



**UPDATE ON THE POLITICAL, SECURITY AND HUMANITARIAN SITUATION IN
THE ICGLR MEMBER STATES**

JANUARY 2024 TO MARCH 2025

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I. GENERAL INTRODUCTION

The FP-ICGLR continues to monitor the political, security and humanitarian situation in the ICGLR Member States that are having security challenges since January 2024, with a general observation that most ICGLR Member States are stable. However, there are some countries that continue to be plagued by insecurity, armed conflicts and instability, namely: the Democratic Republic of Congo, Republic of Sudan, Central African Republic (CAR) and Republic of South Sudan. The following security brief covers the period January 2024 to March 2025:

I.1. DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO

The security situation in the country remains unstable in the eastern DRC and border regions. The DRC continues to witness the presence of over a hundred and twenty armed groups engaging in multiple conflicts over territorial and resource control thereby creating instability in the country. Armed groups are present and intercommunal violence has affected the political, security and humanitarian situation especially for the most vulnerable people in the eastern DRC.

During the Christmas break of 2024, the Islamic State group-linked ADF rebels have killed at least 21 people this week in the conflict-riven eastern DRC, the local sources told Associated Free Press (AFP) on 28 December 2024. The attacks all took place close to Manguredjipa, a town known for its rich mineral deposits and regularly targeted by the ADF. The ADF rebels on 21 December 2024 made an incursion into the village of Robinet, in the Bapere sector of North Kivu province, a local official said. Then on Christmas Day, the ADF fighters arrived seven kilometers from Manguredjipa in the village called Makele and killed three people. Multiple separate local sources confirmed the dates, locations and tolls of these attacks to the Associated Free Press (AFP).

During the period under review, North Kivu province also faced a separate rebel insurgency further south, with the M23 movement and the DRC's army locked in fighting all week following the failure of a Peace Summit in mid-December 2024. Recently, the resurgence of the M23 armed group and subsequent capture of the City of Goma in North Kivu province and also Bukavu in South Kivu province has continued to cause instability and cross-border tensions which not only threaten the security of those in the DRC but also poses a great threat to the stability of the entire Great Lakes Region.

On 28 January 2025, dozens of protesters in Kinshasa attacked foreign embassies, demanding action against M23 rebels in the eastern DRC. Police used teargas to disperse them. The attacked foreign embassies include those of France, Belgium and Rwanda as protestors demanded that they push back against the advance of M23 rebels in the eastern DRC. Police fired teargas at the protesters as they marched to the embassies, reportedly looting and setting fires to parts of the buildings. The embassies of Kenya and Uganda were also attacked, according to AFP.

While launching an offensive operation in the eastern DRC, the M23 rebels abducted at least 130 sick people and wounded men from two hospitals in the city of Goma. In a statement by the UN Human Rights Office Spokesperson Ravina Shamdasani, the M23 fighters raided CBCA Ndosho Hospital and Heal Africa Hospital during the night of 28 February 2025, taking 116 and 15 patients respectively. The abducted men were

suspected of being DRC soldiers or members of a pro-government militia known as 'Wazalendo'. While calling for their immediate release, Shamdasani expressed deep displeasure that the M23 were snatching patients from hospital beds in coordinated raids and holding them incommunicado in undisclosed locations.

On 19 March 2025, the M23 pushed deeper into the eastern DRC, capturing the town of Walikale despite growing international calls for a ceasefire. The rebels entered the mining hub in North Kivu province, a day after the DRC President, Felix Tshisekedi and his Rwandan counterpart Paul Kagame called for an immediate ceasefire after meeting in Qatar's capital Doha.

Conflict in the DRC has sent 63,000 refugees fleeing to neighbouring Burundi in its largest influx in decades, with conditions dire at a crammed stadium camp and many stuck in fields outside, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) said on 10 March 2025. About 45,000 displaced people were sheltering in a crowded open-air stadium in Rugombo, a few kilometres from the border with the DRC where the DRC army and M23 rebel group were fighting. The situation is absolutely dire and conditions are extremely harsh, according to Faith Kasina, the Regional Spokesperson for East and Horn of Africa and Great Lakes, who told reporters in Geneva.

On 14 March 2025, Save the Children's local partners working on child protection in North and South Kivu provinces documented more than 400 cases of children newly associated with armed groups between January and February 2025, when violence escalated in the eastern DRC. Some of the children were reported to have been picked up from their communities, schools and streets and taken to the bushes to be trained to handle weapons against their will. Save the Children further reported that children were often targeted for recruitment because they were cheap, easier to control and manipulate, and because they looked to adults to protect them. Usually unpaid, they were used to do tasks which adults did not want to do and may also be coerced into carrying out acts of violence, or violence perpetrated onto them.

Aside from this, the UN mission in the DRC began its withdrawal on 28 February 2024 with the official handover to the Congolese authorities of the first of its bases in South Kivu, in the eastern DRC. In June 2024, MONUSCO concluded the withdrawal of its forces from South Kivu in accordance with the disengagement plan agreed with the DRC Government and endorsed by the Security Council on 19 December 2023. The process faced some challenges which included a lack of adequate resources, such as logistics and manpower, and the deteriorating security situation. However, the UN Security Council on 20 December 2024, extended the mandate of MONUSCO by 12 months as the UN committed itself to peace, stability and security in the eastern DRC. The mission's new mandate expires on 20 December 2025 and includes; on an exceptional basis and without precedent to peacekeeping's basic principles.

