



# Civilians Protection by United Nations Peacekeeping Operations: Case Study of MINUSCA from 2014 to 2019

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**How to cite this paper:** Solodi-Ouiabanga, B.I. (2024) Civilians Protection by United Nations Peacekeeping Operations: Case Study of MINUSCA from 2014 to 2019. *Open Access Library Journal*, 11: e11546. <https://doi.org/10.4236/oalib.1111546>

**Received:** April 8, 2024

**Accepted:** June 4, 2024

**Published:** June 7, 2024

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## Abstract

On 10 December 2012, rebels attacked several provincial towns in the CAR and overthrew the Bozizé regime on 24 March 2013. The rebellion's victory quickly turned into atrocities and undermined the civilians protection. With the CAR totally disintegrated, civilians protection requires a UN peacekeeping operation. On 10 April 2014, the Security Council authorized the establishment of MINUSCA, which took up its duties on 15 September 2014. The objective of this study is to analyse the role that the MINUSCA played in protecting civilians in CAR between 2014 and 2019. The study concludes that MINUSCA has made an effective contribution to civilian protection and human rights promotion, despite some difficulties and complexities of the violence in the country between 2014 and 2019. To help MINUSCA protect the civilian population, particular emphasis needs to be placed on the annual operating budget, the humanitarian aid plan, and the number and professionalism of staff and soldiers.

## Subject Areas

International Relations, Politics

## Keywords

Civilians Protection, CAR, Conflict, MINUSCA, Responsibility

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## 1. Introduction

The protection of civilians in armed conflict has been on the agenda of the UN Security Council in its current form since 1999, when the Council adopted its

first thematic resolution 1265, and recognizing the protection of civilians as essential to the maintenance of international peace and security. A key distinguishing element of the protection of civilians mandate in peacekeeping operations is the authorization given to peacekeeping operations to use all necessary means, up to and including deadly force, to protect civilians under threat or imminent threat of physical violence. The protection of civilians refers to efforts that reduce civilian risks from physical violence, secure their rights to access essential services and resources, and contribute to a secure, stable, and just environment for civilians over the long term. According to International Humanitarian Law, civilians may not be the object of attacks and must be spared and protected. The term “civilians” can be defined as persons who are not or are no longer directly participating in hostilities [1].

A principal aim of International Humanitarian Law (IHL) is to ensure that parties to conflict respect and protect civilians. Under IHL, therefore, the main purpose of defining civilians is directly related to the obligation of those engaged in conflict to protect civilians from harm. So, civilians are generally defined as persons who are not members of the armed forces or of organized armed groups [2].

The political and socio-economic history of the Central African Republic since its independence on 13 August 1960 has been punctuated by coups d’Etat, mutinies and rebellions, resulting in institutional and economic instability that is detrimental to its development [3]. For more than three decades, the country has suffered repeated military-political crises and rebellions that have affected not only the socio-economic fabric but also the State’s ability to protect the population and defend its borders with other countries in the sub-region [4]. Political instability and general insecurity in the CAR are part of a pattern of sub-regional conflict that has included Sudan and South Sudan, Chad and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), and bad governance in both public affairs and the private sector, not to mention external interference. The consequences are recurrent politico-military crises, chronic instability of state institutions and a breakdown in national cohesion [5].

On 10 December 2012, rebel groups united in an alliance called “Séléka” attacked several provincial towns in the Central African Republic, committing serious violations against the population and the provisions of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement signed in Libréville, Gabon, in 2008 [6]. In an attempt to put an end to this new crisis, the Economic Community of Central African States once again convened a peace dialogue in Libréville, Gabon, between the Central African Government, rebel groups, the democratic opposition parties and civil society. The dialogue led to the signing of the Libreville Agreements on 11 January 2013. Article 1 of these new peace agreements stipulates that President François Bozizé should remain in power until 2016, and that the ECCAS Peace Consolidation Mission is responsible for facilitating the respect and implementation of these agreements.

Despite the start of the implementation of these agreements, the Séléka rebels

violated them and overthrew Bozizé's regime on 24 March 2013 [7]. Michel Djotodia, the leader of the Séléka, proclaimed himself president and kept Nicolas Tiangaye as prime minister. The rebellion's victory quickly turned into atrocities committed by the Séléka coalition against the civilian population. The Central African Armies Forces were hunted down and murdered, and the civilian population looted, raped and murdered. The transitional authorities proved incapable of restoring peace despite the disbanding of the Séléka, and the country descended into chaos when a self-defense militia (Anti-Balaka, nominally anti-bullet Kalashnikov) formed and attacked the capital city of Bangui on 5 December 2013 in response to Séléka abuses [8].

The risks of destabilization were enormous for the whole of the Central African sub-region. On the evening of the attack on the capital city of Bangui, the UN Security Council adopted Resolution 2127 authorizing the French operation "Sangaris" to support the troops of the African-led Mission Internationale Support of CAR (MISCA). A few months later, the European Union authorized the dispatch of UEFOR-RCA, an European force to provide security in Bangui and the surrounding area. Despite calls for calm and dialogue from the country's political and religious authorities, the situation threatened to degenerate into a religious conflict between Muslims and Christians. Stripped of all authority, President Michel Djotodia and his prime minister were finally forced to resign on 10 January 2014 in Ndjaména, Chad. The National Transitional Council (CNT) elected Catherine Samba-Panza, mayor of Bangui, as transitional president on 20 January 2014. Faced with increasing violence throughout the country, the International Mediator on the crisis in the Central African Republic, President Denis Sassou N'guesso convened a forum in Brazzaville in the Republic of Congo from 21 to 23 July 2014 to try to obtain cessations of hostilities in the Central African Republic. The forum led to the signing of agreements on the cessation of hostilities in the Central African Republic on 23 July 2014. With the CAR totally disintegrated, the search for peace requires a UN peacekeeping operation.

