

**Briefing to the Open Session of the Security Council on the Situation in
the Central African Republic, 22 June 2009**

**By Mr. B. Lynn Pascoe, Under-Secretary-General, Department of Political
Affairs**

1. Thank you Mr. President for giving me the opportunity to present the latest report of the Secretary General on the situation in the Central African Republic and on the activities of the Peace-building Support Office in that country (BONUCA).

2. There were significant developments in the CAR during the period under review. These included the efforts to implement the outcomes of the historic Inclusive Political Dialogue held in December 2008. The dialogue itself was widely welcomed, especially by the people of the CAR, as the most far-reaching endeavour towards genuine national reconciliation since the eruption of the current crisis in the mid 1990s. You will recall that in its Presidential Statement of 7 April, Council welcomed the successful convening of the Dialogue and “reiterated its full support for this process, as an effective framework to foster national reconciliation and stability in the Central African Republic”.

3. The post-Dialogue period has, in the main, been characterized by two, sometimes seemingly contradictory, trends. On the one hand, significant efforts were made and continue to be made to implement the recommendations of the Dialogue with a view to consolidating the momentum for peace in the country. A broad-based government was formed, a DDR Steering Committee was established and a Follow-up

Committee to facilitate the implementation of the recommendations of the Dialogue, with the participation of the United Nations and other key international partners, was set up. On the other hand, there has also been a resurgence of rebellion in the north of the country, a development that contradicts the spirit of reconciliation which the Dialogue sought to engender. For instance, on the 21st of June there were reports of rebel attacks on Birao. After several hours of fighting, Central African armed forces and troops of the Union of the Democratic Forces for Unity repelled the attack. The total number of casualties remains unknown. MINURCAT has relocated 18 international NGO personnel to MINURCAT headquarters at Birao. Under-lying these two contradictory developments is a third element, namely, the increasing fragility of the peace process in the CAR and of the country itself.

4. Mr. President, I have just returned from a visit to the Central African Republic. I was able to see for myself the impact of years of instability and insecurity in the country. But I also heard words that reflected the profound faith that the Government and people of the country had in the United Nations, which they saw as a reliable partner for the realization of their aspirations for a better future. The problems are huge, but I am convinced the UN can help to move them to a solution.

5. As you meet here today, the National Assembly of the CAR is currently holding an extraordinary session to discuss and adopt a new electoral code to guide the preparations for and conduct of legislative and presidential elections in 2010. We are concerned by claims by opposition political parties that some key provisions of the code tabled before the Assembly by

the Government are at variance with the version of the document that was adopted by the Ad Hoc Committee charged with revising the electoral code. The organization of peaceful, transparent and credible elections is contingent on the adoption of an electoral code that is accepted by all stakeholders. Another key measure linked to the electoral code is the establishment of the independent electoral commission as called for by last December's Inclusive Political Dialogue. That Commission, to be made up of different shades of political opinion and civil society, would ensure a credible, transparent and inclusive electoral process. We have received a request for electoral assistance from the Government and once the Commission is established, we will dispatch a needs assessment mission promptly to Bangui to assess ways in which the UN could contribute to the process.

6. The Secretary General has called on the CAR authorities to ensure that elections are held on schedule as provided for in the CAR constitution in order to prevent a constitutional power vacuum which could further complicate an already fragile political environment, including the possibility of renewed violence. We have also urged all political leaders to avoid intimidation, harassment and incitement and to work to eliminate the current climate of mistrust and suspicion in the CAR's political landscape. It is especially important for the Government to guarantee security and a level playing field for all participants if the electoral process is to proceed peacefully and with credibility.

7. Another important challenge facing the peace process is that of the Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR) of the country's ex-

combatants who have agreed to end rebellion and join the peace process. While the concrete launching of DDR operations is yet to begin, critical preparatory work has advanced, with technical documentation adopted, provisional lists of potential ex-combatants submitted to the UN, and initial funding of about four million dollars released from the PBF to kick-start the project. During my meeting with President Bozizé, he reaffirmed his determination to take personal control of the DDR process and to make available the financial assistance of eight billion CFA francs (about sixteen million dollars) pledged by the CAR's Central African economic and monetary partners, CEMAC, to finance DDR projects. Subsequently, we were informed that a total of five billion francs (about ten million dollars) of the CEMAC funds had already been disbursed. The Secretary General has appealed to the international community to provide additional support for the successful completion of the estimated thirty million dollar- DDR programme on which the imperatives for security and peaceful elections hinge.

