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May 6, 2016

Dr. Admore Kambudzi  
Acting Director of the Peace and Security Department (PSD)  
African Union Commission  
Addis Ababa  
Ethiopia

Dear Dr. Kambudzi,

### RE: Executions Committed by African Union Peacekeepers in the Central African Republic

First all of all, please accept my greetings from Human Rights Watch.

I am writing to share findings of research conducted by Human Rights Watch into the alleged murder of 17 people, including women and children, by peacekeepers from the Republic of Congo serving in the Africa-led International Support Mission to the Central African Republic (MISCA) between December 2013 and September 2015. These abuses are of an extremely serious nature and we believe they require your urgent attention.

The deliberate killing of civilians and detainees by Congolese MISCA peacekeepers documented by Human Rights Watch occurred in at least three locations. You will find further details in an attachment to this letter, but in summary the incidents are as follows:

1. The summary execution of at least 12 individuals in Boali on March 24-25, 2014, including women and children, detained by Congolese peacekeepers. According to witnesses, the bodies were secretly buried at night in a mass grave near the location of the MISCA Boali base. On February 16, 2016, approximately one year after the departure of Congolese troops from the Boali base, a local non-governmental organization exhumed the grave where witnesses believed the victims had been buried. The exhumation revealed 12 bodies. The bodies were in an advanced state of decomposition and there was no forensic expert present, but those present at the exhumation said that based on the clothing found on the bodies, they believed two were women and one was a child. At the time of

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this incident, Captain Abena was in charge of Congolese troops at Boali.

2. The torturing to death of two anti-balaka leaders by Congolese peacekeepers on December 22, 2013 in Bossangoa. At the time Captain Mokongo was in charge assisted by Captain Wilson Aboni.
3. The public execution of two suspected anti-balaka militia in Mambéré on February 26, 2014 witnessed by scores of people.

Many MISCA peacekeepers demonstrated bravery and dedication to protecting civilians, even under tremendous pressure. I am confident that you share our view that there can be no excuse for African Union (AU) peacekeepers carrying out serious human rights abuses.

Human Rights Watch first published its findings on the abuses by Congolese MISCA peacekeepers on June 2, 2014. A day later, on June 3, 2014, the AU issued a [press release](#) in which it stated it had initiated an investigation into the allegations raised by Human Rights Watch. The statement asserted that based on the findings of the investigation, “the AU will take the required action in accordance with the rules governing the functioning of MISCA.”

In July 2014, we followed-up with the then MISCA Force Commander, General Jean-Marie Michel Mokoko, who recalled to Bangui the two Congolese captains in charge of MISCA troops in Bossangoa and Boali and told us that he ordered investigations. On July 4, 2014, we wrote privately to Mr. El Ghassim Wane, the then Director of the Peace and Security Department (PSD), urging the AU to take steps to ensure there was a full investigation into the events. We received no response.

Also in July 2014, we wrote to the RoC foreign minister, Basile Ikouébé, urging for credible investigation into crimes committed by Congolese MISCA peacekeepers and met with the RoC ambassador to the United Nations in New York to share our research findings and urge for action.

Human Rights Watch repeatedly met with MISCA and AU officials in Bangui urging them to ensure credible investigations into the serious abuses we had documented. In March 2015, we were told a report had been drafted, but were not informed about its contents or conclusions. After the UN took over peacekeeping responsibilities in CAR from MISCA in September 2015, its human rights officers conducted an investigation. On May 30, 2015, the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) published its report into the killings in Boali and Bossangoa, confirming our findings.

We understand that at least four *notes verbales* were sent by the UN to the RoC government requesting follow-up on the alleged serious crimes committed by Congolese MISCA peacekeepers in the Central African Republic. While some Congolese peacekeepers were repatriated as a result, we are not aware of any tangible progress in holding any perpetrators to account for the crimes described above.

While it is the responsibility of the RoC government to bring to justice the perpetrators of these crimes, it is critical that the AU also takes action to urge for accountability. The lack of progress on holding to account the Congolese MISCA soldiers responsible for the alleged crimes, is not only an injustice, but also undermines the reputation of the AU and the commendable efforts by your institution to help bring peace to CAR.

