2. Peace negotiations in Africa

- Over the course of 2017, 20 peace negotiations and processes were identified on the African continent, constituting almost half (46%) of the 43 peace processes taking place in the world in 2017.
- Twelve of the 20 peace processes occurred in contexts of armed conflict, while the other eight processes took place in scenarios of socio-political crisis.
- In many cases (nine), the only protagonists of negotiations were the governments and insurgent groups of the respective countries.
- Of the 20 analysed processes, there were three negotiation scenarios on the African continent that didn’t involve third parties; the two processes taking place in Nigeria (Niger Delta and Boko Haram) and the one in the Republic of the Congo.
- Of the 17 cases of peace negotiations and processes identified on the African continent in which third parties were involved, the AU was present on its own (in four cases), in conjunction with the UN (in seven cases) or together with regional organisations.
- The release or exchange of prisoners in order to build trust between the parties and contribute positively to the ongoing process was a factor present in several African scenarios, such as Ethiopia (Ogaden), Mali (north), Mozambique, Nigeria (Boko Haram), Republic of the Congo and Sudan (South Kordofan and Blue Nile).
- The political and administrative status of certain territories was one of the key elements in several processes, such as Ethiopia (Ogaden), Mali (north), the dispute between Morocco and Western Sahara, Nigeria (Niger Delta), Senegal (Casamance), Sudan (Darfur), Sudan (South Kordofan and Blue Nile).
- It’s worth highlighting the positive progress made in peace negotiations and in reaching agreements in Gambia, Ethiopia (Ogaden), Mozambique, Republic of the Congo, and between Sudan and South Sudan.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Peace processes and negotiations</th>
<th>Negotiating actors</th>
<th>Third parties</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Burundi</td>
<td>Government, political and social opposition grouped in the Conseil National pour le respect de l’Accord d’Arusha pour la Paix et la Réconciliation au Burundi et la Restauration d’un État de Droit (CNARED)</td>
<td>Yoweri Museveni and Benjamin Mkapa (East African Community, EAC); Jamal Benomar, replaced by Michel Kafando (UN)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethiopia (Ogaden)</td>
<td>Government, ONLF military political movement</td>
<td>Mediation of Kenya, facilitation of UAE and Sweden</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gambia</td>
<td>President Adama Barrow, former president Yahya Jammeh</td>
<td>ECOWAS, AU, UN</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Libya</td>
<td>Presidential Council and Government of National Agreement (GAN), House of Representatives (CDR), National General Congress (CGN)</td>
<td>UN, Arab League, AU, EU (Quartet); Algeria, Egypt, Tunisia, Morocco, UAE, Netherlands, Italy, France</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mali (north)</td>
<td>Government, Coordinator of Azawad Movements (CMA) – MNLA, MAA and HCUA–, Platform –GATIA, CMFPR, CPA, faction of the MAA–</td>
<td>Algeria, France, ECDWAS, AU, UN, EU, Mauritania, Niger</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Morocco – Western Sahara</td>
<td>Morocco, Popular Front for the Liberation of Sagua el-Hamra and River of Gold (POLISARIO)</td>
<td>UN, Algeria and Mauritania, Group of Friends of the Sahara (France, USA, Spain, United Kingdom and Russia)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mozambique</td>
<td>Government, the RENAMO opposition group</td>
<td>National mediation team, Botswana, Tanzania, South Africa, United Kingdom, EU, Community of Sant Egidio (Vatican), Catholic Church</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nigeria (Niger Delta)</td>
<td>Government, Pan-Niger Delta Forum (PANDEF), NIGER Delta Consultative Assembly, (NIDCA), Pan Niger Delta Peoples’ Congress (PNDPC), Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND)</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This chapter studies the main peace processes and negotiations in Africa during 2017. Firstly, the main characteristics and general trends on the negotiation processes in the region are presented. Secondly, the evolution of each different context during the year is analysed, including references to the gender perspective in some cases.

