



## **The Women, Peace, and Security Agenda in the CAR: Implications for MINUSCA and the Samba-Panza Interim Government**

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### **RECOMMENDATIONS:**

- The MINUSCA mission to the CAR should deploy the entire complement of military personnel at the earliest opportunity to secure the state from further collapse, re-instate rule of law, and investigate and prosecute crimes.
- Once the conflict environment is secured, the UN should, in line with UNSCR 2121 and 2127, immediately deploy gender advisors, women and children protection advisors, and medical and counselling services for survivors of SGBV and all other forms of violence.
- During the peace process, the Samba-Panza Interim Government should take all necessary measures to ensure the perspectives and interests of women are represented in accordance with UNSCR 1325.
- The Samba-Panza Interim Government must, as part of their post-conflict recovery and state-building agenda, begin to establish the foundations for a NAP on the implementation of UNSCR 1325 and subsequent resolutions.
- African Union (AU) and ECCOS member states (i.e. The Republic of Congo), with current experience in NAP development, should provide the CAR with technical assistance for their post-conflict WPS implementation, as a stable CAR contributes to the stability of the region.

### **Introduction**

Since 2000, the UN Security Council (UNSC) has ratified seven complementary resolutions regarding the inclusion of women's perspectives during peace processes, and their gender-specific experiences of conflict.<sup>1</sup> This doctrine, known as Women, Peace, and Security (WPS), embodies the international community's acknowledgement,

legitimation, and normalisation of women's fundamental significance to achieving global peace and security.

The WPS agenda is currently experiencing an increased level of political exposure and support from the international community. As such, UNSC Resolution (UNSCR) 2122 was passed in late 2013. It identifies systematic measures for the inclusion of women in conflict prevention, resolution, and

<sup>1</sup> UN Women, 'Women, Peace and Security' (2014), available online: <http://www.un.org/en/peacekeeping/issues/women/wps.shtml> (accessed 8 March 2014).

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peacebuilding.<sup>2</sup> In response to the ratification of this latest edition to the WPS doctrine, UN Women Executive Director, Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka, stated that UNSCR 2122 ‘... recognizes, loud and clear, that gender equality and the empowerment of women are critical to international peace and security’.<sup>3</sup>

Twelve African states have put in place National Action Plans (NAP) to implement UNSCR 1325 into their political and legal structures.<sup>4</sup> However, despite fragmented efforts to promote the rights of women in the Central African Republic (CAR),<sup>5</sup> there remains no specific commitment towards implementing UNSCR 1325 and acknowledging the significance of women during conflict and post-conflict settings. Without this commitment at a state level, the issues that the WPS agenda seeks to remedy cannot progress in the CAR. As a consequence, the specific needs of some of the world’s most vulnerable women will continue to go unaddressed.

The CAR is facing a crucial period in their history due to several factors. Firstly, they are experiencing a severe sectarian civil conflict, which has engulfed the entire nation. Secondly, the conflict has dismantled their rule of law, security, and political systems, giving rise to impunity. Thirdly, the situation has been exacerbated by the UNSC’s prolonged response in sanctioning a proposed peacekeeping mission, which has delayed much needed protection for civilians, and prolonged the state of disorder. However, the

appointment of the CAR’s first female president is giving a reason for hope for women and gender-equality advocates. The election of President Catherine Samba-Panza, an accomplished women’s rights advocate,<sup>6</sup> could be the catalyst for the implementation of UNSCR 1325 and finding a solution for peace. Given the current state of affairs, the opportunity to promote WPS in the CAR is now.

To advance this position, this policy brief will answer three key questions. First, why is a WPS agenda required in the CAR? Second, how will the WPS agenda be implemented in the CAR during the conflict, and in a post-conflict setting? Third, is the timing right for a complex gender reform? This policy brief will answer these questions by analysing the context surrounding the issue and offering policy recommendations.

### The Conflict

The CAR has experienced a state of severe instability since December 2012. The Seleka Muslim rebel group compounded conditions in March 2013, following the overthrow of the Bozize Government.<sup>7</sup> After seizing control of the state’s power base, the Seleka resorted to acts of rape and murder against the largely Christian population. This brought about the emergence of the rival, and equally violent, ‘anti-Balaka’ Christian militia group.<sup>8</sup> Despite the balance of power currently favouring the ‘anti-Balaka’, the conflict remains deeply protracted. It has already caused the deaths of thousands of civilians, and has made

<sup>2</sup> UNSC, ‘Resolution 2122’ (2013), available online: [http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view\\_doc.asp?symbol=S/RES/2122\(2013\)](http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/RES/2122(2013)) (accessed 15 March 2014), pp. 3–4.