We believe the recent exhumation of the mass grave at Boali provides a turning point on the serious human rights abuse committed by AU peacekeepers in CAR and provides a new opportunity to ensure justice for the victims.

We are therefore writing to encourage you to take the following measures:

- To urgently raise these cases at the highest level with the RoC government in order to ensure accountability for the crimes.
- To provide support, if needed, to the RoC government to carry out credible and transparent judicial proceedings.
- To launch a credible internal inquiry into how the AU responded to information about the MISCA human rights abuses including what actions were taken to investigate, the outcome of such investigations and what steps were taken to ensure accountability. Such an internal investigation could be useful to identify and adjust internal procedures as may be required to respond to such allegations in the future. We believe the results of such an inquiry should be made public in the interest of transparency and to demonstrate the commitment of AU to tackling human rights abuses by its peacekeepers.
- Coordinate your investigations with Central African authorities and MINUSCA, and share with them relevant information on progress.

As you are aware, the Central African Republic is coming out of a prolonged period of turmoil. Its citizens desperately want to see the return of law and order and justice for all victims, including those who suffered at the hands of peacekeepers. We hope you will take action on this as a matter of priority and we are ready to cooperate in any way we can.

We look forward to a response from you to our concerns. As I plan to be in Addis Ababa for the PSC open session on 10 May, I would also welcome the opportunity to meet with you or any relevant officials to further discuss our research findings. I am

available to meet in the afternoons of May 9 or May 10. Please feel free to contact me at [bekeled@hrw.org](mailto:bekeled@hrw.org) for any follow-up.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Daniel Bekele". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'D' and 'B'.

Daniel Bekele  
Africa Director

## Annex

### **Details on Cases of Human Rights Abuses by Republic of Congo MISCA Peacekeepers**

#### **Boali 2014**

On March 24, 2014, approximately 20 MISCA soldiers from the Republic of Congo took a group of at least 12 civilians, including four women, from the home of a local anti-balaka militia leader in Boali, a town 80 kilometers north of the capital, Bangui. The MISCA peacekeepers detained the men and women after the anti-balaka killed one Congolese peacekeeper and wounded four others earlier the same day. The detainees were taken to the MISCA military base in Boali.

According to witnesses interviewed by Human Rights Watch, tensions flared in Boali on March 24, 2014 after a local anti-balaka leader, the self-declared “General” Maurice Konoumo, who had been drinking heavily, fired two rounds into the air from an AK-47 automatic rifle. Congolese MISCA soldiers quickly responded to investigate the shots. When it became apparent that the gunfire had come from the anti-balaka leader’s house, the peacekeepers tried to confiscate the automatic weapon, but Konoumo refused to hand it over. A violent argument broke out, partly fuelled by the general’s drunken state and his limited ability to communicate in French. As the argument became more heated, the anti-balaka leader followed the Congolese MISCA troops to their base, where he continued to argue with the commander. Konoumo then ordered anti-balaka fighters to collect their weapons, erect barricades, and “go to war” against the MISCA soldiers.

A respected local Catholic priest, Father Xavier-Arnaud Fagba, was called in to mediate. The Catholic priest immediately noticed that Konoumo was very drunk and told him that he should calm down. The general, who appeared to understand, returned home at about 5 p.m.

Shortly after the general returned home, a group of anti-balaka fighters threw a grenade at the Congolese MISCA troops’ vehicle in the central market area of Boali and opened fire on them with automatic weapons. The attack killed one MISCA soldier and wounded at least four others.

Following the lethal ambush, a group of about 20 Congolese MISCA soldiers went to Mokono’s house and surrounded it. According to one witness, a boy who saw the Congolese MISCA troops attempted to run ahead to warn the general, but the MISCA soldiers ordered him to stop and sit down. When he refused their order, they shot him dead.

When they reached Konoumo’s house, MISCA soldiers detained at least 11 people they found there including four women and a child. Witnesses also said that MISCA soldiers detained at least seven more people along the main road, probably because

they were wearing traditional *gris-gris* amulets associated with the anti-balaka militia.