The Southern African Development Community decided to terminate the mandate of the SADC Mission in DRC (SAMIDRC) and begin a phased withdrawal of troops. The decision announced during the Extraordinary SADC Summit in Harare, the Republic of Zimbabwe on 13 March 2025, marks the end of a mission that the Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF) believed was unsustainable and poorly planned. SAMIDRC was deployed in December 2023 with the goal of assisting the Congolese army in combating rebel groups in eastern DRC. However, following significant losses,

including the deaths of at least 18 SADC soldiers in January 2025, the mission's effectiveness has been called into question. The decision to withdraw troops also follows a significant diplomatic push, with SADC and the East African Community (EAC) convening a joint meeting in February 2025 to promote peace talks between the DRC Government and rebel groups.

In a related development, SAMIDRC and M23 reached a ceasefire agreement on the withdrawal of SADC troops and equipment from Goma on 29 March 2025. The M23 rebels in the eastern DRC will facilitate the withdrawal of SADC Mission troops from Goma. A communique was signed in Goma by Tanzania Peoples' Defence Forces, Major General Ibrahim Mhona on behalf of the Chairperson of SADC, and Major General Sultani Makenga, Military Coordinator of the Congo River Alliance. According to the document, troops are withdrawing with their weapons and equipment. SADC will assist with the repair of Goma Airport to facilitate the withdrawal. A joint follow-up meeting will be held between the M23 and SADC in the future.

Though regional initiatives and joint security operations have been launched, these efforts have not fully resolved the myriad of conflicts in the eastern DRC. However, there is significant progress being made to improve diplomatic relations between DRC and Rwanda. In recent months, we have seen meaningful political commitment by both parties to address longstanding grievances, with constructive agreements through the Luanda Roadmap Process as signed on 26 November 2024. The International Contact Group for the Great Lakes, including representatives from Belgium, European Union, France, Germany, Netherlands, Sweden, Switzerland, United Kingdom, and the United States, welcomed the commitment to a concept of operations to trigger harmonized action by the DRC to neutralize the FDLR and for Rwanda to disengage its forces – both hugely significant pledges and key to reducing the tensions that for too long have made North Kivu a battleground. The Contact Group further commended the unwavering commitment by the Angolan President João Lourenço to achieve a Peace Accord through the Luanda Process and called on all regional leaders to push for a renewed diplomatic effort at this critical time.

Relatedly, Qatar mediators hosted a second round of talks on 28 March 2025 between DRC and Rwanda, and separately met representatives of the the Congolese River Alliance which are waging an insurgency in eastern Congo, local sources told Reuters. The DRC President Felix Tshisekedi and his Rwandan counterpart Paul Kagame met recently in Doha for their first talks since the M23 rebels stepped up an offensive in January 2025. The talks between President Tshisekedi and Kagame, and their subsequent call for a ceasefire, provided a glimmer of hope for a de-escalation of eastern Congo's biggest conflict in decades.

In view of the foregoing, Resolution 13OSPA/02/2023 on the political, security and humanitarian situation in the DRC was adopted by the 13th Ordinary Session of the Plenary Assembly of FP-ICGLR held from 31 March to 1 April 2023 in Juba, the Republic of South Sudan. In clause 13 of this resolution, the Plenary Assembly decided to deploy a Parliamentary Fact Finding Mission to the eastern DRC to document and verify various reports on insecurity and armed conflicts in the country. The Plenary Assembly decided that the mission was necessary in order to augment the ongoing peace process of EAC mediated by the Former President of Kenya, H.E.

Uhuru Kenyatta and also the Luanda Roadmap led by the President of the Republic of Angola, in his Capacity as ICGLR Chairperson, H.E Joao Lourenco.

The mission was planned to be implemented in six (6) phases. However, the Forum has undertaken five (5) phases. The first deployment of the parliamentary diplomacy of FP-ICGLR began on the ground, in Goma, in the eastern DRC from 10 to 15 July 2023. The Mission met different representatives of the targeted stakeholders in Goma. The second segment of the Mission to Kinshasa, involved having a discussion with H.E the President of DRC, Félix Antoine Tshilombo Tshisekedi, the leadership of Parliament and ICGLR Ambassadors accredited to DRC / other stakeholders. The Mission took place from 14 to 19 August 2023 while the third Mission took place from 26 February to 1 March, 2024 in Kigali, Republic of Rwanda.

The fourth phase involved having a meeting with H.E. the President of Uganda, Yoweri Kaguta Museveni on 10 March 2025. The fifth phase was a Mission to Nairobi, the Republic of Kenya. It involved having a consultative meeting with the H.E. the President of Kenya and the current Chairperson of the East African Community, William Samueo Ruto. The mission was held on 24 March 2025. The sixth and last phase of the mission also planned for Nairobi with the Facilitator of the Nairobi Peace Process, H.E. Uhuru Kenyatta could not take place due to prior engagements.

Nonetheless, having verified and gathered enough evidence on the ground, the General Secretariat of FP-ICGLR will proceed to publish the Final Report of the Mission and present the document for adoption during the 15th Ordinary Session of the Plenary Assembly scheduled to take place from 20 to 25 April 2025, in Luanda, the Republic of Angola.