<sup>3</sup> UN Women, ‘Women and Peacebuilding’ (2013), available online: <http://www.unwomen.org/lo/news/stories/2013/10/ed-statement-on-sc-resolution-on-women-and-peacebuilding> (accessed 8 March 2014).

<sup>4</sup> Peace Women, ‘List of National Action Plans’ (2014), available online: <http://www.peacewomen.org/naps/list-of-naps> (accessed 16 March 2014).

<sup>5</sup> On June 21, 1991, the CAR ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) Treaty, which is an international human rights treaty adopted as national law as the highest standard for women’s rights. United Nations Treaty Collection, ‘Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women’ (1979), available online:

[https://treaties.un.org/pages/viewdetails.aspx?src=treaty&mtdsg\\_no=iv-8&chapter=4&lang=en](https://treaties.un.org/pages/viewdetails.aspx?src=treaty&mtdsg_no=iv-8&chapter=4&lang=en) (accessed 10 March 2014).

<sup>6</sup> H. Fischer, ‘From mayor to interim president of CAR: a portrait of Catherine Samba-Panza’, *Deutsche Welle* (21 January 2014), available online: <http://www.dw.de/from-mayor-to-interim-president-of-car-a-portrait-of-catherine-samba-panza/a-17376200> (accessed 8 March 2014).

<sup>7</sup> UN News Centre, ‘News Focus: Central African Republic’ (2014), available online: <http://www.un.org/apps/news/infocusRel.asp?infocusID=152&Body=Central+African+Republic&Body1> (accessed March 9 2014).

<sup>8</sup> D. Smith, ‘Christian militias take bloody revenge on Muslims in Central African Republic’ *The Guardian* (10 March 2014), available online: <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/mar/10/central-african-republic-christian-militias-revenge> (accessed March 10 2014).

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approximately half the population either displaced or in need of immediate humanitarian assistance.<sup>9</sup>

Despite many reports describing this as an ‘ethnic-religious’ driven conflict, in a press conference with three religious leaders from the CAR, UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon stated, ‘... the conflict in the Central African Republic is not about religion ... religious and ethnic affiliations are being manipulated for political purposes’.<sup>10</sup> Regardless of the conflict’s ideological foundations, violations of human rights continue without consequence. The main reason for the continuation of violence is the absence of law and order. Without a transitional power, such as the UN, and without the required military presence, efforts to rectify the situation in the CAR will be ineffective. For instance, despite the signing of a cease-fire in July by representatives of the two opposing rebel groups, the agreement has little value without the enforcement of an overarching power.<sup>11</sup> In the case of the CAR, Lewis Mudge from Human Rights Watch explains that impunity is able to exist because ‘law enforcement authorities lack the means to make arrests, judicial authorities are unable to resume work outside Bangui, and there is no functioning prison system’.<sup>12</sup> Therefore, it must be the priority of MINUSCA and the Samba-Panza Interim Government to establish rule of law systems, so that crimes can be documented and perpetrators can be prosecuted appropriately. This first step is crucial and strongly advocated by Daniel Bekele, the African Director at Human Rights Watch, who argues that ‘there can be no durable peace in the

Central African Republic unless law and order are restored’.<sup>13</sup>

### The International Response

Demands for a robust and well-equipped UN peacekeeping force have remained constant from those who appreciate the severity of the violence and the horrific consequences of non-action. In a report to the UNSC, Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon urged the deployment of a ten-thousand strong UN peacekeeping force, with an additional two thousand police officers to protect civilians, promote a cease-fire, and re-build the state.<sup>14</sup> Regional powers and neighbours of the CAR, Chad and the Republic of Congo, have called for the deployment of a large stabilising peacekeeping force. In a warning to the international community, the President of Chad, Idriss Deby, advised that the absence of such a force would risk severe humanitarian consequences, and the potential partitioning of the CAR.<sup>15</sup>

After ‘...inheriting a country on the verge of collapse...and facing an unprecedented humanitarian disaster’, President Samba-Panza has argued that ‘without massive support and assistance from the international community ... we will not meet our goal of stabilising the country and restoring constitutional order ...’<sup>16</sup> In response to these appeals, on 10 April 2014, the UNSC authorised an international response, to be known as the United Nations Multidimensional Stabilisation Mission in the Central African Republic

<sup>9</sup> UN News Centre, ‘UN probe set to investigate reports of rights violations’ (10 March 2014), available online: <http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=47314&Cr=central+african+republic&Cr1=#.UyhyVqUtwds> (accessed March 10 2014).

