increased funding to cover MINUSCA’s expanded responsibilities to support the FACA.** The new mandate for the peacekeeping force calls for it to support the redeployment of the FACA by providing logistical assistance in the forms of petrol, food and water, and transportation support. While this is a welcome step, and the UN Security Council’s political support for this effort is vital, MINUSCA will also require increased funding to fulfil this responsibility in line with the nature and scope of the associated tasks. All assistance to the FACA by MINUSCA forces must be implemented alongside continued efforts by the mission to increase the FACA’s accountability for human rights violations.

2. **Ensure that newly mandated responsibilities to support national reconciliation do not come at the expense of ongoing local mediation efforts.** MINUSCA’s mandate was amended late last year, in anticipation of the AU-brokered peace deal, to allow it to play a supporting role for the implementation of the agreement. However, MINUSCA also has a track record of success in brokering local agreements to decrease violence and improve the humanitarian situation at the community level. While this new role in national reconciliation is a welcome step, peacekeepers must not let their work on local peace efforts fall by the wayside.

3. **Request that the budget committee of the General Assembly fund MINUSCA to support CAR’s upcoming election.** The mission’s new mandate only briefly touches on a support role for the 2020-2021 elections. However, this must not stop member states from adequately resourcing MINUSCA to carry out this critical function. Few experts believe that credible elections can take place without significant international assistance. The failure to hold credible and legitimate elections could have significant implications for the peace process and stability in CAR.

4. **Call for the United Nations Department of Safety and Security (UNDSS) to be bolstered to conduct more frequent and thorough road assessments in hopes of decreasing the need for MINUSCA escorts.** At present, much of the forces’ time is spent on providing escorts for humanitarian convoys. Humanitarian workers told RI they believed that if UNDSS were in a position to conduct these assessments more frequently, certain roads would not require escorts and MINUSCA could spend less time on escort provision.

5. **Work with the UN Secretariat troop-contributing countries and the Special Committee on Peacekeeping to standardize rotation frequency of troops and decrease the amount of time needed to deploy troops.** The lack of consistency of the varied contingents’ rotation schedules damages the force’s performance. As stated in General Carlos Alberto dos Santos Cruz’s report on peacekeeper security: “Frequent
rotation (i.e. more than twice a year) also implies constant administrative measures that consume time that the contingent could use to train and operate. This loss of knowledge and lack of exercise can decrease readiness and expose the mission to attack.”

6. **Ensure that issues arising from conflicting lines of command are documented and addressed.** Given the impact of informal national chains of command on the performance of certain contingents in MINUSCA, the peacekeeping mission should document this practice in a systematic fashion. The SRSG and the leadership of the Department of Peace Operations in UN headquarters in New York should use these findings to approach offending capitals in order to resolve this issue.

Building sustainable peace in CAR is no easy feat, and MINUSCA has been working toward this end with extremely limited resources. As a result, MINUSCA faces many obstacles, but its challenges are amenable to solutions that would aid contingents to better protect civilians, and better prepare troops. CAR’s security situation is complex, and with limited international engagement, the road to peace will take time. But Mr. Ndiaye can strengthen MINUSCA’s efforts and ensure that changes in MINUSCA’s mandate do not have negative consequences on the vulnerable civilian population.

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