I.2 REPUBLIC OF SUDAN

Sudan has experienced power struggles between military factions which erupted after faltering transition to civilian-led government. Intense clashes between Sudan's army and the country's main paramilitary force which erupted on 15 April 2023 have killed hundreds of people and sent thousands including diplomats fleeing for safety. The ongoing situation is violent, volatile and extremely unpredictable, particularly in the capital city Khartoum.

This volatile security situation has created a serious humanitarian crisis with thousands of civilians being displaced and fleeing to neighbouring countries for safety. Worse still, members of known terrorist groups and individuals sympathetic to these groups in Sudan are accused of attacking with little or no warning, targeting foreign and local government facilities, and areas frequented by westerners. Violence continues along the border between Chad and Sudan and areas that border South Sudan (including the disputed Abyei area). Armed opposition groups are active in Central Darfur state and parts of Blue Nile and South Kordofan states.

It should be underscored that Sudan's civil war has fueled world's biggest humanitarian crisis with worse still to come if it continues. With barely two years of civil war, Sudan is suffering the world's worst humanitarian crisis. Things are going to get much worse for civilians, experts say. Sudan's civil war has unleashed violence, death, hunger and disease on a scarcely imaginable scale: tens of thousands of people have been killed and 12 million have been displaced. With the country on the brink of famine, more than half of its 48 million citizens are acutely food insecure. However, the toll of the war on civilians is likely to get much worse in the coming months, political analysts and aid workers told Euronews recently.

Within this reporting period, an aid convoy reached a besieged area of Khartoum for the first time since Sudan's civil war broke out in April 2023, bringing food and medicines in a country where half of the people are at risk of starvation. The 28 trucks arrived in southern Khartoum on 25 December 2024 and food distribution started on 29 December 2024, according to the World Food Programme (WFP), which provided 22 trucks loaded with 750 tonnes of food. It was reported that UNICEF sent five trucks with medicines and malnutrition kits for children, while Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) contributed one truck of medical supplies, according to the Khartoum State Emergency Response Room (ERR), a grassroots aid group that is helping to coordinate the distribution. The aid convoy reaching Jebel Aulia, south of Khartoum, and the Al Bashayer hospital in the city was cause for hope for some humanitarian workers.

Further, the RSF massacre on 27 December 2024, in Al-Jazira state further threatened regional stability. The precise reasons for the flare up of violence in Sudan's Al-Jazira State seems to have been driven by retribution and revenge. Days after the defection of an ex-Rapid Support Forces leader, 370 villagers mainly from the Shukria Tribe in the east of Al-Jazira were massacred. The horrific events followed jubilant scenes on 20 October 2024, when a RSF leader, Abuagla Keikal, Commander of Al-Jazira State, surrendered with his forces and joined the ranks of the Sudanese army. A member of the Shukria tribe, Keikal's decision to surrender was confirmed by the Sudan army in an official statement. However, the unprecedented upsurge in violence does not seem to have any military benefit but rather appears to be acts of terror and retribution, according to the Middle East Monitor.

It should be mentioned that fighting between Sudan's army and rebel groups recently intensified in Kordofan Area. Much attention was given to fighting in Sudan's capital, Khartoum, and its Darfur region. However, the Kordofan area, on the border with South Sudan, had also seen intense clashes. Thousands of people in the area fled to South Sudan, as fatalities increased due to the conflict. The SAF and the RSF fought a power struggle that resulted in a conflict that severely damaged society, the economy, the health care system, and infrastructure. Accordingly, the UN Humanitarian Chief, Tom Fletcher called for immediate international action to address Sudan's deepening crisis, highlighting the suffering of millions displaced by conflict. He spoke with refugees during a visit to Sudan and Chad, vowing to amplify their plight and urge the world to provide greater support.

On 1 December 2024, the RSF missile attack on Darfur's Zamzam Internal Displaced Persons (IDPs) camp killed and injured civilians. The RSF bombarded the Zamzam camp for displaced people in North Darfur with a barrage of long-range missiles, resulting in deaths and injuries among the displaced and forcing thousands to flee. International humanitarian organizations announced in August 2024 that a famine had occurred in Zamzam camp, but the Sudanese Government denied this, attributing the scarcity of food and medicine to the RSF siege of El Fasher. According to local media reports, witnesses said the bombardment also destroyed numerous homes and forced the displaced to flee towards the towns of Shaqra and Saluma, west of El Fasher. The camp is suffering from an unprecedented humanitarian crisis due to the lack of aid caused by the RSF's siege and restrictions on humanitarian and commercial convoys.

Multiple media reports suggest that the RSF forcibly recruited from Darfur camp amid mounting losses. The RSF was forcibly recruiting men from a displaced persons camp in North Darfur, the latest escalation in its campaign to bolster its ranks amid a protracted war with the Sudanese army. The move came after RSF leader Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo, known as Hemeti, called for one million fighters to join his forces following a battlefield setback in early October 2024. It has been reported that the RSF tasked tribal leaders and allied clan chiefs with spearheading recruitment efforts to deploy new recruits to the front lines in Khartoum, El Fasher, and other areas. On 13 November 2024, the Darfur Displaced and Refugees Coordination accused the RSF of detaining dozens of young men from a camp in Shangil Tobaya and forcing them into military service. The RSF was pressuring young people in the Shangil Tobaya camps, kidnapping them and torturing them," said Adam Rijal, a Spokesperson for the displaced persons organization, in a statement.

