

Agreement on new peace deal ‘only one step’ on challenging road ahead for Central African Republic, says UN envoy

Despite the recent signing of a recent peace deal between the Government of the Central African Republic (CAR) and 14 armed groups “we should not forget that the situation in the country remains serious,” a senior UN envoy told the Security Council on Thursday.

“The signing of the Global Agreement for Peace and National Reconciliation on 6 February is the culmination of a long process,” said Parfait Onanga-Anyanga, the Secretary-General’s Special Representative and Head of the UN mission in CAR.

In his final briefing to the Council, Mr. Onanga-Anyanga recalled that after a difficult transition, new legitimate and democratic institutions were installed on March 30, 2016. “Central Africans have come a long way, and despite numerous challenges...they deserve our admiration and encouragement,” he added.

Since conflict began in CAR in 2012, due to fighting between the mostly Christian anti-Balaka militia and the mainly Muslim Séléka rebel coalition, thousands of civilians have been killed and two out of three people in the small Central African Nation have become dependent on humanitarian aid.

“While we are right to welcome the fact that our multifaceted efforts have allowed this important political advance in the Central African Republic, we must remain vigilant because the situation remains serious,” said the UN envoy, adding: “The unbearable fate of displaced people and refugees, as well as scenes of senseless violence and the many victims [are a nagging reminder] of this.”

Mr. Onanga-Anyanga stressed that the signing of the peace deal was a “necessary and decisive step, certainly, but only one step. The hardest thing is indeed to come. The real test will be in the full and good faith implementation of the agreement,” he explained.

With that in mind, he called on all stakeholders to scrupulously honor the commitments they have made under the agreement and not to betray the confidence placed in them by the Central African people and all those who accompanied them in throughout the peace process.

“The country today has the opportunity to open a new page full of promise and that turns its back, definitely, to a painful story,” said Mr. Onanga-Anyanga, and he urged the parties to always pursue dialogue to sustain the

new political and social consensus put forward by the February 6 agreement.

The UN envoy said the role of the guarantors, especially neighboring countries and the region, and that of the facilitators will be decisive for the full realization of the accord. He welcomed the joint initiative of the United Nations and the African Union to hold a meeting of the International Support Group at CAR on Friday 22 February.

Mr. Onanga-Anyanga said that the support of the Security Council, the countries of the region and the wider international community remain essential for the successful implementation of the peace agreement.

Finally, he saluted the sacrifice of peacekeepers who were killed in CAR. "These peacekeepers gave their lives to help assist, protect and comfort the Central African people and support the country's young democratic institutions when threatened," he said.

This was Mr. Onanga-Anyanga's last briefing to the Security Council as Special Representative for CAR. Heading up the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic ([MINUSCA](#)) since August 2015, Mr. Onanga-Anyanga will be [succeeded by](#) Mankeur Ndiaye, of Senegal.

[UN decolonization successes can 'inspire us today,' UN chief tells Special Committee](#)

Since the early 1960s, the United Nations decolonization committee has "accompanied many territories in their journey", Secretary-General António Guterres said on Thursday, opening the body's 2019 session.

Reminding the [Special Committee on Decolonization](#) that as a Portuguese national, he came from a country oppressed by dictatorship, Mr. Guterres called the decolonization agenda "an area close to my heart and to which I reiterate my commitment."

Back in 1946, some Member States identified a roster of non-self-governing territories and placed them on [a UN list](#). In 1960 the [Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples](#) was adopted and the following year the General Assembly established the Special Committee, known by the shorthand 'C-24' after its original 24 members, to monitor its implementation.

As "one of the most significant chapters of the Organization's history," Mr. Guterres credited decolonization with helping to transform UN membership,

“propelling the Organization’s growth from 51 original members to 193 today.”

Over the years this process has resulted in the removal of most territories from the list.

“But this story is still being written,” the UN chief continued, “as 17 non-self-governing territories remain,” each waiting to attain self-government, in accordance with Chapter XI of the [UN Charter](#), the 1960 Declaration and relevant UN resolutions.

Among other things, the Special Committee annually reviews the territories remaining on the list – making recommendations on implementation and supporting the dissemination of public opinion information on the decolonization process.

Decolonization under way today

Most recently, Mr. Guterres explained, New Caledonia in the South Pacific territory took an important decolonization step forward through a referendum last November.

He commended France, the country administering the territory, on its cooperation throughout the process – in accordance with the 1998 Nouméa Accord, which set out that a referendum on self-determination would be held by 2018.

Meanwhile, the Special Committee assisted in the period leading up to the referendum, including by dispatching two [visiting missions](#) to New Caledonia.

“To achieve decolonization, the voices of the peoples of the territories should be heard,” underscored Mr. Guterres adding that “likewise vital” was the cooperation of all concerned, including the administering powers.

To achieve decolonization, the voices of the peoples of the territories should be heard – *UN chief*

That the people of the non-self-governing territories understand the options regarding their political status and right to choose their future freely is “paramount,” according to the UN chief.

As he wished the Committee “every success” throughout the 2019 session, Mr. Guterres said: “The UN’s decolonization successes across the decades can inspire us today.”