On 10 April 2014, the UN Security Council adopted Resolution 2149 authorizing the UN Secretary-General to send the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA). The transfer of responsibilities from MISCA to MINUSCA took place on 15 September 2014. MINUSCA has a mandate under Chapter VII of the United Nations Charter to protect civilians, facilitate the immediate safe and unhindered delivery of all humanitarian assistance and promote human rights [9].

The aim of this study is to analyse the ability of the United Nations peacekeeping operations to fulfil its mandate, specifically the protection of civilians in the Central African Republic between 2014 and 2019. Our analysis is based on the fact that the primary responsibility for protecting the population lies with States, which must guarantee the security of their respective populations [10]. It is in cases where the State has failed to protect its own population that the responsibility to protect falls to the international community to take decisive action at the appropriate time [11]. Given that the CAR has failed since 2013 to

protect the civilian population, the Security Council has authorized MINUSCA to act under Chapter 7 of the UN Charter to protect the population and reduce threats to international security. This study has chosen the interval between 2014, the date of MINUSCA's deployment in CAR, and 2019, the year in which an important political agreement for peace and reconciliation in the Central African Republic was signed between the Central African government and the 14 armed groups. The study will first analyse the process of deploying MINUSCA; then analyse the role played by MINUSCA between 2014 and 2019 in protecting the civilian population.

## 2. Theoretical Approach to the Study

Faced with the multiplicity of what Kaldor calls "new wars" [12], in poor and totally disintegrated states, the question of how to protect civilians is at the crossroads of the literature on the responsibility, capacity and willingness of the United Nations and other regional organizations to promote military and humanitarian intervention in order to protect civilians, then to provide humanitarian aid, to reduce the suffering of the population and finally to participate in the post-conflict reconstruction of states. The in-depth analysis of all these elements calls on the disciplines of International Politics, International Law and International Humanitarian Law. Although each of these disciplines has made it possible to analyse certain concepts surrounding our research problem from a different angle, the fact remains that the UN peacekeeping process in the CAR is still poorly analyzed.

Armed conflicts are tearing apart vast swathes of the world and record numbers of people are in need of humanitarian assistance and protection [13]. The protection of civilians refers to efforts that reduce civilian risks from physical violence, secure their rights to access essential services and resources, and contribute to a secure, stable, and just environment for civilians over the long-term. According to the law of war, civilians may not be the object of attacks and must be spared and protected. The term "civilians" can be defined as persons who are not or are no longer directly participating in hostilities [14]. In many conflicts, like in CAR from 2014 to 2019, non-state armed groups defied international law by directly targeting civilians and civilian objects, launching indiscriminate attacks or failing to take all feasible precautions to avoid civilian harm. Civilians were killed, tortured, raped, enslaved, abducted, disappeared, used as human shields, forcibly recruited or forcibly displaced, among other violations. In some conflicts, deliberately attacking hospitals, schools and places of worship, removing humanitarian goods from convoys and besieging entire communities were strategic methods of warfare [15].

International human rights law and international humanitarian law share the goal of preserving the dignity and humanity of all. Over the years, the General Assembly, the Commission on Human Rights and, more recently, the Human Rights Council have considered that, in armed conflict, parties to the conflict have legally binding obligations concerning the rights of persons affected by the

conflict. Although different in scope, international human rights law and international humanitarian law offer a series of protections to persons in armed conflict, whether civilians, persons who are no longer participating directly in hostilities or active participants in the conflict. Indeed, as has been recognized by United Nations organs, treaty bodies and human rights special procedures, both bodies of law apply to situations of armed conflict and provide complementary and mutually reinforcing protection [16].

The literature on the responsibility of international organizations to protect civilians has highlighted the increasingly important role of military intervention in combating threats to international security, in providing humanitarian assistance to reduce the suffering of the population and in contributing to the reconstruction of states that have often been totally disintegrated and weakened as a result of conflict. According to the report of the International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty, the responsibility to protect (R2P) lies primarily with sovereign states, and it is only when a state is unable or unwilling to fulfil its responsibility to protect that it becomes the responsibility of the international community to act in its place [17]. The Central African Republic was confronted with these sad realities between 2014 and 2019 [18]. After several years of military-political confrontations, the Central African State had become totally disintegrated and weakened, incapable of ensuring the responsibility to protect its entire population. So the international community, first through regional organizations and then through the United Nations, decided to assume its responsibility to protect civilians.