It is acutely clear that the Sudan's warring parties trade blame as fighting rages in the country. The UN-backed Human Rights Investigators on 6 September 2024, call for the creation of an "independent and impartial force" to protect civilians in Sudan's war, blaming both sides for war crimes including murder, mutilation and torture and warning that foreign governments which arm and finance them could be complicit. The experts also accused the RSF, which are fighting the Sudan's army, and its allies of crimes against humanity including rape, sexual slavery and persecution on ethnic or gender grounds. The UN experts have called for the expansion of an arms embargo on Sudan's long-restive western Darfur region to the entire country. Given the failure of the parties to protect civilians so far, the fact-finding mission recommends the deployment of an independent and impartial force with a mandate to protect civilians in Sudan," the team's report said.

Widespread conflict-related sexual violence committed by the RSF since the fighting commenced have been reported in Sudan. On 10 June 2024, the last civilian hospital in besieged Sudan city was closed. Doctors at one of the last functioning hospitals in the besieged Sudanese city of el-Fasher said they were forced to close down the facility after it was attacked. The hospital had been supported by the Medical charity Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) which had described it as the only one left in el-Fasher where injured civilians could receive treatment. On 8 June 2024, the RSF were reported to have driven up to the hospital and opened fire - looting drugs and medical equipment, stealing an ambulance and assaulting staff.

In the mix of clashes in Sudan, intercommunal violence between Arab and non-Arab tribes which erupted has continued in the Darfur region as a result of fighting between the RSF and SAF. As fighting in Sudan between the army and the RSF rages on, the United Nations has warned that there was a likelihood of an increase in ethnic violence. The UN Assistant Secretary-General for Africa, Martha Ama Akyaa Pobee stated that without swift action, Sudan risks becoming engulfed in more ethnic violence and fragment even further. Ms Pobee added that the risk of a conflict spill over remained high. She said looting, burning, and indiscriminate shooting against non-combatants were also being reported. Food, water, medicine, and fuel were all becoming increasingly scarce, and costs were skyrocketing. The threat of crime remained significant in Khartoum and Darfur's major cities, with RSF and SAF-affiliated personnel chiefly carrying out lootings.

Further, a UN Human Rights expert report released on 19 June 2024 revealed that the RSF engaged in conflict with SAF were utilizing the Am Dafok region on the border with the Central African Republic as a key supply line and recruitment hub of new fighters for the RSF. Am Dafok, a strategic town located on the border between the CAR and Sudan in South Darfur which the RSF gained control of the town in mid-June 2023, holds economic and commercial significance. The report highlights the recruitment of CAR-based fighters by the RSF, with groups like the Popular Front for the Renaissance of Central Africa (FPRC) actively participating in the Sudanese conflict. These complex dynamics posed a challenge for the CAR's national armed forces (FACA), as the RSF simultaneously claims to support the CAR Government while also collaborating with armed groups within the country. The experts noted that the conflict in Sudan had caused an influx of armed actors to Vakaga Prefecture, particularly around Am Dafok, which is vital for RSF supplies and recruitment.

In Sudan, there are reported incidents affecting aid agencies and challenges associated with security risk management practices. Since the start of the conflict, humanitarian agencies have operated in an environment of largely urban conflict, characterised by small arms fires and the use of explosive weapons with indiscriminate effects. Such conflict dynamics have left many civilians in populated urban areas – especially vulnerable demographic groups – trapped in their homes, often with diminishing supplies of essential items such as food and water, while security risks persist around them. The same risks have created severe challenges for aid agencies seeking to safely reach civilians in need in urban areas. In addition, aid agencies have been targeted by local criminal gangs, the RSF, SAF, and militia units seeking monetary gain and access to vehicles and buildings. Such groups have looted aid agency supplies and equipment on a large scale.

To help end the conflict, the Human Rights groups called for the extension of arms embargo all over Sudan and ensure enforcement. Amnesty International called on the United Nations Security Council to extend the arms embargo on Darfur to cover all of Sudan, in a report on weapons flooding the war-torn country. There are hundreds of thousands of weapons, millions of rounds of ammunition going into Sudan, fuelling mass human rights violations, Brian Castner, Amnesty's Head of Crisis Research, told AFP. The existing arms embargo, which since 2004 has applied only to Sudan's western Darfur region, "is both too narrowly focused" and "too poorly implemented to have any meaningful impact on curbing these weapons flows," the report found. Amnesty International has since implored on the UN Security Council to urgently expand the arms embargo to the rest of Sudan, and also strengthen its monitoring and verification mechanisms.

In response to the ongoing atrocities in Sudan, Human Rights Watch (HRW) has urged the African Union (AU) to work with the United Nations to deploy a civilian protection mission and initiate strong human rights investigations. The request came ahead of the AU Peace and Security Council's meeting on 21 June, where concrete steps to protect civilians and ensure accountability were expected to be discussed. The devastating conflict between the SAF and the RSF had caused widespread humanitarian suffering and serious human rights abuses. HRW highlights that both sides are responsible for international humanitarian law violations, with the RSF and allied forces accused of crimes against humanity and war crimes against specific ethnic communities in West Darfur. Allan Ngari, Africa Advocacy Director at HRW, stressed the need for urgent action by the AU Peace and Security Council. He stated, "The Peace and Security Council should spell out what urgent steps it plans to take to ensure the deployment of a United Nations-backed civilian protection mission and to support investigations by the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights."