<sup>10</sup> United Nations, ‘Secretary-General Press Release SG/SM/15707- AFR/2836’ (13 March 2014), available online: <http://www.un.org/News/Press/docs/2014/sgsm15707.doc.htm> (accessed March 13 2014).

<sup>11</sup> A. Harding, ‘Central African Republic factions announce ceasefire’, *BBC News* (24 July 2014), available online: <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-28457599> (accessed 2 September 2014).

<sup>12</sup> L. Mudge, ‘Central African Republic Cease-fire Ignores Justice’, *Human Rights Watch* (2 August 2014), available online: <http://www.hrw.org/news/2014/08/02/central-african-republic-cess-fire-ignores-justice> (accessed 11 August 2014).

<sup>13</sup> D. Bekele, ‘Central African Republic: ICC Investigation Needed’, *Human Rights Watch* (26 June 2014), available online: <http://www.hrw.org/news/2014/06/26/central-african-republic-icc-investigation-needed> (accessed 12 August 2014).

<sup>14</sup> S. Sengupta, ‘U.N. Debates the Breadth of a Mission in the Central African Republic’, *The New York Times* (3 March 2014), available online: [http://www.nytimes.com/2014/03/04/world/africa/un-debates-the-breadth-of-a-mission-in-the-central-african-republic.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2014/03/04/world/africa/un-debates-the-breadth-of-a-mission-in-the-central-african-republic.html?_r=0) (accessed 5 March 2014).

<sup>15</sup> M. Nako, ‘Chad says U.N. force needed to stabilize Central African Republic’, *Reuters* (18 February 2014), available online: <http://www.reuters.com/article/2014/02/18/us-centralafrican-chad-un-idUSBREA1H0WK20140218> (accessed 5 March 2014).

<sup>16</sup> Deutsche Welle, ‘UN recommends sending more troops to Central African Republic’ (3 March 2014), available online: <http://www.dw.de/un-recommends-sending-more-troops-to-central-african-republic/a-17470487> (accessed 4 March 2014).

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(MINUSCA). In partnership with the Samba-Panza Interim Government, MINUSCA will assume responsibility for the CAR's stabilisation on 15 September 2014. UNSCR 2149 states that MINUSCA will act under a chapter VII mandate to employ all necessary resources to protect the lives of citizens and return the CAR to constitutional autonomy and power.<sup>17</sup>

### The State of Women in the CAR

The breakdown of the state, the protracted conflict, and the rise of impunity have manifested an environment where sexual violence (SV) and gender-based violence (GBV) goes unpunished in the CAR. For women and girls living in the CAR, sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) is one of their realest and greatest fears. The International Rescue Committee's director for the CAR, Sarah Terlow, stated, 'the severity of violence women and girls are experiencing is shocking. Yet as communities are being torn apart, women and girls are not only bearing the brunt of this conflict, they are also largely responsible for keeping their families together and providing stability in an environment that is increasingly chaotic'.<sup>18</sup> Between January and February 2014, there have been over two thousand confirmed and documented cases of SV.<sup>19</sup> However, what is alarming is that this fails to take into account the unreported cases. Given the widespread insecurity, analysing data on all forms of violence against women is extremely difficult as existing information could be lost, and the situation on the

ground is not safe for data collection. It is feared that cases have already reached 'astronomical' proportions, and without the necessary resources for providing comprehensive visibility of abuses, many victims will not receive justice.<sup>20</sup>

Despite the outbreak of the current conflict, different forms of violence against women and girls in the CAR have been widespread. In many communities, traditional practices have institutionalised GBV, and promote the discrimination of SV victims. As a consequence, many have been subjected to harmful practices such as forced marriage, SV, physical abuse, and genital mutilation by members of their own community.<sup>21</sup> Therefore, women and girls in the CAR currently face a dual-layered oppression. The attitudes surrounding SGBV in these communities, and the CAR in general, facilitates a culture of impunity, which perpetuates the degradation of the state of women and girls. The struggle for victims of SGBV is worsened by the lack of support services such as health and psychosocial institutions.<sup>22</sup> This remains an urgent concern; however, deeper legislative and state level issues exist, making this a problem that requires strategic attention. The International Medical Corps director for the CAR, Christian Mulamba, explains that 'legislation on sexualised violence is not well known or applied, which forces survivors and their families to rely on traditional justice systems for example, consulting with village elders, community chiefs, and religious leaders. In some cases, the outcome is that the victims are forced to marry their perpetrators'.<sup>23</sup>