Table 2.1. Summary of peace processes and negotiations in Africa in 2017
2.1 Negotiations in 2017: regional trends

Over the course of 2017, 20 peace negotiations and processes were identified on the African continent, constituting almost half (46%) of the 43 peace processes taking place in the world in 2017. Twelve of the 20 peace processes occurred in contexts of armed conflict, while the other eight processes took place in scenarios of socio-political crisis. The analysis of the different contexts reveals certain trends concerning peace negotiations and process on the African continent.

As regards the actors involved in negotiations, the analysis of the scenarios shows that in many cases (nine), the only protagonists of negotiations were the governments and insurgent groups of the respective countries. This was the case of contexts such as that of Ogaden (between the Ethiopian government and the ONLF), Mozambique (between the government led by the Mozambique Liberation Front or FRELIMO and the Mozambican National Resistance or RENAMO, a political-military movement), the Central African Republic (between the government and the members of the former Seleka coalition and anti-Balaka militias), Nigeria (humanitarian contacts between the government and factions of Boko Haram), the Democratic Republic of Congo (between the government and the political-military movement of Pastor Ntoumi), the Sudanese region of Casamance (between the government and the Movement of Democratic Forces of Casamance and its factions), and South Sudan (between the government and factions of the Sudan People’s Liberation Movement-In-Opposition). In other scenarios, greater diversity...
Peace negotiations in Africa

1. The Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic (SADR) has not been internationally recognised but at the same time the Western Sahara is still considered by the UN as a territory pending decolonisation. Morocco’s claim on the territory is not recognised by international law or by any UN resolution.

In a large number of cases, the only protagonists of negotiations were the governments and insurgent groups of the respective countries.

As regards the third parties involved in peace negotiations and processes, it’s worth pointing out that although there are many cases in which the actors carrying out mediation and facilitation tasks make their involvement publicly known, in other contexts these tasks are carried out discretely and privately. Of the 20 analysed peace processes, there are three negotiation scenarios on the African continent in which no third parties are involved. This is the case of the two negotiation processes that the Nigerian government is carrying out, on the one hand in the conflict of the Niger Delta with the various political-military actors and, on the other hand, in the conflict in the north of the country and the regions bordering on Cameroon, Niger and Chad with the Boko Haram jihadist insurgency, along with the contacts that the Congolese government of Denis Sassou-Nguesso has had with the envoys of Pastor Ntoumi. Out of the remaining 17 cases...
it’s important to highlight the support role played by the UN in the negotiation processes of 10 cases. In some cases the UN has been involved as a third party through special envoys (for example, the conflicts in Burundi, between Morocco and Western Sahara or in Libya), as part of platforms or groups of actors who aim to act as facilitators of dialogue (such as in the case of the CAR, where it forms part of the International Support Group and strengthens the political dialogue carried out by the government, and in partnership with the African Initiative for Peace and Reconciliation) or through missions and the special representatives of the UN Secretary-General on the ground, such as in the CAR, the DRC, Mali and Sudan (Darfur).

Another important third-party role is the one played by the AU in Africa within the framework of the African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA), whether on its own or in partnership with other regional and international organisations, such as the UN. Of the 17 cases of peace negotiations and processes identified on the African continent in which third parties are involved, in 11 cases the AU was present on its own (in four cases), in conjunction with the UN (in seven cases) or together with regional organisations involved in facilitating contacts between the actors in conflict. These include the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) in three cases (Gambia, Mali and Togo); the East African Community (EAC), in the case of Burundi; the Economic Community of Central African States (ECEAC, according to its French initials), in the case of CAR; the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) in three cases (Somalia, South Sudan and the negotiations between Sudan and South Sudan); and, last of all, the International Conference of the Great Lakes Region (CIRGL, according to its French initials) and the International Organisation of La Francophonie (OIF, according to its French initials), in the DRC. It should also be pointed out that the EU also fulfilled functions as a third party on the African continent, including in the cases of Libya, Mali (north), Mozambique, the CAR, the DRC and Sudan-South Sudan. Last of all, we should also underline the good offices carried out by religious organisations in five contexts: the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation and the Community of Sant’Egidio (Vatican) in the CAR; the national Catholic Church and the Community of Sant’Egidio in Mozambique; the Community of Sant’Egidio in the Senegalese region of Casamance; the Congolese National Episcopal Conference (CENCO) in the DRC; and the Islamic High Council in Mali.