In a related development, the International Criminal Justice has set 10 April 2025 for Sudan genocide case against United Arab Emirate after Khartoum accused the Gulf State of complicity in genocide. Sudan has dragged the UAE before the court, arguing its alleged support for the rebel RSF making it "complicit in the genocide on the Masalit", a non-Arab ethnic group that has been a target of brutal violence in the Darfur region.

The conflict, which broke out in April 2023, the international community has expressed grave concern at the dire humanitarian situation and acute food insecurity in Sudan. They also expressed their deep concern at the continued violations of international law in Sudan and the heavy toll of the ongoing conflict on civilians, including women and children. The Sudanese warring parties are to de-escalate tensions, cease hostilities, and ensure the protection of civilians, including in El Fasher, in accordance with international humanitarian law and, as applicable, human rights law. They called on the parties to use the opportunity of the talks to agree to steps to rapidly deliver these goals and work towards a sustainable end to the crisis in Sudan. The warring parties are called upon to agree further steps to allow and facilitate, in a manner consistent with relevant provisions of international law and with United Nations guiding principles of humanitarian assistance.

I.3. CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC

The security and humanitarian situation in CAR remains a challenge primarily due to chronic instability. CAR continues to be impacted by the effects of a 2013 coup which inflamed tensions between the country's Christian and Muslim communities and caused a significant deterioration in law and order across much of its territory. It must be stated that there have been modest improvements in CAR regarding the security environment in the capital, Bangui, due to disarmament and demobilization efforts as well as a return to constitutional order.

However, the overall situation remains volatile, amid alleged weak state institutions, limited security capabilities and enduring ethnopolitical tensions. Widespread poverty and limited development opportunities have also driven up crime rates. There remains little Government control in many rural areas, and outbreaks of religious violence continue to occur intermittently at various flashpoints.

Despite its vast mineral wealth, including gold and diamonds, CAR's prospect of accelerated political and social-economic development has been hampered by the existence and activities of rebel groups in some parts of the country. Rebel groups have often operated with impunity, thwarting mining exploration by foreign companies. The country has been in conflict since 2013, when predominantly Muslim rebels seized power and forced the then President Francois Bozize from office. Six of the 14 armed groups that signed the 2019 peace deal later left the agreement. Locals and Government have credited Wagner forces for preventing rebels from taking control of the Bangui in 2021.

Worse still, the noble operations of not only the peacekeepers but also humanitarian organisations have been affected by attacks from rebel groups in many instances. Recently, a Kenyan peacekeeper was killed on 28 March 2022, in an ambush of a patrol in the eastern of CAR. According to Florence Marchal, the Spokesperson for MINUSCA, the soldier was killed during a UN patrol near the village of Tabant, 25 km north-west Semio. The UN Secretary General condemned the attack in the strongest possible terms and was extremely shocked by this despicable attack on peacekeepers whose mission was to protect the civilian populations.

Due to growing insecurity and instability in CAR, the UN Security Council extended the mandate of MINUSCA on 14 November 2024 until 15 November 2025. MINUSCA was mandated to advance a multi-year strategic vision to create the political, security and institutional conditions conducive to national reconciliation and durable peace. The Council urged all parties to the conflict to respect the ceasefire announced on 15 October 2024 and called on the CAR Government and other signatories to fully implement the Political Agreement. The Security Council also encouraged the CAR Government to cement and broaden national awareness and ownership of the peace and reconciliation process. In that vein, the Security Council urged the CAR Government and all national stakeholders to ensure the preparation of inclusive, free and fair elections in 2025 and 2026.

The humanitarian and security conditions in CAR have deteriorated since March 2024, amid escalating clashes between armed groups. Despite these challenges, significant strides have been made in stabilizing the country. There were several areas of positive change which were noticeable. These include the redeployment of

the state's presence in conflict zones and successful stabilization efforts in various regions of the country. The other noted progress made was in disarming members of armed groups, and the fact that some groups had withdrawn from armed conflict and reintegrated into civilian life.

In a related development, UN Security Council on 13 August 2024, unanimously lifted an arms embargo on the CAR. It was imposed in 2013 when mainly Muslim rebels ousted the then President, Francois Bozize, prompting reprisals from mostly Christian militias. The sanctions were already watered-down last year when the Council agreed to exempt government forces from the embargo. In many aspects, the decision was a “historic and crucial turning point for peace and stability”, not only for the country but also for the region. In many aspects, this diplomatic victory constitutes a first step that restores dignity to CAR and its people by making Central African diplomacy a model of perseverance and determination in the quest for a more equitable world. However, the Security Council called on nations to take all necessary measures to prevent the direct or indirect supply of weapons to armed groups operating in the country.

Within this reporting period, CAR won the bid to have diamond export ban rescinded. CAR had campaigned for months to end an embargo imposed in 2013 amid a civil war in a country marked by decades of violence, instability and coups. The Kimberley Process Certification Scheme (KPCS) lifted trade restrictions it imposed on diamonds from the CAR 11 years ago following recommendations from a review mission headed by South Africa in September 2024. In this light, the KPCS rescinded diamond export ban opened up opportunities for CAR’s economic growth through diamond revenue” and also reaffirmed the commitment of the international community to maintaining transparency and accountability” in the diamond trade.