Peacekeeping has developed over the years as one of the most cogent features of the United Nations (UN), the second universal organisation in the history of international institutions. Peacekeeping operations are those operations conducted by the UN or under the authority of the UN and conducted by regional organizations or by ad hoc coalitions of states that were sanctioned by the UN or authorized by a UN Security Council resolution, with the stated intention to 1) serve as an instrument to facilitate the implementation of peace agreements already in place, 2) support a peace process, or 3) assist conflict prevention and/or peace-building efforts [19]. For Denskus (2007), peacekeeping operations are international efforts to consolidate peace. Peacekeeping has been used as an umbrella term to incorporate other approaches such as peacebuilding, peace-making, peace enforcement and preventive diplomacy to achieve peace [20]. Peacekeeping has been defined by Conteh-Morgan (2004) as the use of military intervention to maintain peace and prevent the escalation of conflict [21]. Diehl (1991) has defined peacekeeping as any international effort with an operational component to promote the resolution of armed conflict or the settlement of long-standing conflicts [22].

This study defines a UN peacekeeping mission in the Central African Republic as a military and humanitarian intervention taken by the UN to reduce the massive civilian suffering caused by militias and rebel groups. The primary and most imposing objective of this humanitarian intervention is to do everything

possible to alleviate the suffering of the civilian population and to protect human rights in the short term; and to tackle the causes of the conflict by facilitating its resolution and the consolidation of peace in the medium and long term [23]. This is why the aim of this study is to determine whether MINUSCA, which is a UN military and humanitarian intervention mission in the Central African Republic, was capable of alleviating the suffering of the civilian population and protecting human rights in the Central African Republic between 2014 and 2019.

The liberal approach to global governance based on the principle of the responsibility to protect is adopted in this research. For Duffield Mark (2010), the liberal approach to global governance can be defined as a matrix encompassing security, democracy and development [24]. In its 2003 report, the United Nations Commission on Human Security stated that new wars are not only recognized as the main threats to international security, but that they are often the result of a failure of democratic governance and socio-economic development. This is why maintaining security in the world's poor and unstable countries must involve promoting democracy and free market economies through peaceful, military and humanitarian interventions [25]. For the author, the liberal approach of global governance has a high probability of being accepted by the local population and of contributing to the strengthening of human security and regional peace, if the intervention is conducted for essentially humanitarian reasons and the interests of certain states involved in the intervention are relatively moderate. This was the case in the Central African Republic, where international intervention through the responsibility to protect was welcome or a necessary possibility to protect the population vulnerable to conflict.

Critics see the liberal approach to global governance as a problematic solution to the new wars in the post-Cold War context. Because it is a Western ideology. These critics have accused the approach of being a political mechanism to maintain global security and development in line with the interests of Western governments, NGOs and private companies. Realists have been among the most vocal opponents of this theory. Thus, many of them have proposed other, different models for solving the problem of new wars. Licklider (1995) proposes that the best way to stabilize a country in the grip of new wars is to help one party to the conflict to maximize its power in order to consolidate its authority through military victory [26]. Herbst Jeffrey (1996) has also confirmed the importance of seeing one of the parties to the conflict maximize its power in order to end the war through victory [27].

In the same vein, Weinstein (2005) suggests that it is more important not to help one of the conflicting parties, nor to interfere in the war. The conflicting parties should be left to fight it out until one party is able to consolidate its power in order to force the others to recognize its authority [28]. The study argues that if Weinstein's approach were applied to conflict resolution in the CAR, the situation would degenerate into total genocide, with incalculable consequences, as happened in Rwanda in 1994. To relativize the criticisms of other realists into perspective, Kimberly (2004) mentions that peacekeeping may be an essential

element in putting an end to the conflict and stabilizing a country that is prey to new wars, but wanting to continue to influence the reconstruction process that allows local authorities to consolidate their internal powers is not normal [29].

For this study, the main causes of three decades of military-political confrontation and rebellions in CAR are bad governance, socio-political exclusion and external interference. The best solutions to these conflicts will, of course, come from the establishment of democratic and inclusive institutions, but also from the dynamic restructuring of the country's defence and security forces to ensure that CAR's borders and airspace are properly secured.

### 3. The Process of Setting up the MINUSCA

MINUSCA is deployed on CAR territory following numerous letters and reports to the UN Security Council, including the letter from the CAR Minister of Foreign Affairs dated 27 January 2014, in which he requested the deployment of a UN peacekeeping operation to stabilize the country and deal with the civilian aspects of the crisis; the letter from the Chairperson of the African Union Commission dated 17 February 2014, proposing a number of measures to step up international action in support of CAR, in particular through the deployment of a UN peacekeeping operation; the report of the UN Secretary-General [30] on the situation in CAR requiring a unified and integrated approach, including through the deployment of a multidimensional UN peacekeeping operation; and the letter dated 8 April 2014 from the Transitional President of CAR, Catherine Samba-Panza, to the Security Council.

Taking note of these correspondences and noting that the situation in the Central African Republic continues to threaten the peace and security of the sub-region and acting under Chapter VII of the Charter of the United Nations, the Security Council, under the terms of its Resolution 2149 (2014), decided to create the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA). The transfer of responsibilities from MISCA to MINUSCA took place on 15 September 2014. The main pillars of MINUSCA's mandate between 2014 and 2019 include the protection of civilians and the promotion of human rights; the creation of security conditions conducive to the delivery of humanitarian assistance.

From the deployment of the operation on September 15, 2014 until September 15, 2019, MINUSCA has never reached 100% of its personnel authorized by United Nations Security Council resolutions. Out of 12,820 military, police and civilian personnel authorized by Security Council Resolution 2149, only 8810 (74.53%) of personnel were deployed towards the end of 2014. Out of 14,577 personnel authorized by Security Council Resolution 2212, only 12,396 (85.12%) were deployed in 2015, only 13,721 (94.12%) deployed in 2016, only 14,012 (96.12%) deployed in 2017, only 14,472 (99.27%) deployed in 2018. In 2019, the Security Council Resolution authorized the deployment of over 15,477 MINUSCA personnel, of which only 14,736 (95; 21%) were deployed in 2019.

