

22. Central African region

Initial proceedings

Deliberations of 24 November 2003 (4871st meeting)

At its 4871st meeting,¹ on 24 November 2003, the Security Council included in its agenda without objection the item entitled “Central African region” and a letter dated 10 November 2003 from the Secretary-General to the President of the Security Council,² transmitting to the Council the interim report of the multidisciplinary assessment mission to the Central African subregion.

In the report, the multidisciplinary assessment mission, which had been authorized by the Secretary-General pursuant to the statement by the President of 31 October 2002,³ elaborated on the outcome of its visit to all 11 members of the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS)⁴ from 8 to 22 June 2003. The mission highlighted the discrepancy between the subregion’s potential richness and its low ranking on the human development indices and indicated that the recurrence of armed rebellions and conflicts as well as mismanagement and non-inclusive governance throughout the subregion had hampered its socio-economic development. At the same time, the mission pointed out a number of cross-border challenges, including ethnic tensions, refugee flows as well as cross-border movement of weapons, drugs and armed groups, which could only be solved through cooperation and coordination to establish an integrated, holistic subregional approach. The mission recommended that the international community should intensify its partnership with subregional organizations to address such transnational challenges and that the United Nations should strengthen its efforts to support the country-specific disarmament, demobilization and

reintegration programmes. Moreover, 10 of the 11 affected countries had called for the establishment of a United Nations political presence in the subregion, through an office in Central Africa. In the letter, the Secretary-General recalled that there were already a number of United Nations structures in the subregion, including three offices headed by Special Representatives, and proposed instead to appoint a Special Envoy who would be available to work on political issues with Governments in the subregion, and who would also interface with the United Nations entities involved in development and humanitarian activities in Central Africa.

At the same meeting, the Council heard a briefing by the Assistant Secretary-General for Political Affairs and head of the multidisciplinary mission to Central Africa. Statements were made by all Council members as well as the representatives of Italy (on behalf of the European Union⁵), the Congo (on behalf of ECCAS), the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Rwanda, Chad, Equatorial Guinea, the Permanent Observer of the African Union and the Deputy Secretary-General for Political Affairs of ECCAS.

Introducing the report of the multidisciplinary assessment mission, the Assistant Secretary-General noted that, in line with its mandate, the mission had identified the priority needs and challenges in a number of areas, including peace and security, economic and social development, humanitarian affairs, human rights, HIV/AIDS, subregional institutions, United Nations activities and regional integration. He stressed the need for the United Nations to provide assistance to implement subregional policies to address the numerous cross-cutting challenges in the Central African region, and emphasized that the interlinkages between poverty and security required a holistic and integrated approach. Taking note of the Secretary-General’s agreement with the mission’s assessment, he reported that the Secretary-General had called for further examination of the root causes of the

¹ For more information on the discussion at this meeting, see chap. X, part IV, with regard to the interpretation or application of the provisions of Chapter VI of the Charter.

² S/2003/1077.

³ S/PRST/2002/31.

⁴ The members of ECCAS are Angola, Burundi, Cameroon, the Central African Republic, Chad, the Congo, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Equatorial Guinea, Gabon, Rwanda and Sao Tome and Principe.

⁵ Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Iceland, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Norway, Poland, Romania, Slovakia and Turkey aligned themselves with the statement.

conflicts in the subregion and requested a review of United Nations programmes.⁶

Most speakers concurred with the report's assessment concerning the primary challenges confronting the countries in Central Africa, and about the importance of a subregional approach to address the numerous cross-cutting challenges facing those countries. A number of speakers stressed the importance of strengthening existing subregional mechanisms and organizations, including ECCAS. Moreover, several speakers, while expressing concern about the continued fragility of the countries in Central Africa, welcomed recent progress in the peace process in a number of Central African countries.

Several delegations welcomed the Secretary-General's intention to appoint a Special Envoy for the region.⁷

The representative of Cameroon deplored that the report did not include a recommendation in line with the request, which he believed had been made by all, and not just most, Governments in Central Africa during the mission's visit, for a permanent United Nations presence in the subregion. In addition, he expressed regret that the Secretary-General's transmission letter appeared to indicate that the proliferation of national United Nations offices in the region constituted a problem for the request for a subregional presence, while similar numbers of offices had not prevented the Secretary-General from setting up other subregional offices in the past. He also questioned the need for a new study of the root causes of conflict in the region, as Central Africa had already carried out its own study and the Secretary-General had already published a report on the causes of conflict in Africa. Finally, he rejected the idea that the creation of the office should wait until after the international conference on the Great Lakes, since the Great Lakes conference did not concern ECCAS. The representative hoped that the Council would ask the Secretary-General to see how the request by the Governments in Central Africa could be accommodated swiftly and effectively within existing resources.⁸

The representative of France stated that the cross-border challenges confronting the countries in Central

Africa made it necessary for the States of the region and the international community to coordinate appropriate responses. At the same time, France believed that the proposal to appoint a Special Envoy should be considered in the context of the international conference on the Great Lakes region. He noted that while there was no precise equation between countries participating in the conference on the Great Lakes, there were more than four countries overlapping, and the conference would have an impact on cooperation between many of the countries in the region and on their relations with the United Nations.⁹