“Let us uphold our duty to assist all the peoples of the non-self-governing territories in bringing their decolonization process to a successful conclusion, according to their own choice,” concluded the Secretary-General.

The C-24 also observes [the Week of Solidarity with the Peoples of Non-Self-Governing Territories](#).

Service and Sacrifice: UN peacekeeping assignment 'lifetime opportunity' for Nepalese doctor

For over six decades, Nepalese women and men have served around the world as United Nations peacekeepers. The South Asian nation is currently the fifth largest contributor to [UN peacekeeping](#), with over 5,700 personnel serving in more than a dozen countries. They protect vulnerable communities and support countries working to move from conflict to peace, doing so at great personal risk and in harsh conditions.

UN News spoke with one such peacekeeper, Captain Poonam Khadka, who served with the joint African Union-UN peacekeeping mission ([UNAMID](#)) in the Darfur region of Sudan last year. Captain Khadka completed her assignment in Darfur and returned home to Nepal in January of this year. The following interview took place while she was still serving with the Mission.

UN News: Please state your name, position and where you are from; tell us a little bit about your background.

Poonam Khadka: I'm Captain Dr. Poonam Raval Khadka, the Senior Medical Officer working with the Nepal Force Reserve Company (FRC) Level 1 Hospital at UNAMID headquarters in El Fasher, North Darfur. I joined the Nepal Armed Forces in 2011 and have worked in its military hospitals ever since. My family background is rooted in the Nepalese military; my husband, my father-in-law and my brother-in-law, literally most of my immediate and extended family, have worked in the military. The strong military background is my main motivation in my work, especially when you get this rare opportunity to serve in UN peacekeeping missions, where I can make a contribution to global peace and stability and provide support to people in need all over the world.

UN News: How long have you been with UNAMID and what are your responsibilities?

Poonam Khadka: I joined UNAMID in mid-2017. My main responsibility is to treat and care for patients who come or are admitted to our Level 1 Hospital. Additionally, I am the Gender Focal Point for the Nepal Contingent. The latter assignment affords me the opportunity to interact with the local communities during sensitization campaigns where we educate them on the importance of health care and hygiene, particularly in the IDP [internally displaced persons] camps. These sensitisation campaigns focus mainly on the critical need for handwashing during cooking or toilet use, drinking safe water, eating healthy food in addition to the protection of the environment through organizing clean-up campaigns in their communities.

UN News: What led you to join UN peacekeeping?

Poonam Khadka: Actually, I was nominated by the UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations ([DPKO](#)) as well as my Government. It is compulsory, in my country, for everyone working in our military hospitals to work in a UN peacekeeping mission before he/she completes a master's degree. Personally, I was driven by the need to serve humanity and to support vulnerable people, particularly those living in conflict areas or those affected by natural calamities.

UN News: Which UN missions have you served with?

Poonam Khadka: This is my second UN peacekeeping assignment. Prior to joining UNAMID, I served with the UN mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo ([MONUSCO](#)) from 2014 to 2015.



UN Photo/Amin Ismail

Captain Poonam Khadka while on mission in Sudan's Darfur region. UN Photo/Amin Ismail

UN News: Describe what a typical day at the mission is like for you.

Poonam Khadka: In UNAMID, we are on duty 24/7. This also depends on the patient conditions in our hospital as sometimes we have to stay overnight to attend to very sick patients and other emergencies. Otherwise, we work the normal 6 hours per day.

We have also done external assignments as was the case during the last Nelson Mandela Day commemorative event held in ZamZam IDP Camp, near El Fasher, North Darfur where we partnered with other military personnel from the Indonesian and Egypt Contingents to conduct a health camp. We sensitised residents there about water-borne diseases, the usage of oral rehydration solutions at home and how to keep hands clean to minimise food contamination.

UN News: What are some of the highlights of serving with the peacekeeping

mission?

Poonam Khadka: UN peacekeeping missions operate in a multi-cultural environment where each and every member learns new things and exchanges ideas with colleagues and the host community. During my tenure with UNAMID, I have taken the initiative to attend HIV/AIDS awareness sessions and participated in various cultural and sporting activities organized by the Nepal Contingent to mark various UN International Day observances.

UN News: What are some of the challenges for you personally?

Poonam Khadka: The long distance and time away from close family is perhaps my greatest challenge as my current location is very far from my country. The weather in Darfur sometimes is challenging for me, especially during the sandstorm season and the incessant humid and hot weather.

UN News: What do your family and friends back home think about your service with UN peacekeeping?

Poonam Khadka: My family and friends are very proud of what I do as they know that we are in Darfur representing our country, Nepal. My family appreciates that our Nepal Contingent is in Darfur to build peace and security and to assist in conflict resolution in the region.

Working as a peacekeeper and being a female military officer, who is also a doctor working in UN peacekeeping, fills me and my family with a lot of pride.



UN Photo/Amin Ismail

Captain Poonam Khadka while on mission in Sudan's Darfur region. UN Photo/Amin Ismail

UN News: How would you describe your overall experience as a UN peacekeeper? Is there one particular experience/memory you will take back with you when

you return home?