From 15 September 2014 to 31 January 2019, MINUSCA suffered 80 casualties. The following section presents the results of our research into the role played by MINUSCA in protecting civilians in the CAR between 2014 and 2019.

Its missions revolve around protecting the population; restoring state authority; reinforcing freedom of movement by escorting vehicles; and engaging in the process of disarmament, demobilisation, reintegration and repatriation of ex-combatants and armed elements (DDRR). The MINUSCA police is responsible for internal security and institutions. The Political Affairs Division is one of the mission's civilian bodies responsible for supporting the political process and providing political and strategic advice in line with MINUSCA's mandate. The human rights component is one of MINUSCA's civilian bodies responsible for promoting and protecting human rights as part of the implementation of MINUSCA's overall mandate. MINUSCA's Civil Affairs team provides support for local initiatives to promote the protection of civilians, political dialogue, social cohesion and the extension of State authority throughout CAR, in support of national and local authorities and in collaboration with the UN Country Team.

#### **4. Civilians Protection by MINUSCA**

MINUSCA was deployed in September 2015 with a mandate to protect civilians from serious abuses and violence by armed militias across the Central African Republic. MINUSCA's first mandate is to protect the civilian population from physical violence by using a robust force and conducting active patrols [31]. Two weeks into its deployment, MINUSCA has been faced with a high level of violence in the capital Bangui and the country's various provinces. Welcoming the Secretary-General's special report on the strategic review of MINUSCA [32] and acting under Chapter VII, the Security Council, in its resolution 2301 (2016), decided that the Mission's mandate should be implemented on the basis of the hierarchy of tasks set out in that resolution, and in stages [33]. More specifically, MINUSCA's existing tasks relating to the protection of civilians and United Nations personnel and property, the promotion and protection of human rights and the facilitation of the delivery of humanitarian aid have been defined as "urgent priority tasks". In an attempt to implement these recommendations to reduce violence, MINUSCA has formulated a UN system-wide civilian protection strategy.

This strategy has focused on developing preventive measures to neutralize threats to civilians. One of the tools used is a Protection of Civilians model developed and used in consultation with the Inter-Agency Protection Group. The model is based on joint analyses to identify communities at risk of physical violence. Faced with a new upsurge in violence from October 2014, MINUSCA intervened militarily to protect the population in general or vulnerable communities, based in particular on the analyses grouped together and regularly updated in the civilian protection model. To facilitate strategies to protect civilians, MINUSCA has continued to organize weekly meetings with the main UN



agencies in CAR, and has deployed soldiers in priority protection zones to protect civilians and act quickly to avert threats [34].

On 10 February 2015, MINUSCA and Operation Sangaris launched an operation in Bria, Haute Kotto, to evict ex-Séléka elements from all the administrative buildings they were occupying. Six of these elements were killed during the operation, several others were wounded and at least 16 others were arrested. The following day, MINUSCA and Operation Sangaris facilitated the deployment of 30 CAR gendarmes to Bria, on the occasion of a visit by the transitional Prime Minister Mahamat Kamoun, who sought to reassure the local population that the authority of the State would be rapidly restored.

From March 2015, MINUSCA deployed joint protection missions to facilitate the launch, at the local level, of civilian protection plans in priority areas. In addition, 52 community liaison assistants have been recruited to help MINUSCA's military components maintain good relations with the population, humanitarian actors and local authorities. Series of training sessions have been organized for MINUSCA civilian and military personnel in Bangui, to help establish standard procedures for rapid response to alerts of violence against civilians. Within the framework of the Joint Operations Centre, MINUSCA military and police personnel have carried out targeted operations to protect civilians by containing the movement of armed elements in Bangui and certain provinces. In June 2015, MINUSCA, in coordination with French forces, carried out two major military operations to resolve conflicts between armed groups [35].

On 20 June, at least six people were killed and one MINUSCA peacekeeper was injured during a MINUSCA operation to free six policemen from the police station in Bangui's 5th district, who were surrounded by an armed self-defence group and civilians. The efforts made by MINUSCA with the French forces of Operation Sangaris made it possible to contain the outbreak of violence, reduce tensions between local self-defence groups, and secure the non-violent release of the six police officers on 24 June 2016. To demonstrate its ability to protect the civilian population, MINUSCA launched "Operation Bekpa", using air assets to stabilize the town of Bambari and gradually restore State authority there [36].

The security situation has deteriorated in Bangui following the murder of a Central African Armed Forces soldier on 4 October 2017 in the predominantly Muslim neighbourhood of PK5. This violence led to the death of many civilians, forcing MINUSCA to free more than 135 Muslims trapped in hostile areas of the capital, to carry out patrols in coordination with the national security forces and to set up fixed posts in strategic locations, which helped to calm the situation. Violent fighting between the coalition of two rebel groups took place at the beginning of February 2017 in the Bambari region. On 11 February, MINUSCA engaged an armed helicopter against a column of around 300 members of the rebel coalition 12 kilometers east of Ippy because, according to MINUSCA, they had crossed the demarcation line it had set. MINUSCA has reinforced its presence in the town of Ippy to prevent any advance towards the town of Bambari in the centre-east of the country.