The representative of Germany stated that it was difficult to see how a mandate for an additional special envoy for Central Africa could avoid overlapping with the mandate of the Special Representative for the Great Lakes Region. His delegation therefore preferred for the United Nations missions in the Central African subregion to identify possible areas of cooperation aimed at effectively addressing cross-cutting issues.¹⁰

The representative of Spain agreed with the report that it was preferable to make effective and coordinated use of existing structures in the region before considering the possibility of establishing new ones.¹¹

The representative of the United Kingdom recognized the need for a comprehensive and concerted approach to the issues of peace, security and development in Central Africa, and stressed the importance of making effective operational linkages across the United Nations system and, where relevant, across borders. He stated that an integrated and holistic subregional approach was required to complement national solutions, but cautioned against imposing templates on different kinds of problems. In addition, he warned against cutting across or duplicating existing regional and subregional initiatives, noting that rather than creating a new level of bureaucracy, his delegation would prefer to build on existing structures. In that context, he urged the Central African subregional organizations to define their roles according to where they could best add value, and hoped that the proposed review of United Nations programmes would do the same.¹²

⁶ S/PV.4871, pp. 2-4 and 30.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 7 (Guinea); p. 8 (China); p. 11 (Syrian Arab Republic); p. 14 (Russian Federation); and p. 25 (Chad).

⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 4-6.

⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 6-7.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 11.

¹² *Ibid.*, pp. 12-13.

The representative of the Russian Federation expressed concern that some African countries tended to appeal to the international community before fully exhausting national or regional possibilities. That applied to the “rather excessive approach for the establishment in Central Africa of a United Nations office”. Along the same lines were the requests relating to international commissions for investigating violations of human rights and international humanitarian law.¹³

The representative of the United States, noting that the international conference on the Great Lakes region might incorporate a number of the elements laid out in the report of the multidisciplinary mission, recommended that the decision on naming a Special Envoy be deferred until after the issuance of the results and recommendations of that conference. Moreover, he expressed concern about adding yet another layer of bureaucracy to the United Nations structures in the Central African region.¹⁴

The representative of Chile recommended heeding the concern of the Secretary-General regarding the proliferation of United Nations offices in the region. He stressed the importance of setting clear and achievable goals, drawing up a specific timetable and avoiding any duplication of functions.¹⁵

The representative of the Congo, speaking on behalf of the 11 States members of ECCAS, expressed his agreement with the statement by Cameroon. Noting the strong interest of the Central African leaders in strengthening cooperation with the United Nations, he said that the subregion wished to send the message that it wanted to emerge from the “infernal circle of violence and poverty”, but added that this would require substantial support from the international community. Drawing attention to a number of positive developments throughout the subregion since the mission’s visit, he reiterated the determination of the Central African leaders to face up to their responsibilities. At the same time, he underlined that it was imperative to have a subregional, coordinated approach, and for the subregion to have a United Nations interlocutor with a regional perspective.¹⁶

The representative of Equatorial Guinea stressed the special responsibility of the Security Council to address the crises in the region, and also expressed appreciation for the work of the United Nations Standing Advisory Committee on Security Questions in Central Africa. He underlined that despite recent positive developments, the countries of the region remained fragile, and he stressed the need for a permanent political United Nations presence with a subregional scope.¹⁷

The Permanent Observer of the African Union indicated that the diagnosis and remedies recommended in the assessment mission’s report could be applied to all of Africa’s regions, and reiterated the paradox that Central Africa was one of the regions with most resources, while also one of the weakest performers with regard to socio-economic development. Pointing to the abundance of subregional, regional and international organizations present in Central Africa, he stressed the need to strengthen existing capacities, and hoped that a United Nations regional political presence could serve to enhance coordination among the various initiatives. As to what form the structure should take, he stated that the African Union relied on the flexibility shown by the countries in the subregion that were prepared to consider the issue further with the Special Envoy to be appointed by the Secretary-General. While supporting the request by the countries of the subregion, he emphasized that the form of coordination mattered less than its efficiency and effectiveness.¹⁸

The Deputy Secretary-General for Political Affairs of ECCAS, noting that progress was being made toward a collective security mechanism in the subregion, informed the Council that the Council for Peace and Security in Central Africa had become operational. He added that ECCAS was undertaking efforts to improve conflict prevention and management in the subregion, aimed at, inter alia, making the early warning mechanism for Central Africa operational. Noting the recent progress made towards consolidating peace and security in a number of countries in the region, he argued that a new dynamic was under way in Central Africa and reiterated the call for a permanent United Nations regional office.¹⁹

¹³ Ibid., pp. 13-14.

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 14.

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 15.

¹⁶ Ibid., pp. 18-21.

¹⁷ Ibid., pp. 26-27.

¹⁸ Ibid., pp. 27-28.

¹⁹ Ibid., pp. 28-29.