The lack of support services and legislation in the CAR existed long before the current crisis and reveals a state in need of strategic reform. A

<sup>17</sup> United Nations, 'MINUSCA Mandate' (2014), available online: <http://www.un.org/en/peacekeeping/missions/minusca/mandate.shtml> (accessed 27 July 2014).

<sup>18</sup> International Rescue Committee, 'Sexual Violence biggest fear for women in Central African Republic, says International Rescue Committee' (6 March 2014), available online: <http://www.rescue.org/press-releases/sexual-violence-biggest-fear-women-central-african-republic-says-international-rescue> (accessed 6 March 2014).

<sup>19</sup> UNRIC, 'CAR: Number of sexual violence cases "astronomical"' (20 January 2014), available online: <http://www.unric.org/en/latest-un-buzz/28989-car-number-of-sexual-violence-cases-astronomical> (accessed 1 March 2014); and

Nobel Women's Initiative, 'Sexual Violence Crisis in Central African Republic' (11 February 2014), available online: <http://nobelwomensinitiative.org/2014/02/sexual-violence-crisis-in-central-african-republic/> (accessed 1 March 2014).

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> L. Jepson, 'In CAR, "If they saw a woman they wanted, they just took her"', *The Women's Media Centre* (5 December 2013), available online: <http://www.womenundersiegeproject.org/blog/entry/in-car-if-they-saw-a-woman-they-wanted-they-just-took-her> (accessed 2 March 2014).

<sup>22</sup> UN News Centre, 'Central African Republic: sexual violence is constant threat, UN envoy warns' (21 March 2014), available online: <http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp/story.asp?NewsID=47408&Cr=Central-african+republic&Cr1=#.UzQsTKUtwds> (accessed 22 March 2014).

<sup>23</sup> Jepson, op. cit. (2013).



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dramatic increase in SGBV occurred during the coup d'état that saw Francois Bozize come to power in 2003. The survivors of SGBV were largely abandoned to cope with their trauma due to the absence of local- and state-level government cooperation in developing support systems.<sup>24</sup> Unfortunately, with the current conflict, history is repeating itself, as UN Special Representative to the CAR, Boubacar Gaye, explains: 'when I talk to administrators I feel or felt there was a lack of support or disconnect between central and local government'.<sup>25</sup> Thus, despite the history and recurrence of this violent issue, women and girls continue to suffer in a state whose systems fail to recognise their specific experience in conflict and daily life.

### Implementing WPS

The current conflict in the CAR offers an opportunity for change. Political transitions can offer a unique platform for enabling rejuvenation and reform. In his report on women, peace, and security to the UNSC, Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon stated that 'transitions can present opportunities to strengthen women's leadership, empowerment, and rights in the process of restoring the rule of law and governance systems'.<sup>26</sup> Often, the success of government policy is dependent on timing. With women's rights on the rise, the election of Ms. Samba-Panza, a known gender advocate, could mean real and significant changes for women in the CAR. The significance of this fact will ultimately be determined by the Samba-Panza Interim Government's level of commitment to WPS. If

they are serious and committed to comprehensively addressing WPS in the CAR, the time to act is now.

To successfully implement WPS in the CAR, a conflict and post-conflict strategy is required. Firstly, immediate action is required to respond to the deteriorating SGBV crisis. Once security has been restored by MINUSCA, priority must be allocated to the deployment of gender advisors, and women and children protection advisors under UNSCR 2121.<sup>27</sup> Additionally, to assist this crucial phase, medical facilities and counselling services must be established for victims of violence and SGBV as stated in UNSCR 2127.<sup>28</sup>

To dismantle the current climate of impunity afforded to perpetrators of SGBV, the Samba-Panza Interim Government must, in line with UNSCR 1960 and 2106, put in place a plan to investigate alleged abuses and hold perpetrators accountable.<sup>29</sup> Secondly, specific commitments must be put in place by the Samba-Panza Interim Government to implement WPS as a post-conflict and conflict-prevention policy in the CAR. This recognises the fundamental need for women to be included in the peacebuilding process, with specific focus on the prosecution for violations against women's rights during conflict. In addition, this commitment recognises that women must contribute to the development of preventative measures such as, but not limited to, early warning systems and gender education.<sup>30</sup> Achieving this goal rests on establishing and integrating WPS into state

<sup>24</sup> IRIN, 'CAR: Struggling to undo the damage of sexual violence' (1 April 2008), available online: <http://www.irinnews.org/report/77552/car-struggling-to-undo-the-damage-of-sexual-violence> (accessed 10 March 2014).