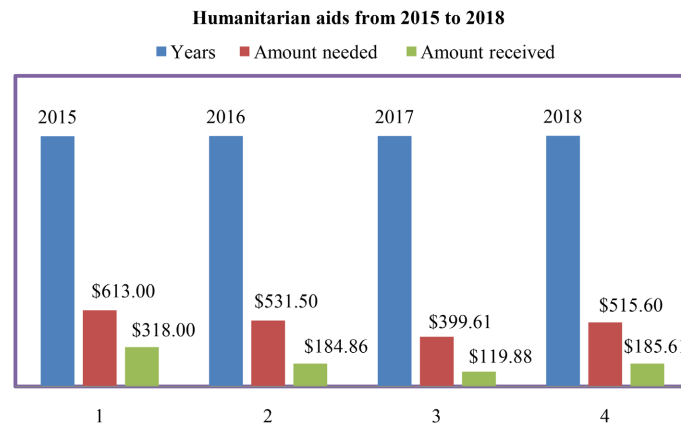
As part of its ongoing efforts to protect the civilian population, MINUSCA has increased the number of assistants responsible for liaising with the local population to 78 at its 38 military bases located in the country's 16 prefectures. These liaison assistants have made an enormous contribution to collaboration between MINUSCA forces, the Central African Armed Forces and the internal security forces, with a view to facilitating rapid intervention in the event of threats against the civilian population. A MINUSCA local alert network of more than 2267 contacts has proved highly effective as an early warning and prevention mechanism and has made it possible to gather information on possible threats to the safety of the civilian population. MINUSCA has continued to step up its efforts until 2019 to protect civilians caught up in violence caused by armed groups. These efforts demonstrate MINUSCA's willingness, determination and capacity to fulfil its mandate to protect civilians.

## 5. Humanitarian Aid Problems between 2014 and 2019

By mid-November 2014, the number of internally displaced people in CAR had reached around 410,000 and more than 420,000 Central Africans had fled to neighbouring countries. An emergency food security assessment carried out by the World Food Programme showed that 28% of the Central African population is affected by food insecurity and that almost 1.2 million Central Africans are in need of humanitarian assistance. By mid-2015, more than 2.7 million people, or half of the total population, were in need of assistance and protection, while there were almost a million internally and externally displaced people [37]. While MINUSCA's presence and escorts have helped to expand the areas open to humanitarian activities, attacks by armed groups have continued to prevent assistance from reaching those most in need. In collaboration with the UN Country Team, MINUSCA has continued to strengthen the coordination mechanisms for international assistance in order to better harmonize the different modes of intervention of international partners and Central African stakeholders [38].

In addition, the level of humanitarian needs has outstripped the resources available, due to a lack of funding. Humanitarian resources are strained to meet humanitarian needs, for example, of the \$613 million urgently needed to cover the needs of 2 million people in 2015, only 52% had been released towards the end of the year [39]. Given the vulnerability of the civilians, non-governmental organizations continued to save lives in an extremely difficult and increasingly dangerous environment, in effect providing basic services in place of the state in some areas. Increased incidents affecting humanitarian workers led to severe access difficulties and the temporary suspension of activities in several parts of the country. Efforts to achieve a sustainable improvement in the humanitarian situation were hampered by the lack of partners and opportunities for development and recovery, due to ongoing insecurity and a lack of national capacity.

Financial difficulties have had a negative impact on the humanitarian aid plan. (See **Figure 1**) For example, in 2016, only 28% of the \$531.5 million needed for



**Figure 1.** Humanitarian aid from 2015 to 2018. Source: Produced by the author using information from the UN Secretary-General's reports on the CAR.

the humanitarian aid plan was raised [40]. This financial shortfall has forced some humanitarian organizations to leave the country, while others have completely reduced their geographical coverage, despite humanitarian needs having increased significantly. In 2017, 399.6 million dollars were deemed necessary for the humanitarian aid plan, towards the end of the year, only 30% of the money had been funded [41]. In 2018, after multiple clashes between armed groups, the number of displaced people reached record levels, up to 616,000 displaced people and 572,062 refugees. By the end of 2018, only 36% of the \$515.6 million humanitarian aid plan had been funded [42].

