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Statement by Adama Dieng, United Nations Special Adviser of the Secretary-General on the Prevention of Genocide, on his visit to the Central African Republic

1. (Bangui, 11 October 2017). The mission I undertook to the Central African Republic from 6 to 11 October, came following worrisome reports about the resurgence of serious violations of human rights and international humanitarian law, including sexual violence, against a backdrop of confrontations between armed groups and the manipulation of religion, ethnic sensibilities and community origins observed from the south-east to the north-west of the country. I had the opportunity to bring together the authorities, national actors, representatives of armed groups, victims and international partners to initiate a dialogue on urgent, concerted and coordinated steps to be taken to put an end to the violence, defuse the intercommunity tensions and alleviate the suffering of the civilian population.

2. In Bria, which I visited with the Minister of Defence, two local parliamentarians and the Chair of the National Committee for the Prevention of Criminal Atrocities, I was able to discuss with key actors and to see, with regret and consternation, the systematic destruction of the homes of civilians, many of whom were forced to flee. I received similar reports from Bangassou, Mobaye, Alindao, Bocaranga, Nieme and Gambo about serious violations against the civilian population, particularly women and children, for allegedly belonging to certain ethnic and/or religious groups belonging and/or being affiliated with armed groups. It is time to condemn these unacceptable manipulations that sow the seeds of division and wrongfully justify the horrors reported to me by victims, the authorities, civil society representatives and religious and community leaders.

3. I condemn in the strongest possible terms the manipulation and incitement to ethnic and religious hatred instigated by armed groups and militias and accomplice politicians, with the aim of establishing territorial control, mobilizing combatants or extending their predatory instincts to private property and the country's economic resources. I also condemn in the strongest possible terms the attacks carried out against MINUSCA and humanitarian personnel in the performance of their duties to support civilians. Any individual responsible for criminal atrocities or incitement to commit such atrocities will sooner or later have to assume criminal responsibility for their acts and face national or international justice. I therefore I encourage all efforts made jointly by MINUSCA and the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, in cooperation with the Office of the Special Adviser to the Secretary-General on the Prevention of Genocide, to monitor and document messages of hate and incitement to violence, to identify their perpetrators and instigators, and to ensure that their acts do not go unpunished.

4. All the victims made it clear to me that their wish was to live together in peace and harmony with all the people of the Central African Republic. Christian, Muslim and Peuhl civilians are taken hostage by armed groups. The people of Bria, Bangassou, Mobaye and Alindao are all calling for their towns to once again be weapons-free, and they all aspire to return to their respective communities.

5. I shared with President Touadera the concerns observed during the visit regarding the seriousness and scope of the criminal atrocities committed in the hinterland with impunity by armed groups. He believes that urgent steps must be taken to combat the attempts at ethnic or religious division. He also reiterated to me his determination to continue the dialogue with the armed groups, in order to ensure that they put down their weapons.

6. He is also convinced that violence must be condemned in no uncertain terms, regardless of its source or of the victims or the perpetrators, in order to break the cycle of impunity. The authorities, institutions, women's groups and opinion leaders that I met also expressed the same position to me.

7. I call on the Government of the Central African Republic and all the parties concerned to commit resolutely to dialogue, in accordance with the consolidated road map of the African Initiative for Peace and Reconciliation in the Central African Republic, but without sacrificing the need to strengthen the rule of law, to restore good governance and to combat impunity.

8. All the people I met said they were very hopeful, in the light of the restoration of State authority, security sector reform and the DDR process, which all present opportunities for strengthening the capacity to prevent criminal atrocities and protect the civilian population.

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