In most of the cases of peace negotiations and processes on the African continent analysed in 2017, states also participated as mediators or facilitators of the contacts and dialogue between the disputing parties. These states are often regional powers or states with a reputation on the continent for peacebuilding and the promotion of peace. Among these countries, it’s worth highlighting, for example, the role played by Algeria in scenarios such as the conflict between Morocco and Western Sahara, in Libya, in Mali (north) or in South Sudan; the one played by Ghana in the crisis between the government and political opposition in Togo; the one played by Kenya, which has historically promoted contacts between the ONLF armed group and the Ethiopian government; the one played by Uganda, which exercises regional leadership in the facilitation of good offices in the processes of Burundi, the DRC and between Sudan and the SPLM-N in South Kordofan and Blue Nile; the one played by South Africa in the processes of Mozambique and South Sudan; and the one played by Tanzania in the conflicts of neighbouring Burundi and Mozambique. In five of the 17 cases the former colonial powers also carried out or have carried out good offices tasks: France in Mali (north); Italy in Libya; Spain and France in the dispute between Morocco and Western Sahara; and the UK in Sudan and in South Sudan.

As far as the analysis of the items on the negotiation agenda are concerned, there are some recurring issues that arise in the various processes. For example, issues related to the disarmament of armed groups, the surrender of specific weapon arsenals and/or the reintegration of fighters, which over the course of 2017 were present in contexts such as Mozambique, Mali (north), the CAR, the DRC and South Sudan. Another issue present in dialogue processes or in the demands of some of the actors involved in negotiation processes is related to demands for the release of prisoners, or measures for the release or exchange of prisoners as steps for building trust between parties and contributing positively to the ongoing process. This issue was on the agenda in several contexts during 2017, including Ethiopia (Ogaden), Mali (north), Mozambique, Nigeria (Boko Haram), the Democratic Republic of Congo and Sudan (South Kordofan and Blue Nile).

The political and administrative status of certain territories was one of the key elements in several processes on the African continent, such as Ethiopia (Ogaden), Mali (north), the dispute between Morocco and Western Sahara, Nigeria (Niger Delta), Senegal (Casamance), Sudan (Darfur), Sudan (South Kordofan and Blue Nile). Issues related to border demarcations were also present in cases such as Sudan-South Sudan, among others. Other elements on the agenda in 2017 included issues related to inclusiveness, political and economic reforms, electoral timetables, formation of transitional or national unity governments, or reparation mechanisms for victims of conflict.

The declaration of truces and ceasefires, respect for ceasefire commitments and negotiations for the

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2. The African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA) was approved in 2002 and includes the AU Commission, the Panel of the Wise (PoW), the Continental Early Warning System (CEWS), the Peace and Security Council (PSC), which is the decision-making organ of the AU, and the African Standby Force (ASF).
establishment of the long-term cessation of hostilities were also recurring key issues in several African contexts over the course of 2017. In some cases positive steps were taken, such as in Mali (north), where the Platform and groups forming part of the Coordination of Movements of Azawad (CMA) reached an agreement on 20 September that included a cessation of hostilities, which remained in force at the end of the year. In Mozambique, the establishment by the political-military opposition movement RENAMO of a unilateral truce ended up leading to a permanent truce that contributed to strengthening the peace process. Another highlight was the signing of a ceasefire agreement in the Republic of the Congo between the government and the representatives of Pastor Ntoumi on 23 December, which was respected by the parties. However, in the CAR, the agreement signed in Rome on 19 June for the cessation of hostilities between the government and 13 of the 14 armed groups in the country was systematically violated, highlighting the lack of trust between the parties, although some partial cessations of hostilities were agreed between groups. As regards the dispute between Morocco and Western Sahara, an outbreak of tension occurred at the end of 2016 due to Moroccan activity in an area considered to be of restricted access to the parties. This action was interpreted by the POLISARIO Front as a violation of the 1991 ceasefire, which according to the UN Security Council raised doubts about the maintenance of the ceasefire and led to the temporary deployment of troops by both parties. In the Sudanese regions of Darfur, South Kordofan and Blue Nile, the Sudanese government postponed on three separate occasions the unilateral ceasefire established in January until 31 December. This partly contributed to the joint declaration of a ceasefire in May by the JEM and the SLM-MM in Darfur, although both in Darfur itself and in the South Kordofan and Blue Nile regions the government and the armed actors violated their own ceasefire commitments. Last of all, mention must be made of the situation in South Sudan, where the systematic violation of the 2015 ceasefire led to the total collapse in September 2016 of the 2015 agreement between the government and the SPLA-IO and to the violation of various unilateral initiatives for the cessation of hostilities. The IGAD made considerable efforts to breathe new life into the process and managed to get a new ceasefire agreement agreed on 21 December 2017. However, it was systematically violated by the parties soon after it came into force on 24 December.