## 6. Failure to Protect Civilians

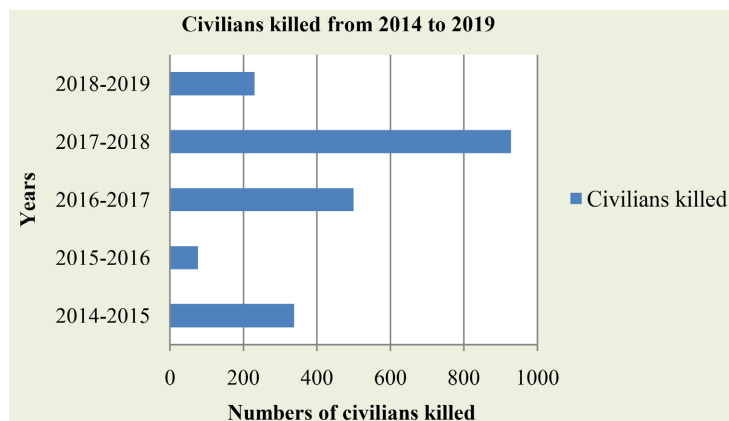
Clashes between armed groups and attacks on civilians meant that CAR continued to suffer one of the worst protection crises in the world. This situation reflects serious structural and institutional shortcomings in terms of protection, in particular the lack of ownership by national authorities. Through its actions, MINUSCA has helped to protect civilians in several parts of the country where it is present, notably through local peace and awareness-raising initiatives in the prefectures, also carrying out robust military actions and arrests where necessary. However, the inadequacy of preventive measures has meant that most of MINUSCA's protection activities have consisted solely of physical protection in some of the country's major towns. The viability of the results of MINUSCA's actions remained fragile between 2014 and 2019, especially as many Central Africans considered the protection of civilians to be MINUSCA's main mission, particularly outside Bangui and in areas where State institutions have little presence. MINUSCA has been publicly criticized for its inability and unwillingness to protect civilians or forcibly disarm armed groups [43]. According to the NGO, International Safety Organisation, at least 15 Central African humanitarian workers were killed towards the end of 2018 [44]. Despite the establishment of MINUSCA in 2014, the civilian population has continued to be killed, raped, pillaged and human rights violated by armed groups, sometimes within a few

meters of MINUSCA bases [45].

During 2016, MINUSCA personnel were the subject of allegations of serious misconduct, including allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse, including of children, and excessive use of force which, on 10 June 2016, resulted in the deaths of two civilians. Reacting immediately to this incident, MINUSCA leadership repatriated the peacekeepers involved in the case, without prejudice to investigations and prosecutions. In his report on the CAR to the UN Security Council, UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said: “I am dismayed to note that, five years after the start of the crisis in the CAR, inter-communal violence continues to exact a heavy toll on civilians throughout the country” [46]. The figure below shows part of the trend in the number of civilians killed from 2014, the year in which MINUSCA took up its duties, to early 2019, the year in which a major political agreement for peace and reconciliation in CAR was signed between the Government and the 14 armed groups. (See **Figure 2**)

The table above shows that many civilians were killed between 2017 and 2018, since MINUSCA took office. Despite the fact that MINUSCA accompanied the referendum, legislative and presidential election process that led to the election of President Faustin Archange Touadéra, putting an end to the transition period, the country began to slide back into violence towards the end of 2016, a few months after the new president was inaugurated. Why have the years 2016 to 2018 been more deadly since MINUSCA took office? To answer this question, the study will analyse the financial aspects, the number of soldiers and external interference.

After analyzing MINUSCA’s various operating budgets, the study found that between 2017 and 2018, MINUSCA’s annual operating budget fell from \$976,272 million for the previous year to \$882,800 million for the years 2017 to 2018. Despite the fact that MINUSCA’s annual operating budget has been slightly reduced, outstanding contributions totaled more than \$1826.9 million towards the beginning of 2019. While the number of uniformed and civilian personnel has increased steadily from around 8810 in 2014 to more than 14,472



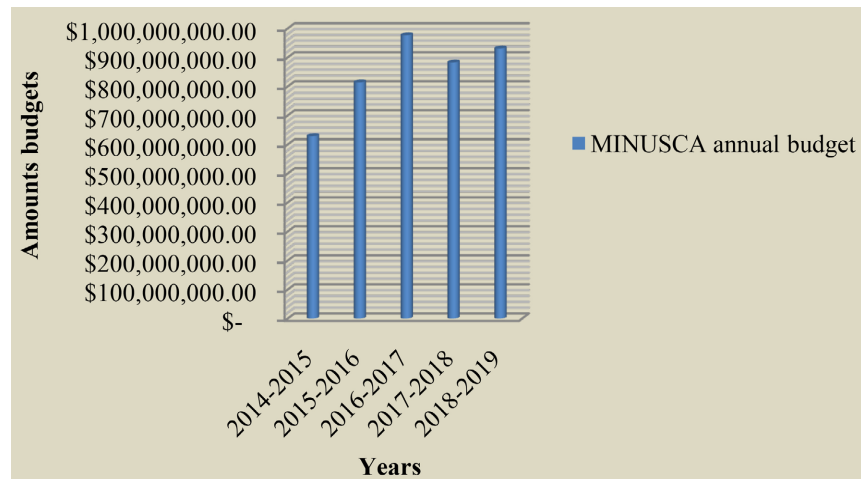
**Figure 2.** Number of civilians killed from 2014 to 2019. Source: Produced by the author from Amnesty International reports and national newspapers from 2014 to 2018.

at the start of 2019. Figure One shows that 2017 and 2018 were the deadliest years since the establishment of MINUSCA. The study also notes that the same period saw a reduction in MINUSCA's annual operating budget. The study concludes that the reduction in MINUSCA's annual operating budget, combined with the failure of contributing states to pay over 1826.9 million dollars, has certainly had a negative impact on MINUSCA's ability to protect the civilian population during the upsurge in violence between 2017 and 2018. (Figure 3)

The other negative impact on MINUSCA's ability to protect the civilian population may be the problem of staff numbers and deployment. In the first half of 2019, MINUSCA had 1507 uniformed and civilian personnel out of the 1554 authorized by United Nations Security Council Resolution 2448 of 15 November 2018. At the beginning of 2019, more than 247 MINUSCA personnel had not been deployed to the field. From 2014 to 2019, the total number of MINUSCA personnel authorized by the UN Security Council has never been deployed 100% on the ground. At the beginning of 2019, MINUSCA's military air assets consisted mainly of three helicopters, including an attack helicopter unit [47].

