Under-Secretary-General Valerie Amos

Remarks to the Security Council on the Central African Republic

6 March 2014

Thank you for the opportunity to brief the council on the situation in the Central African Republic (CAR) following my recent visit with the Executive Director of UNAIDS, Michel Sidibe, the ASG of the Department of Security and Safety, Mbaranga Gasarabwé, and the African Union Political Affairs Commissioner Aisha Abdullahi.

The situation in CAR remains extremely grave, and urgent action by all – including by this Council – is required to prevent further bloodshed.

The violence has led to the total breakdown of the state locally and nationally. State institutions which were weak have now totally collapsed in Bangui and across the country. The State is unable to deliver basic services, and the salaries of civil servants have not been paid for months. There is no national army, and the police and the gendarmerie are ill-equipped to address the challenges the country is facing, and Mr. Ladsous referred to this. Mr. Guterres will speak to the regional implications of the crisis, which are profound.

Mr President,

CAR is experiencing unacceptable sectarian brutality; persistent insecurity and fear, with tragic humanitarian consequences.

More than 650,000 people are still internally displaced across the country, more than 232,000 of them in Bangui alone. Seventy thousand people are still living at the airport IDP site in appalling conditions which are set to deteriorate dramatically with the onset of the rainy season. More than 288,000 people have fled to neighbouring countries, and thousands more are desperately trying to leave, seeing it as their last and only option. Humanitarian workers are now facing the difficult dilemma of either responding positively to their requests to leave, and thereby appearing to contribute to changing the demography of communities, or not facilitating their exit and leaving them at risk of being killed.

Unless the current trajectory is urgently reversed, the demographic and social changes taking place in CAR will have severe and lasting consequences for the country, the region, and the continent.
Mr. President,

Trust between communities that have lived side by side for years has eroded. While people – at all levels – told us that the conflict is not about religion, but about the pursuit of power and economic advantage, it is being played out through religious and ethnic conflict. Communities’ and people’s fear is being exploited for political gain.

Today, those seeking personal political gain at the expense of the people are gaining ground. We are witnessing armed groups attacking communities, the exploitation and manipulation of widespread fear and, increasingly, retaliatory attacks by and against ordinary people. The longer this goes on the more difficult it will be for CAR to recover.

Humanitarian assistance alone cannot resolve the situation in the CAR. Security and stability must be urgently restored. While French and MISCA forces have provided security and saved lives where and when they have been deployed, they do not have the substantial resources required to provide security throughout the country. More troops are desperately needed to support them and they are needed now. Central Africans need to feel safe in their own country. It is the first vital step for recovery.

As we speak, people are living in fear of being attacked, and the international community appears paralyzed. Attempts to establish areas of temporary protection for people under threat in their neighbourhoods and to facilitate the voluntary return of IDPs have not yet achieved the desired results due to the inability to provide the necessary security. For example, one site called PK5 where we have tried to establish a safe environment was attacked a few days before our visit.

Improved security will also allow humanitarian workers to save more lives and make a real difference through their relief operations. The international community, given the scale of the crisis in Bangui, declared it as one of our highest priorities, and at a meeting yesterday we reaffirmed our commitment to doing all we can to secure additional capacity and resources to support the people of CAR. But to do that, security must be improved. For example, the insecurity on the road from Douala to Bangui, which is central to commercial activity in the country and for humanitarian supply, prevents the regular transportation of goods and relief items into the country by road. The alternative - air lifting of relief goods - forces us to divert our already limited resources from feeding people to paying for the transport of their food. Almost eight times more expensive than moving goods by road, air transport from Douala is unsustainable in the longer term.

As the Secretary-General outlines in his report to this Council, a comprehensive and multidimensional response is required to meet the vast needs of a country that has been ignored for years.

Mr. President,

The restoration of services is also urgently needed and all efforts to support the authorities in this must be made. While in Bangui, we spoke with the Head of State of the Transition, Ms. Samba-Panza. She has a difficult and challenging task and needs to demonstrate, as soon as possible, the benefits of political transition.
She told us that people point to their stomachs when they see her and that if she is not able to give people the means to feed themselves soon, she will lose their trust. She outlined her priorities as security, institution building, the restoration of basic services, justice, rule of law, and reconciliation. And she made it clear that she requires the support of the whole international community to make progress in all these areas.

Mr. President,

As further evidence that the conflict is not simply about religion, religious leaders and community leaders have come together and shown great courage and leadership in standing up to extremist elements. We were impressed by their tireless work and resolve to intervene to try to stop the violence and promote reconciliation.

Again, we must do everything we can to support their mediation and reconciliation efforts at national and local levels and demonstrate that despite the horrors of this conflict, communities can still live together.

One of the recommendations from our visit is a proposal for a coordinated operational focus on four geographic areas - Bossangoa, Bria, N'Dele, and Bambari - where both communities are still living together and where a combination of international, national and local efforts can make an immediate difference. We want to see the international community’s resources targeted to stabilising the security situation in these areas, restoring state authority and the rule of law, ensuring the delivery of humanitarian assistance and basic services, and promoting reconciliation efforts.

It is important to demonstrate that communities can continue to live side by side in peace and stability.

Mr. President,

As highlighted by the Secretary-General in his Six Point Proposal, the humanitarian response in the Central African Republic is severely underfunded, further limiting our reach to people in need.

And time is not on our side.

A food crisis is looming and with the rainy season upon, us millions of people will be at risk of communicable diseases. Movement – for Central African Republic people, troops and for humanitarian workers within the country – will be severely restricted as the already poorly maintained roads become impassable. While increased logistics capacity will be required once the rains set in, financial support is urgently needed now to provide seeds and tools so that people can plant, to support the pre-positioning of stocks, and voluntary returns where possible, and to improve conditions in IDP sites.

The humanitarian Strategic Response Plan for 2014 requests $551 million for humanitarian interventions in CAR. It is modest, given the scale of need, but is only funded at 16 per cent. Many pledges made at the January Brussels conference which I co-chaired with EU commissioner [Kristalina] Georgieva have yet to translate into funds. I ask Member States and international organisations who made pledges to honour them as soon as possible. As the UN and operational partners extend humanitarian operations outside Bangui, continued financial support by the international community is crucial to support our efforts.
The situation in the Central African Republic is dire and more must be done to ensure that the work of the transition government, humanitarian workers, Sangaris and MISCA troops is sustained. We must provide the people of the Central African Republic with the security that they need, and the services and assistance they require so that peace and reconciliation efforts have some chance of success.

Thank you.