In respect of the progress of peace negotiations and processes in 2017, the analysis of the different cases reveals a diversity of dynamics. On the positive side, by the end of the year the good progress made in negotiations, the reactivation of processes and the achievement of agreements in some contexts raised expectations about the general progress of their respective peace processes. One such case was Gambia, where the crisis triggered by former president Yahya Jammeh’s refusal to accept his defeat in the presidential election of 1 December 2016, was calmed thanks to regional diplomatic efforts, mostly by ECOWAS. President Adama Barrow, winner of the election, who had fled to Senegal for security reasons, was persuaded to return and Jammeh was forced to accept his defeat. In Ethiopia (Ogaden), the reactivation of the process at the end of 2017 in the UAE was followed up with a meeting in Sweden in early 2018 and a second round of talks in February 2018 coordinated by Kenyan officials. Furthermore, the release of prisoners by the Ethiopian government was interpreted as a measure to strengthen the process. In Mozambique, the RENAMO unilateral truce of early 2017 was extended, creating a favourable climate for holding the first direct meeting between President Nyusi and the rebel leader Dhlakama in August, which contributed to strengthening the peace process and the necessary constitutional changes. In the Republic of the Congo, the release of prisoners involved in the political movement of the rebel leader Pastor Ntoumi was interpreted as a trust-building measure in order to facilitate contacts which led to an agreement at the end of December. Finally, in the dispute between Sudan and South Sudan, despite the fragility of the relations between the two countries, the mutual threats and the volatility of the regional situation, by the end of the year relations were on the path to normalisation and a demilitarised border zone was set up.

In other cases, although dialogue between parties remained open and various rounds of negotiations were held during the year, with agreements reached in some cases, no significant progress was made in relation to a final peace agreement or in terms of implementing recently signed agreements. One such case was Nigeria (Niger Delta), where the complete lack of progress in dialogue between the various coalitions of civil society, such as the PANDEF or the NIDCA, and the Nigerian government in order to implement the previously reached peace agreements, led the armed actors of the Niger Delta to threaten to reactivate their violent activity. In the CAR, despite the signing of an agreement for the cessation of hostilities on 19 June in Rome, the mutual lack of trust concerning the disarmament process led to a reactivation of clashes in parallel with the continuation of talks with armed groups. It’s also worth highlighting the case of Mali (north), where there were tensions and divisions between the parties that signed the Algeria agreement in 2015 and where hostilities continued. However, in September the two armed opposition coalitions (the CMA and the Platform) reached an agreement to work towards the implementation of the Algeria agreement. In the case of South Sudan, the