All these shortcomings have certainly made it extremely difficult for MINUSCA to adequately protect the civilian population and human rights, given the size of the CAR's territory (630,000 km<sup>2</sup>) and the complexity of the crisis, where it is sometimes difficult to distinguish between the civilian population and armed groups. The study also noted the lack of professionalism among some MINUSCA personnel, who have no experience in UN peacekeeping operations. For this reason, the UN Secretary-General's special report on the strategic review of MINUSCA recommended strengthening the command and control structures of the Task Force, improving the performance of patrols, and addressing the resource and logistical shortcomings that hamper the functioning of MINUSCA [48].

From 2014 to 2019, the UN Security Council adopted 6 major resolutions on the situation in the Central African Republic. These were resolution 2149 of 10 April 2014, resolution 2217 of 28 April 2015, resolution 2301 of 26 July 2016, resolution 2387 of 15 September 2017, resolution 2448 of 13 December 2018, and resolution 2499 of 15 November 2019. The main thrust of these resolutions is that MINUSCA must use all necessary means to fulfil its mandate within the limits of its capabilities and areas of deployment. And that MINUSCA's mandate includes priority tasks such as the protection of the civilian population under threat of physical violence, averting and responding effectively to any serious threat to the civilian population and, in this respect, improving early warning systems, while maintaining preventive deployment and a mobile, flexible and robust presence, not forgetting the organisation of active patrols, particularly in high-risk areas. Probably the most crucial problem is MINUSCA's rapid response capacity, which remained relatively weak during the study period, mainly due to reduced mobility as a result of the poor state of the road infrastructure.



**Figure 3.** MINUSCA annual budget from 2014 to 2019. Source: Produced by the author from MINUSCA annual budget reports.

There are, however, contradictions of meaning in these different resolutions, because authorizing MINUSCA to use all its necessary means, but only within the limits of its capacities and areas of deployment, simply means that, faced with a situation of serious violence against the civilian population, MINUSCA can put forward pretexts, such as that it does not have the military or logistical capacity to come to the aid of civilians. MINUSCA was set up on the principle of Chapter VII of the United Nations Charter, based on the use of force to restore peace and international security. In response to this concern, Lamine (2017) tells us that any United Nations mission in a country obeys a cardinal principle, namely not to fight, but to interpose between the opposing forces and protect civilians; in addition to helping the country to restructure [49]. This is its weakness, especially when it is sent to countries in the throes of complex civil wars with unclear motives, as in CAR, and so-called asymmetric wars, where arms bound for the country are placed under embargo, including for the national defence forces, unless an exception is made.

## 7. Conclusions

The political and socio-economic history of the Central African Republic since its independence on 13 August 1960 has been punctuated by coups d'Etat, mutinies and rebellions. On 10 December 2012, rebels belonging to the Séléka attacked several provincial towns in the CAR. In an attempt to put an end to this new crisis, ECCAS again convened a peace dialogue in Libreville, Gabon, between the Central African government, rebel groups, the democratic opposition and civil society, which led to the signing of the Libreville Agreements on 11 January 2013. Despite the start of the implementation of these agreements, the rebels violated them and overthrew the Bozizé regime on 24 March 2013. The rebellion's victory quickly gave way to atrocities committed by the Séléka coalition against the civilian population. The transitional authorities proved incapable of restoring peace despite the dissolution of the Séléka, and the country des-

cended into chaos when a self-defence militia was formed. The risks of destabilization loomed large over the entire Central African sub-region.

With the CAR totally disintegrated, the search for peace requires a UN operation. On 10 April 2014, the UN Security Council adopted Resolution 2149 authorizing the establishment of MINUSCA. On 15 September 2014, MINUSCA began its mission under Chapter VII of the UN Charter to protect civilians, facilitate humanitarian assistance and promote the protection of human rights. The objective of this study was to analyse the capacity of the United Nations peacekeeping mission through MINUSCA to fulfil its mandate in CAR, with regard to the protection of civilians between 2014 and 2019. The study considers that the primary responsibility for protecting the population lies with States. Since the Central African State has failed since 2013 to protect the civilian population, the Security Council has authorized MINUSCA to act under Chapter 7 of the UN Charter to protect the population and reduce threats to international security.

The study concludes that the United Nations peacekeeping mission in CAR since 2014 has contributed effectively to the protection of the civilian population and the promotion of human rights, despite some difficulties and the complexity of the violence in the country between 2014 and 2019. To protect the civilian population, MINUSCA forces were obliged to launch military operations with attacks against rebel groups. These included the operations to liberate the town of Bria in 2016 and Operation Békpa in Bambari. The commitment and determination of certain MINUSCA forces have facilitated the delivery of humanitarian aid to meet the basic needs of the population affected by asymmetric violence, such as the liberation of the Bangui-Cameroon corridor. Up to 2023, the commitment and determination of certain MINUSCA forces have cost the lives of more than 164 peacekeepers in the Central African Republic, making MINUSCA one of the UN missions where the death rate among peacekeepers is too high.