<sup>25</sup> IRIN, "'Get a grip,'" UN chief tells CAR leaders' (27 March 2014), available online: <http://www.irinnews.org/report/99850/get-a-grip-un-chief-tells-car-leaders> (accessed 28 March 2014).

<sup>26</sup> B. Ki-Moon, 'Report of the Secretary-General on women and peace and security – S/2013/525', *United Nations Security Council* (4 September 2013), available online:

<http://www.unwomen.org/~media/Headquarters/Attachments/Sections/New/In%20Focus/Open%20Debate%20on%20WPS%202013/2013%20SG%20report%20on%20WPS%20pdf.pdf> (accessed 10 March 2014), p.11.

<sup>27</sup> United Nations Security Council Resolutions, 'Resolution 2121 (2013)' (10 October 2013), available online: <http://unscr.com/en/resolutions/doc/2121> (accessed 10 March 2014), p.1; and

NGO Working Group on Women, Peace and Security, 'Monthly Action Points on Women, Peace and Security: March 2014' (2014), available online: <http://www.womenpeacesecurity.org/rapid-response/car> (accessed 9 March 2014).

<sup>28</sup> United Nations Security Council Resolutions, 'Resolution 2127 (2013)' (5 December 2013), available online: <http://unscr.com/en/resolutions/doc/2127> (accessed 8 March 2014), p.6.

<sup>29</sup> United Nations Security Council Resolutions, 'Resolution 2134 (2014)' (28 January 2014), available online: <http://unscr.com/en/resolutions/doc/2134> (accessed 5 March 2014), p.7.

<sup>30</sup> UN Women, 'Women and Peace and Security: Guidelines for National Implementation' (2012), available online: <http://www.unwomen.org/~media/Headquarters/Media/Publications/en/02BP/lanonWomenandPeaceandSecurity.pdf> (accessed 7 March 2014), p.5.

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structures, so that protecting the interests of women in the CAR becomes normalised and part of the national agenda. This will require the development and implementation of a NAP. Such a document would provide a framework, recording the government's commitment for implementing specific goals in addressing the obligations and responsibilities outlined in UNSCR 1325.<sup>31</sup> For the CAR, the development of a NAP could integrate with existing laws on gender equality and further strengthen the mainstreaming of gender equality.

## Challenges

This policy brief has recognised the following factors as challenges to implementing WPS in the CAR:

- A lack of state support for civil society organisations (CSOs) can hinder progress, as CSOs are a vital actor in promoting WPS reform at a local and national level. They are also crucial for keeping the government accountable in adhering to policy promises.
- Granting full amnesty for soldiers in exchange for disarmament can lead to the perpetrators of SGBV going unpunished. This promotes and maintains a culture of impunity, and dismantles attempts to transform harmful attitudes and practices.
- Changing the culture around SGBV is difficult when traditional attitudes are entrenched in the community psyche.
- The crisis in '... Ukraine has impacted on the willingness of some of the likely contributors both in the EU and outside the EU to be necessarily ready to deploy to Central African Republic'.<sup>32</sup>
- The CAR requires extensive state building and investment, which is a concern for UN donor members. It is predicted that a UN

peacekeeping operation to the CAR would become the third most expensive, behind South Sudan and the Democratic Republic of Congo.<sup>33</sup>

- Collaboration between major power brokers in the CAR will be essential for securing the state's future. Thus, it is imperative that current and future governments remain representative of all those residing in the CAR, and promote '... inclusive political dialogue'.<sup>34</sup>

## About the Author

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The Government of Norway



The Government of Denmark



The Government of Sweden

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Aljazeera, 'Ukraine crisis "thwarting CAR efforts"' (15 March 2014), available online: <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/africa/2014/03/ukraine-crisis-thwarting-car-efforts-2014315125131735722.html> (accessed 15 March 2014).