The release or exchange of prisoners in order to build trust between parties was a factor present in several African scenarios, such as Ethiopia (Ogaden), Mali (north), Mozambique, Nigeria (Boko Haram), the Democratic Republic of Congo and Sudan (South Kordofan and Blue Nile)
agreement reached in 2015 between the sectors loyal to the president, Salva Kiir, and those loyal to the former vice-president, Riek Machar, collapsed in September 2016 due to the persistence of violence. Nevertheless, in the second half of 2017, several initiatives and contacts were promoted by the IGAD in order to set up the so-called High-level Revitalization Forum (HLRF). In December it managed to bring the parties together in Addis Abeba, which led to the signing of the Agreement on Cessation of Hostilities between the country's 14 political-military actors. Last of all, in Libya, there continued to be difficulties in implementing the Skhirat agreement signed at the end of 2015, to the point where one of the parties in the conflict, General Khalifa Hifter, declared the expiry of the agreement and the illegitimacy of the political entities set up on the basis of the agreement, despite multiple efforts to get the process back on track in a context marked by institutional fragmentation and persistent violence.

Another noteworthy factor in several contexts of negotiation is the existence of spoilers or saboteurs, actors who are not involved in the peace process but who through their actions threaten to complicate efforts to resolve the conflict through dialogue. Furthermore, the fragmentation or internal divisions of actors involved in dialogue call into question the credibility of armed actors in negotiation initiatives. In the case of Mali (north), jihadist armed actors who were not involved in the 2015 peace negotiations continued their armed actions in the country. In the Lake Chad Basin region (Boko Haram), the splits within Boko Haram began when the ISIS organisation made Abu Musab al-Barnawi the leader of the group in August 2016, while another faction remained under the leadership of Abubakar Shekau. The Shekau faction refused all offers to negotiate while the al-Barnawi faction seemed more open to establishing contacts with the Nigerian government, according to several sources. In the case of Libya, there continued to be difficulties in implementing the Skhirat agreement signed at the end of 2015, to the point where one of the parties in the conflict, General Khalifa Hifter, declared the expiry of the agreement and the illegitimacy of the political entities set up on the basis of the agreement, despite multiple efforts to get the process back on track in a context marked by institutional fragmentation and persistent violence.

General Antonio Guterres, a series of preconditions and ultimatums prevented progress from being made in the process with the main armed actors (JEM, SLM-MM and SLM-AW). Finally, in the case of Sudan (South Kordofan and Blue Nile), the internal splits of the SPLM-N affected the peace process throughout the year, since its vice-president, Abdel-Aziz al-Hilu, resigned over disagreements with its leader Malik Agar regarding the negotiating position of the group, which was against raising the issue of the self-determination of the Nuba Mountains, the position defended by al-Hilu. In June, the political wing of the SPLM-N decided to remove Agar as leader and appointed al-Hilu as new leader and commander general. It also removed the general secretary and lead negotiator Yasir Arman. These tensions led to delays in negotiations. The Sudanese government declared that it would not negotiate with Agar’s faction due to its lack of capacity to implement potential agreements.

2.2. Case study analysis

Southern Africa

| Mozambique | Negotiating actors | Government, the RENAMO opposition group |
| Third parties | National mediation team, Botswana, Tanzania, South Africa, United Kingdom, EU, Community of Sant’Egidio (Vatican), Catholic Church |
| Relevant agreements | Rome peace agreement (1992) |