8. Mr. President, DDR is only part of a broader programme of Security Sector Reforms. Its success will strengthen efforts to make progress towards Security Sector Reforms in the CAR. A successful SSR would in turn help institute, for the first time in nearly three decades, a multi-ethnic, professional and republican military and security establishment for the defence of democratic institutions and not in the service of partisan and mono-ethnic political movements. The Secretary General has appealed for international support for programmes being put forward by the CAR authorities in support of the national SSR strategy, including the

organization of the donors roundtable on SSR scheduled for October this year.

9. During my visit to the CAR, I had the opportunity to visit the military component of the peacebuilding mission of the Economic Community of Central African States, FOMAC/MICOPAX, based in Bangui. This force of 520 troops is making a major contribution, in partnership with the UN and other partners, towards the stabilization of the CAR. I salute their courage and determination and commend their governments for the concrete demonstration of political will and solidarity in support of peace in the CAR.

10. Two days from now, the Bretton Woods institutions will examine the possibility of granting debt relief to the CAR under the HIPC Initiative. As pointed out in the Secretary General's Report, the country's macro-economic reforms have been widely acclaimed by international partners and are credited for turning a previously bleak picture into one in which economic growth is not only happening, but where long term prospects are rated as encouraging and deserving of enhanced donor support. Should those reforms continue and should the overall climate of political stabilization persist, it is reasonable to be hopeful about the possibilities of reducing the desperately high levels of poverty and misery in the medium term.

11. The best way forward now to address the multi-faceted problems besetting the CAR is through the implementation of the recently adopted Strategic Framework for Peace-building. It is vital that the Central African

Republic take full ownership of that roadmap, which identifies three key pillars for sustainable peacebuilding, namely: security, through DDR and SSR, good governance, including respect for human rights and the rule of law, and finally development. The United Nations will work in partnership with the CAR to support its efforts to implement those strategic priorities. Let me take this opportunity, Mr. President, to express our appreciation for the important contribution being made to that end by the Peace-building Commission, especially its Country Specific Configuration for the CAR led by Ambassador Jan Grauls of Belgium who, as an example of his commitment to the goal of promoting the sustainable stabilization of the CAR last month undertook his fourth mission to the country in about a year. He has been a strong voice of the international community for reform and progress in the CAR.

12. You would recall that the Council has endorsed the Secretary General's proposal to transform the current UN Peacebuilding Support Office in the CAR, BONUCA, into a UN Integrated Peacebuilding Office, BINUCA. The purpose is to maximize the UN's contribution to the CAR, minimize the risks of duplication and simplify consultations with our partners, including the CAR authorities.

13. The present report of the Secretary General before the Council sets out the proposed structure and staffing of BINUCA, as requested by Council in April. As the transitional process proceeds, the Secretary General proposes that BINUCA becomes fully operational by 1 January 2010. We will use the intervening period to finalize recruitment of personnel and to address

related logistical and other preparatory tasks so that the new office takes off smoothly as scheduled by 1 January 2010.

14. I am delighted to be accompanied today by the newly-appointed Special Representative of the Secretary General in the CAR and Head of BONUCA, Ms. Sahle-Work Zewde, who departs in a few days for Bangui to take up her assignment. The CAR authorities, during my recent visit, welcomed her appointment, thanked the Secretary General for his continued support and reiterated their cooperation with BONUCA. I also wish to express my appreciation to Mr. Sammy Kum Buo, Director of Africa II Division of the Department of Political Affairs, who has aptly filled in for the past three months in Bangui as Officer-in-Charge, following the departure of the former SRSG from the country. He did an excellent job in bridging the gap.

15. In conclusion, Mr. President, Let me add my voice to that of the Secretary General and other world leaders who have paid tribute to the late Gabonese President for his mediation in various conflicts across Africa. President Bongo was a strong advocate of peace whose passing has been felt, not least, in the CAR, a country that was close to his heart. Six months ago, he personally traveled to Bangui twice within two weeks to attend the opening and closing ceremonies of the Inclusive Political Dialogue. The Comprehensive Peace Agreement for the CAR which forms the foundation for the current peace process was signed exactly one year ago yesterday, on 21 June 2008, in Libreville, Gabon, under his chairmanship.

Thank you.