From the perspective of security and civilian protection, increased cases of armed activities, including cross-border violence in the country have been reported. The security situation remained volatile, with an increase in human violence. During the period under review, armed groups maintained their presence along the north-east, north-west and south-east borders, attacking civilians as well as national defence and security forces’ positions. The rebel groups have been reported to be active in the outskirts of major towns’ and at the mining sites, restricting access to fields, farmland and forests, and disrupting supply chains. MINUSCA, in coordination with national security forces, have been launching patrols to consolidate security gains in areas where prior MINUSCA operations had helped deter security threats. Fighting between the national army, alongside Russian mercenaries and Rwandan forces, and elements of the CPC, have been intense at times, with dozens of civilians killed in some attacks.

CAR continues to face a protracted complex emergency that is generating severe protection violations, widespread displacement, and humanitarian needs. As a consequence, the ongoing fighting in CAR has forced close to a million Central Africans to flee to neighbouring countries, including Cameroon, Chad, the DRC, and Nigeria. An estimated 2.8 million people require humanitarian assistance in 2024 to address the ever growing humanitarian needs in CAR, according to the UNHCR. Meanwhile, as of April 2024, an estimated 518,000 people remained internally displaced due to conflict and climatic shocks, a majority of whom reside with host communities near their areas of origin.

The growing insecurity in the CAR because of the resumption of military activities by some armed groups has been a major source of concern. The country has witnessed new developments in the modus operandi of armed groups, namely, the use of explosive devices and drones, negatively impacting the population, national security forces, humanitarian actors and United Nations peacekeepers. Armed groups are reported to be operating across the border with neighbouring countries, particularly in the resource-rich areas in the northwest and northeast, have been a particular concern in recent months. It has also been reported that more than 10,000 children were still fighting alongside armed groups in CAR, according to the MINUSCA.

On 6 November 2024, CAR authorities said that several hundred rebels had surrendered and handed over their weapons over to government troops and UN forces. The rebels surrendered less than a month after the CAR reached an agreement with neighbouring Chad to jointly protect the two countries 1,200-kilometer border. CAR officials said it was hardship and ceaseless raids by government troops that forced many rebel fighters to drop their weapons and give themselves up. Maxime Balalou, the CAR's Communication Minister and the Government Spokesperson, said some of the 105 fighters who surrendered their weapons in Bambari, the third-largest city in the country, belonged either to the UPC or Anti-balaka rebel groups. Balalou stated that the Government said its operations consist of attacking hideouts of rebels who refuse to surrender. The goal is to establish peace before the CAR holds its first local elections in 36 years. The elections originally slated for October 2024 were postponed because of insecurity and a lack of readiness by political parties. Officials now say the elections will take place on 29 December 2024, assuming conditions are favourable.

CAR remains vulnerable to further outbreaks of conflict stemming from communal tensions and political instability made worse by weak security capabilities. Frequent outbreaks of communal violence in various areas of the country including the Ouaka, Ouham and Mbomou prefectures have seen thousands of civilian fatalities and caused several NGOs to suspend operations due to hostile local security environments. Although the country does not have a history of terrorism, rebel groups and militias continue to pose a high threat of indiscriminate violence.

Security conditions have hampered humanitarian relief, and serious violations of human rights and international humanitarian law have resulted in high numbers of refugees and IDPs. The UN peacekeepers have also been prone to attacks by suspected militia in CAR. Despite the difficult operating environment, MINUSCA, its leadership, troops and police contributing countries should be commended for their sacrifices and commitment to promoting peace in the CAR. The UN condemned the killing on 15 January 2024 of one Cameroonian peacekeeper from MINUSCA and the wounding of five others, including two seriously, by an explosive in Mbindali, in Ouham-Pende Prefecture, north-west of Paoua. "The UN Secretary-General in a statement released called upon CAR authorities to spare no effort in identifying the perpetrators of this attack and bringing them to justice swiftly. These unfortunate events highlight some of the challenges that MINUSCA's peacekeepers face as they seek to adopt the necessary posture to provide robust protection of civilians. It is important to reiterate the importance of properly equipping the mission to manoeuvre in this environment and fully implement its mandate.

In a quest to promote peace and stability, the Governments of CAR and Uganda in January 2024 entered into a military co-operation agreement. The MoU signing follows an earlier one signed in 2017 which expired in 2022. Following the signing in Kampala's Naguru, it reiterated the country's commitment to the CAR military partnership. The defence partnership with CAR was a testament to the commitment and pledged to work together to ensure the region remained peaceful and prosperous. The focus of the military co-operation MOU was also meant to build operational capacity of the CAR Armed Forces. The Central African Republic planned to benchmark the professionalism of the UPDF. Also, Serbian and CAR Defense Ministers on 7 March 2024 signed an agreement on cooperation covering the field of defense.

Although the security situation has improved moderately in recent years, crime continues to pose a significant threat across the country and civil unrest occurs with some frequency in urban centers due to alleged volatile security conditions, political uncertainty, and ethno-religious tensions. MINUSCA peacekeepers have endeavoured to maintain a significant presence across the country with a mandate to protect civilians in areas with high communal tensions, including Bangui, but have come under frequent attack in some areas where militia activity remains high.

