

Beat: News

Security Challenges Threaten to Derail Strides in Central African Region

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Security Challenges Threaten to Derail Democratic Strides in Central African Region, Briefers Tell Security Council

Marking both democratic strides and worsening security conditions, the situation in the Central African region remains something of a mixed picture, senior officials told the Security Council today, voicing particular concern over terrorist attacks, population displacement and the resurgence of old armed groups in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Martha Ama Akyaa Pobee, Assistant Secretary-General for Africa in the Departments of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs and Peace Operations, noted that while several countries of the region are on track to hold elections in 2022 and 2023, notable challenges threaten to derail those efforts. In Cameroon, the crisis emanating from Boko Haram splinter groups and displaced persons fleeing neighbouring countries has only grown, with the situations in the country's north-west and south-west regions of particular concern as violence flares. In Chad — which is undergoing a transition following political turmoil in 2021 — “the most important challenges lie ahead” as constitutional talks begin. Meanwhile, heinous attacks continue against civilians and Government troops in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and bilateral relations between Kinshasa and its neighbours are deteriorating.

Gilberto Da Piedade Verissimo, President of the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS), describing the political and security situation in Central Africa as generally stable, highlighted some positive developments. The rule of law continues to be strengthened, with democratic governance and the promotion and protection of human rights now embedded in the institutional landscape of the region's countries. However, he deplored the deteriorating situation on the border between the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Rwanda, caused by a resurgence of the “March 23 Movement” — known as M23 — which has sparked the large-scale movement of displaced persons and mutual accusations of support to rebel groups by both countries. Noting that initiatives are under way in the region to reduce tensions and bring those States to the negotiating table, he said non-State armed groups are also present in north-west and south-west Cameroon.

Meanwhile, civil society representative Jeanne-Danielle Nicole Nlate pointed out that numerous conflicts across Central Africa have led to instability, low levels of regional integration and cooperation, weak State institutions, corruption, poverty and disenfranchisement. Old conflicts have resurfaced in the Great Lakes region, particularly affecting Burundi, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Chad and Cameroon. In some cases, these conflicts have led to tensions between neighbours accused of stoking such conflicts, as was the case recently with Rwanda and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Against that backdrop, she said civil society groups have played an important role in promoting peace and respect for human rights and she called on the United Nations and its partners to provide political, material and financial support to their work.

As Council members took the floor, many expressed support for regional countries' democratic efforts and attempts to combat conflict and armed groups, while also echoing the briefers' concerns.

Gabon's representative, also speaking for Ghana and Kenya, welcomed the measures taken by several States in the subregion to prepare for upcoming elections in 2022 and 2023. Noting that national dialogue can reduce social and political tensions, he also welcomed Chad's organization of a dialogue in Doha and expressed hope that the platform will open the way to an inclusive peace agreement. Additionally, he welcomed the recently improved diplomatic relations between Burundi and Rwanda; Cameroon's adoption of a measure to consolidate the decentralization process and build the capacity of local institutions; and the ongoing process in Nairobi to fight against the insecurity generated by armed groups in the eastern part of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. As well, he echoed the briefers' concerns over emerging bilateral tensions and the impacts of climate change, especially on already serious humanitarian challenges facing the region.

The representative of Norway called attention to the annual list of the world's most neglected displacement crises — recently published by the Norwegian Refugee Council — of which three of the top five are in the Central African region. For a second year running, the Democratic Republic of the Congo “tops” the list, while in Chad a food emergency was recently declared. She also

expressed concern about the situations in north-west and south-west Cameroon and about the grave risk posed by piracy. "Moving forward, the region should remain in the driver's seat, with already commendable efforts being scaled up," she stressed, describing the security situation around the Lake Chad Basin as alarming and warning that the impacts of climate change are only worsening the situation.

Mexico's delegate acknowledged progress made towards regional governance and political dialogue in some Central African countries, while noting that flashpoints of violence, precarious economic recovery and the effects of climate change call for international solidarity. To attain progress towards stability in the region, he called for focused efforts to fight the illicit flow of weapons, the creation of conditions conducive to opposition groups freely expressing their opinions, and a strengthened response to urgent humanitarian crises. He added that the United Nations Regional Office for Central Africa (UNOCA) must have solid leadership to carry out its tasks and voiced his hope that a new Special Representative will be swiftly appointed to succeed François Louncény Fall, whose mandate recently ended.

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