Poonam Khadka: Coming from a South Asian, male-dominated environment, where female voices are gradually being understood by our communities, I am encouraged that lately gender equality issues are being mainstreamed into the workplace and in families. For instance, I come from a family of five brothers and sisters. My parents opted to send me, a woman, to China to study for five years, while my brothers studied locally in government engineering colleges.

Nowadays, in the larger cities in my country, people are changing their mindsets about gender parity but the women in the remote areas still encounter problems in accessing education and their voices remain unheard in their communities and families.

Personally, I am gratified by the chance to work in a UN peacekeeping mission, as this has offered me the opportunity to internalise gender-related issues. Working for MONUSCO and now for UNAMID has helped build my self-confidence immensely, especially in gender-related approaches in the workplace.

UN News: What would you say to others in your home country who are considering serving with the UN?

Poonam Khadka: Working in a UN peacekeeping mission is a lifetime opportunity as it accords people like me a chance to interact with people from different countries with different norms and cultures. I learn from them and they learn from me. As a female peacekeeper, I feel proud and grateful that I have the chance to work with other female and male peacekeepers from around the globe.

How Bangladesh spearheaded creation of International Mother Language Day

Concerned that one language goes extinct every two weeks, the United Nations is honouring linguistic diversity and celebrating indigenous languages on [International Mother Language Day](#). And the roots of the Day start in a South-Asian country with a bloody and historic connection to 21 February.

“We have to protect our heritage, our culture, our existence,” said Ambassador Masud Bin Momen, of Bangladesh, the country which successfully lobbied the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) in 1999 to create International Mother Language Day. The UN General Assembly formally recognized the Day in 2008.

The origins of the Day began before 21 February 1952, but erupted on that

day, when students at the University of Dhaka and other activists protested a Government order declaring Urdu as the sole national language. Bangladesh at the time was part of Pakistan. The deadly protest provoked widespread unrest, resulting in 1956, in Bengali being granted official status.

“It is a part of our Bengali nationalism to promote and commemorate this Day for the protection of not only our language but all those struggles elsewhere around the world,” Mr. Momen told UN News.

He said International Mother Language Day also celebrates multilingualism worldwide, promoting more tolerance and a “sense of culture of peace and harmony where diversity does not mean harmful for the global citizen but diversity is also a powerful instrument.”

Watch the entire television interview with Mr. Momen on YouTube, or [listen](#) to our highlights on SoundCloud.

As part of the Day’s celebrations, the United Nations Postal Administration will issue 18 World Language stamps, each saying “hello” in English and in a dozen other languages.

A special event will be organized on 21 February in New York, organized by Bangladesh, Guatemala, Mozambique, Nigeria and Papua New Guinea, in collaboration with the United Nations Department for General Assembly and Conference Management (DGACM), the UN Department of Global Communications (DGC), the UN Postal Administration (UNPA) and the New York Office of the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO).

[Spending on health increase faster than rest of global economy, UN health agency says](#)

According to the UN health agency, “countries are spending more on health, but people are still paying too much out of their own pockets”.

The agency’s [new report on global health expenditure](#) launched on Wednesday reveals that “spending on health is outpacing the rest of the global economy, accounting for 10 per cent of global gross domestic product (GDP).

The trend is particularly noticeable in low- and middle-income countries where health spending is growing on average six per cent annually compared with four per cent in high-income countries.

Health spending is made up of government expenditure, out-of-pocket payments and other sources, such as voluntary health insurance and employer-provided

health programmes.

While reliance on out-of-pocket expenses is slowly declining around the world, the report notes that in low- and middle-income countries, domestic public funding for health is increasing and external funding in middle-income countries, declining.

Highlighting the importance of increasing domestic spending for achieving universal health coverage and the health-related [Sustainable Development Goals](#) (SDGs), Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, WHO's Director-General, said that this should be seen as "an investment in poverty reduction, jobs, productivity, inclusive economic growth, and healthier, safer, fairer societies."

Worldwide, governments provide an average of 51 per cent of a country's health spending, while more than 35 per cent of health spending per country comes from out-of-pocket expenses. One consequence of this is 100 million people pushed into extreme poverty each year, the report stresses.

When government spending on health increases, people are less likely to fall into poverty seeking health services. But government spending only reduces inequities in access when allocations are carefully planned to ensure that the entire population can obtain primary health care, the UN agency said.

"All WHO's 194 Member States recognized the importance of primary health care in their adoption of the [Declaration of Astana](#) last October," said Agn s Soucat, WHO's Director for Health Systems, Governance and Financing. "Now they need to act on that declaration and prioritize spending on quality healthcare in the community," she added.

The report also examines the role of external funding. As domestic spending increases, the proportion of funding provided by external aid has dropped to less than one per cent of global health expenditure. Almost half of these external funds are devoted to three diseases – HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis (TB) and malaria.

The report also points to ways that policy makers, health professionals and citizens alike can continue to strengthen health systems.

"Health is a human right and all countries need to prioritize efficient, cost-effective primary health care as the path to achieving universal health coverage and the [Sustainable Development Goals](#)," Dr. Soucat concluded.