Stability remains a challenge in CAR due to alleged limited Government control over parts of the country, weak state institutions and widespread insecurity. Political analysts allege that corruption is widespread in CAR, particularly within the security forces, and is prevalent in business practices and dealings with the government. Due to the limited government control outside of Bangui, it is reported that lawlessness pervades in many parts of the country with security and peacekeeping forces more focused on attempting to prevent outbreaks of communal violence, rather than criminal activity.

The FP-ICGLR therefore wish to underscore the fact that many challenges remain in order to advance and achieve the fundamental benchmarks of the peace processes in CAR. The only durable solution for CAR is through political dialogue, including full and inclusive implementation of the 2019 peace agreement and regionally brokered 2021 Roadmap. It is imperative for armed groups of the CPC to deposit their arms without delay, and join the conflict resolution framework as planned, in particular by the Political Accord for Peace and Reconciliation in the Central African Republic (APPR CAR) and the Luanda Road Map. It is of utmost urgency that the political process in CAR comes to alleviate the sufferings of the populations and victims of the violence of a conflict which has lasted for many years.

I.4. REPUBLIC OF SOUTH SUDAN

Despite efforts towards implementing the peace agreement, peace and security remain fragile, while conflict has persisted. Violence between armed groups in Upper Nile, southern Central Equatorial and Southern Unity States has resulted in displacements of thousands of civilians. Intercommunal and intersectional violence persists in most parts of the country, with increased killings, displacements, looting, and destruction of property.

In recent years, inter-communal violence and attacks by community-based militias have resulted in increasing civilian casualties. Cattle raiding and revenge killings, as well as increased resource competition between herding and farming communities, have triggered violent clashes. Clashes have been reported between armed groups in northern Jonglei and Upper Nile states, inter-communal violence in northern Warrap, and ongoing cattle raids and migration-related conflicts in the Equatoria. The clashes have exacerbated the humanitarian situation as the most vulnerable, including women, children, the elderly and disabled, are bearing the brunt of the prolonged crisis in the country. On 28 December 2024, the UNMISS stated that thousand of people who had been forced to flee their homes in South Sudans Western Equatorai State following weeks of violence in the town of Tambura and its surrounding areas, had returned home. The UNMISS reported that calm had returned to the area following the violence which saw many of those displaced talking shelter near a temporary UNMISS base.

The Pope decried appalling humanitarian catastrophe in country's globally with security and humanitarian challenges. The Holy See Press Office published that Pope Francis on 30 March 2025 remarked during Sunday Angelus in which he prayed for peace in places of suffering around the world, especially for the 'appalling humanitarian catastrophe' in Sudan, the tensions in South Sudan and Myanmar. He also expressed his hope that this Lent, may be a time of healing for all.

From the political front, media reports purporting the house arrest and detention of the Leader of the Sudan People's Liberation Movement-in-Opposition (SPLM-IO), the First Vice President Dr. Riek Machar, caused panic and uncertainty over the fate of a 2018 peace accord. The SPLM-IO stated that the 2018 Revitalised Peace Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in the Republic of South Sudan (R-ARCSS), which brought to an end the civil war had effectively collapsed following the house arrest of its leader. In a statement issued on 27 March 2025, by Oyet Nathaniel Pierino, Deputy Chairman and Deputy Commander-In-Chief of SPLM/A-IO and First Deputy Speaker of the National Legislature, said the unlawful arrest and detention of Dr. Machar derailed the prospects of peace. He added that the arrest of Dr. Machar effectively brought the Agreement to a collapse, thus the prospect for peace and stability in South Sudan had now been put into serious jeopardy. However, the Sudanese Security official downplayed reports of Dr. Machars house arrest stating that the Government had instead increased the security arrangements for the SPLM-IO leader following the meeting held on 26 March 2025 in Juba.

Relatedly, there were reports of clashes between Government troops of the South Sudan People's Defence Forces (SPDF) and the SPLM-IO near Rejaf, just south of the capital Juba, and in Wunaliet, to the west. The clashes were as a consequence of the house arrest of Dr. Machar on 26 March 2025 in Juba. In this respect, UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres expressed deep concerned with the escalating

situation in South Sudan, warning that the country was on the brink of civil war, his spokesman said on 27 March 2025. The UN Chief warned that the confinement took the country yet one step closer to the edge of a collapse into civil war and the dismantling of the 2018 peace agreement.

Aside from this, the UN Security Council on 14 November 2024 decided to extend the mandate of the UNISFA until 15 November 2025 to maintain the Force's authorized troop and police ceilings and call for a strategic review of UNISFA's effectiveness, strategic objectives and alignment with the evolving regional security situation. The Council strongly urged the Sudanese and South Sudanese authorities" to provide full support to UNISFA in the implementation of its mandate; provide prompt, full deployment of its personnel and equipment; ensure the Force's full freedom of movement; and facilitate UNISFA's uninterrupted provision of food, medicine and other supplies to its personnel. The Council also urged stronger cooperation between Sudan and South Sudan in support of peace, security, and stability and called for a resumption of Joint Political and Security Mechanism meetings.

During this reporting period, the UN Security Council on 1 June 2024 extended for one year the arms embargo imposed on South Sudan. The arms embargo was extended on the country despite appeals from South Sudan, the African Union and half a dozen countries including Russia and China to lift or at least ease the restrictive measure. The resolution also extends travel bans and asset freezes on South Sudanese on the UN sanctions blacklist until 31 May 2025. The Security Council urged Member States to identify and prevent arms shipments in violation of the resolution, stating that such shipments could fuel conflict and contribute to further instability.