Despite the UN's commitment and determination to resolve the violence in CAR, financial shortfalls have compromised MINUSCA's ability to protect the civilian population, promote human rights and facilitate effective humanitarian assistance to the civilian population. For example, between 2017 and 2018, the reduction in MINUSCA's annual operating budget combined with the non-acquittal by contributing States of 1826.9 million dollars had a negative impact on the mobility capacity of MINUSCA forces to protect the civilian population during clashes, which is why this is the period during which a high number (over 950) of people have been killed in the Central African Republic since MINUSCA was established in 2014. As far as humanitarian aid is concerned, the partners have only contributed between 30% and 52% per year to facilitate the implementation of the humanitarian aid plan.

The other negative impact on MINUSCA's ability to protect the civilian population may be linked to the number of personnel and their deployment. From 2014 to 2019, the total number of MINUSCA personnel authorized by the UN Security Council has never been deployed at 100% on the ground. At the start of

2019, MINUSCA's military air assets consisted of just three helicopters, including one attack helicopter unit, for a territory of 623,000 km<sup>2</sup>. The study also noted the lack of professionalism among some MINUSCA personnel, who have no experience in UN peacekeeping operations. There are, however, contradictions of meaning in various Security Council resolutions, because authorizing MINUSCA to use all its necessary means, but only within the limits of its capacities and its areas of deployment, simply means that, faced with a situation of serious violence against the civilian population, MINUSCA can put forward pretexts, that it does not have the military or logistical capacity to come to the aid of civilians.

To help MINUSCA protect the civilian population, promote human rights and deliver humanitarian aid, the study makes the following recommendations: All peace-loving partners in the Central African Republic must make an effort to fund 100% of MINUSCA's annual operating budget in order to avoid the disruption of peace missions in the country; All partners concerned by the suffering of the vulnerable population in the Central African Republic must mobilize to fund 100% of the necessary annual budget for the humanitarian aid plan; All the countries contributing to the peacekeeping forces in the Central African Republic must make an effort to ensure that MINUSCA reaches the strength and capacity authorized by the Security Council, and above all ensure the competence and professionalism of the soldiers made available to MINUSCA. The Security Council must clarify its expectations regarding the implementation of peacekeeping mandates to protect civilians, on the principles of UN operations who still retain the consent of Host States, impartiality and minimal and proportionate use of force/defence of self and mission, but the UN peacekeeping has been pushed to go beyond to legitimacy, credibility, local ownership.

### Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

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## **Appendix: Contents of 6 Major Resolutions on the CAR between 2014 and 2019**

Resolution 2149 of April 10, 2014, authorized the deployment of a United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Mission to Stabilize the situation of armed conflict in the CAR. MINUSCA's initial strength was set at 11,820 personnel and its mandate was to: protect civilians; support the implementation of the transition, including action to extend State authority and maintain territorial integrity; facilitate the immediate, safe and unhindered delivery of all humanitarian aid; protect United Nations personnel and property; promote and protect human rights; promote national and international justice and the rule of law; and disarm, demobilize, reintegrate and repatriate ex-combatants. The same resolution authorized MINUSCA to use all necessary means to fulfill its mandate within the limits of its capabilities and these areas of deployment (S/RES/2149, 2014).

Resolution 2217 of November 28, 2015, set MINUSCA's strength at 14577 personnel and its mandate was to: protect civilians; support the implementation of the transition; facilitate the immediate, safe and unhindered delivery of all humanitarian aid; protect United Nations personnel and property; promote and protect human rights; take temporary emergency measures; support the Special Criminal Court; and disarm, demobilize, reintegrate and repatriate ex-combatants. The same resolution authorized MINUSCA to use all necessary means to fulfill its mandate within the limits of its capabilities and these areas of deployment (S/RES/2217, 2015).

Resolution 2301 of July 26, 2016, renewed MINUSCA's mandate to protect civilians; support the transition process; facilitate the delivery of humanitarian aid; protect United Nations personnel and property; promote and protect human rights; and take temporary emergency measures. The same resolution authorized MINUSCA to use all necessary means to fulfill its mandate within the limits of its capabilities and these areas of deployment (S/RES/2301, 2016).

Resolution 2387 of November 15, 2017, set MINUSCA's strength at 15477 personnel and its mandate was to: protect civilians; provide good offices and support for the peace process, including national reconciliation, social cohesion and transitional justice; promote immediate, safe and unhindered delivery of all humanitarian assistance; protect United Nations personnel and property; support efforts to extend state authority and maintain territorial integrity; promote and protect human rights; and disarm, demobilize, reintegrate and repatriate ex-combatants. The same resolution authorized MINUSCA to use all necessary means to fulfill its mandate within the limits of its capabilities and areas of deployment (S/RES/2387, 2017).

Resolution 2448 of December 13, 2018, renewed MINUSCA's mandate to protect civilians; support the transition process; facilitate the delivery of humanitarian aid; protect United Nations personnel and property; promote and protect human rights; and take temporary emergency measures. The same resolution authorized MINUSCA to use all necessary means to fulfill its mandate

within the limits of its capabilities and these areas of deployment (S/RES/2448, 2018).

Resolution 2499 of November 15, 2019, renewed MINUSCA's mandate to protect civilians; support the transition process; facilitate the delivery of humanitarian aid; protect United Nations personnel and property; promote and protect human rights; and take temporary emergency measures. The same resolution authorized MINUSCA to use all necessary means to carry out its mandate within the limits of its capabilities and areas of deployment (S/RES/2499, 2019).