The detainees were taken to the MISCA base in Boali where, according to witnesses, they were taken to a villa where the Congolese MISCA commander was housed. MISCA soldiers ordered the civilians who lived at the base to go into their homes, something they had never requested before. Later that night, witnesses reported hearing a volley of gunshots at the base, followed about an hour later by another round of gunfire. The following day, traces of blood were evident in various locations at the base, including at the water pump where MISCA soldiers had cleaned their vehicles. An area near villa 8, also called *Usine Boali 3*, was declared off-limits by the MISCA soldiers who told people to avoid the area, not to cultivate there or to cut the grass. MISCA soldiers told local people the area had been mined.

On March 25, MISCA issued a [press release](#) condemning the murder of the peacekeeper in Boali who they said was killed when the vehicle he was traveling in was attacked by a group of armed men. MISCA said its troops had returned fire killing 12 assailants who they later identified as anti-balaka. MISCA later said the press release did not reflect what had really happened and that it had been released too quickly.

On February 16, 2016 a local non-governmental organization exhumed the grave in the location matching the testimony from witnesses. The exhumation revealed 12 skulls and anti-balaka amulets which matched the individuals who had gone missing in 2014. The bodies were in an advanced state of decomposition and there was no forensic expert present, but those present at the exhumation said that based on the clothing found on the bodies, they believed at least two were women and one was a child.

This recent exhumation provides an important new opening into this case requiring urgent judicial follow-up by the Republic of Congo.

### **Bossangoa 2013**

On December 22, 2013, MISCA peacekeepers from the Republic of Congo tortured to death two anti-balaka leaders following the brutal lynching of a Congolese MISCA soldier the same day. The commander of the MISCA troops in Bossangoa ordered a raid on December 22 on a known anti-balaka base in the town. Three anti-balaka leaders were captured and their weapons were confiscated. Following the raid, residents in Bossangoa protested, calling for the release of the anti-balaka leaders.

As a precautionary measure MISCA troops were ordered to return to their base. One MISCA officer was surrounded by a hostile crowd who wrested his gun from him, shot him dead, and then mutilated his body with machete blows.

When the mutilated body arrived at the base, MISCA troops sought revenge on the three captured anti-balaka leaders already in the camp. At the time, many local UN staff members were staying at the MISCA base for their safety, following fierce clashes between Seleka and anti-balaka fighters in the town in early December. Witnesses told Human Rights Watch that the MISCA soldiers ordered all of the humanitarian workers to hand over their cell phones and locked the staff in a room. The MISCA soldiers then ordered the local police officers to also hand over their weapons, take off their uniforms, and hand over their cell phones, and ordered them to stay in a separate room.

One of the anti-balaka leaders was freed by French peacekeepers, but according to witnesses the other two anti-balaka leaders were tied up arbatasher style, with their arms and legs bound tightly behind their backs.

Witnesses described how they overheard the MISCA soldiers torturing the two anti-balaka leaders throughout the night. The soldiers dripped melting, burning plastic on the bodies of the detained men, who screamed out in pain and begged them to stop. Following hours of torture, the men died from the wounds. Their burned, mutilated bodies were found the next day and viewed by many witnesses, including Catholic Church officials and humanitarians, who confirmed the two men suffered extensive burns.

Human Rights Watch met with Captain Mokongo on March 14, 2014. He said the two anti-balaka fighters were injured when they tried to attack the local hospital. He added that MISCA troops rebuffed the anti-balaka and took them to the hospital, where they later died of their wounds. Captain Mokongo denied allegations that his men had tortured the two anti-balaka fighters to death.

Captain Mokongo's version of events is contradicted by the evidence collected by Human Rights Watch, the accounts of the witnesses, and the version of events provided by humanitarian workers in Bossangoa.

### **Mambéré 2014**

On February 26, 2014 Congolese MISCA peacekeepers in Mambéré publicly killed two anti-balaka fighters at the town's main crossroad. Witnesses interviewed by Human Rights Watch said that they were told by Congolese peacekeepers that the two men had been captured the day before in Bambio village.

The peacekeepers encouraged people to come see the public execution yelling, "These are anti-balaka, we will kill them." When a crowd had gathered, the peacekeepers forced the two men out of their truck, made them lay down on the ground, and then shot them in the head and chest. After the execution, the peacekeepers forced local residents to bury the bodies in the cemetery behind the gendarmerie.