To prioritise restoring peace of mind and security for law-abiding citizens in areas facing security challenges, the law enforcement agencies have been instructed to crackdown on gangs in Eastern Equatoria. Nimule and Torit counties are pinpointed as areas experiencing a particular rise in criminal activity. On 7 June 2024, South Sudan's Inspector General of Police, General Marol Biar, directed law enforcement agencies in Eastern Equatoria State to take stronger action in response to a recent surge in criminal activity. Addressing over a thousand police graduates at a Graduation Ceremony held at Torit's Freedom Square, General Biar emphasized the need for immediate action. He underscored the importance of dismantling criminal groups and apprehending their leaders.

From the legislative side, South Sudan lawmakers passed the hotly debated National Security 2014 (Amendment) Bill 2024, which gave the security agency the right to arrest suspected criminals without a warrant. The lawmakers maintained the two controversial Sections 54 and 55 of the Bill, which gave the agency broad unqualified powers. The Bill was passed by voting after the August House failed to reach a consensus, with some urging the scrapping of the two sections as demanded by a section of the civil society. According to Radio Tamazuj, the passing of the Bill, which many consider a threat to the citizens, comes after the two principals, President Salva Kiir and First Vice-President Riek Machar, had agreed to delete the two sections, which grant the National Security Service powers to arrest and detain people without an arrest warrant.

Further, President Salva Kiir Mayardit announced on 13 September 2024 that the long-awaited general elections would be postponed for a further two years, once again

extending a transitional period agreed in a peace deal. Citizens have waited to elect their leaders since the country achieved its hard-won independence from Sudan in 2011, with South Sudan facing pockets of violence, poverty and political infighting in some areas. President Kiir announced an extension of the country's transitional period by two years as well as postponing elections, which were initially scheduled for December 2024 to 22 December 2026, Kiir's office said in a Facebook post. In the statement, Cabinet Affairs Minister Martin Elia Lomuro said the extension was in response to the recommendations from both electoral institutions and the security sector. Thus, RJMEC endorsed the extension of South Sudan's transitional period for the next two years on 16 September 2024. According South Sudan's Presidency, the transitional period extension was intended to provide time and space for the implementation of the remaining provisions of the 2018 Revitalised Agreement to the R-ARCSS.

The Government of South Sudan requires more than US\$440 million to conduct the country's general elections earmarked for 22 December 2026, an official disclosed. This was revealed by the Cabinet Affairs Minister, Martin Elia Lomuro at an Extra-Ordinary Meeting of the Reconstituted Joint Monitoring and Evaluation Commission (RJMEC). He said the South Sudanese parties to the 2018 peace agreement accepted to fund the elections. Lomuro downplayed the alarming budget for the 2026 polls, saying the High-Level Standing Committee would continue to engage these institutions to reduce the figure to an affordable amount. Further, the UN declared and pledged that it was ready to support the transitional process in South Sudan upto December 2026: The Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Nicholas Haysom said the UN stood ready to support the transitional process in South Sudan. Meanwhile, the National Elections Commission (NEC) of South Sudan on 13 December 2024 outlined key priorities to ensure credible elections in 2026, calling for urgent political decisions, legal framework reviews, and enhanced voter education.

In a related development, the RJMEC Chairperson, Amb. Maj. Gen. Charles Tai Gituai bemoaned the slow pace on the implementation of South Sudan peace deal by many recurring challenges such as insufficient political will, trust deficit, lack of sufficient, dedicated and predictable funding and capacity gaps, He was speaking during the RJMEC's 38th Monthly Meeting held in Juba on 31 October 2024. Amb. Gituai stated that a clear demonstration by the Revitalized Transitional Government of National Unity (RTGoNU) to mobilize sufficient resources to implement the Agreement would be a strong indication of political will and commitment. He called on the RTGoNU and the various institutions and mechanisms of the Agreement to align and deliver their tasks within the extended transitional period.

As South Sudan has extended its transitional period until 2026, it should be underscored that the 2018 Revitalized Peace Agreement "remains the only viable framework to achieve lasting peace and stability in the country. The framework has instilled a period of significant peace and political stability at national level despite shortcomings in its implementation. If the 2026 elections are not managed carefully, there is a potential for violence with disastrous consequences for South Sudan and the wider region. To this end, the Government of President Salva Kiir is urged to mobilise for proper transition, reach political decisions to complete transitional security arrangements, a level playing field all parties to participate and the constitutional review process that guarantees free, fair, inclusive and credible elections.

I.5. CONCLUSION

Violence, instability and armed conflicts in the Great Lakes Region countries namely DRC, Sudan, CAR and South Sudan, have inflicted enormous cost at national and regional level. Stability and security in the GLR depends on a rigorous and shared diagnosis of threats and existing peace efforts. ICGLR Member States must also renew their agreement on resolving the challenges of insecurity and poverty. It is hope and prayer that all the ongoing peace mechanisms may help restore peace and stability in the FP-ICGLR Member States facing security challenges. The firmly supports and stands with the ICGLR Member States, in their pursuit and legitimate demands for lasting peace and stability in the country. The GLR yearns for peace and stability so that Member States can attain lasting political and socio-economic development for its peoples and communities to live a healthier and happy life.