Summary:
The coup d’état against the Portuguese dictatorship in 1974 and the guerrilla warfare carried out by the Mozambique Liberation Front (FRELIMO) Marxist-Leninist insurgency took Mozambique to Independence in 1975. Since then, the country has been affected by a civil war between the FRELIMO Government and the Mozambique National Resistance (RENAMO) armed group, supported by the white minorities that governed in the former Rhodesia (today Zimbabwe) and South Africa during the apartheid, in the context of the Cold War. In 1992 the parties reached a peace agreement that was considered an example of reconciliation. This was mediated by the Community of Sant’Egidio and ended a 16-year long war that caused one million fatalities and five million displaced persons, and gave way to a period of political stability and economic development, albeit high levels of inequality. In parallel, growing accusations of fraud and irregularities in the electoral processes that followed, some of which were confirmed by international observers, have gone hand-in-hand with a growing authoritarianism and repression of the opposition, and FRELIMO taking over the State (and the communication media and economy). In 2013, RENAMO conditioned its continuation in political life to a series of changes, mainly the reform of the national
After three years of negotiations, several positive steps were taken in the peace process in Mozambique in 2017 for the parties to reach an agreement that could meet the demands made by RENAMO in 2013. First, in late 2016, President Filipe Nyusi and RENAMO leader Afonso Dhlakama held telephone conversations that contributed to rapprochement, leading RENAMO to declare a unilateral truce until the beginning of 2017 so that the Mozambican populational could welcome the New Year in a peaceful atmosphere. Dhlakama extended this truce during the year, enabling progress to be made in the peace negotiations. Second, in July the government withdrew troops from eight positions near RENAMO’s stronghold in the Gorongosa Mountains, as demanded by RENAMO in June in order to continue the negotiations, which helped to create a climate of greater trust between both parties. Third, direct meetings were held between the parties during the year. In August 2017, Filipe Nyusi and Afonso Dhlakama held their first direct meeting since 2015. The meeting took place in RENAMO’s historical stronghold in the mountainous Gorongosa district. After the meeting, RENAMO noted that the decentralisation plan had to be submitted to Parliament in December, before the 2018 local elections were held. Fourth, FRELIMO and RENAMO discussed issues that are part of the core of the problem, such as the demand to increase the decentralisation of power in the country, the procedure for appointing provincial governors and other matters.

In early February 2018, Nyusi announced that he would implement the constitutional amendments that would allow the political parties that win the provincial parliamentary elections to select the regional governor prior to subsequent approval by the president. Nyusi and Dhlakama also met in Namadjjwa in mid-February 2018 to discuss the disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration of RENAMO members and their incorporation into the state security forces. The process continued to receive international support following Dhlakama’s request for international mediation in 2016, which President Nyusi accepted. The Catholic Church, the Community of Sant’Egidio, the EU and South African President Jacob Zuma became mediators. The EU appointed Mario Raffaelli and Father Angelo Romano of the Community of Sant’Egidio as its representatives. Raffaelli was also appointed coordinator of the international mediation team. One of the main issues that could hinder implementation of a peace agreement is the role that the most recalcitrant sectors of FRELIMO may play in approving the constitutional amendments, since the decentralisation plan means that RENAMO might end up with more provincial governors and district administrators, implying a direct loss of power for FRELIMO.

Tensions between the Mozambican government and RENAMO fell significantly during the year due to the positive development of the peace negotiations

Following the trend observed during the previous year, and with a backdrop of persistent violence among several armed actors, in 2017 difficulties in implementing the peace agreement signed in 2015 continued. The problems to implement the agreement were generally caused by the impact of violent actions from actors that had been excluded from the 2015 agreement, with an escalation of hostilities among the groups that signed the agreement, and also by the failure to adopt some of the measures set out in the agreement. During the first six months of the year the peace process was affected by an attack in January by the armed group al-Mourabitoun—which hadn’t taken part in the agreement—on a joint military camp of military forces and armed groups, killing sixty people. At this camp 600 members of the Malian Armed Forces were affected by an attack in January by the armed group al-Mourabitoun—which hadn’t taken part in the agreement—on a joint military camp of military forces and armed groups, killing sixty people.
Forces, members of the CMA (groups supportive of a federalist/secessionist formula) and from the Platform (pro-unity and pro-government groups) were preparing joint patrols as established in the peace agreement. Although there was fear that the agreement might collapse following the attack, the parties reiterated their commitment to the agreement. After this episode, in February, came a high-level meeting of the Supervisory Committee of the agreement, convened by Algeria—the main mediating country— with the participation of representatives from the Malian Government, the Platform, and the CMA (the latter had boycotted the committee’s meetings since December 2016 on the basis that it lacked inclusivity when taking decisions on the implementation of the agreement), as well as other international mediating actors, including the Governments of Mauritania, Niger, France, the AU and the UN mission in Mali (MINUSMA). This meeting served to advance in the definition of a timeframe to implement key aspects, such as appointing interim authorities, launching joint patrols, the holding of consultations for the Conference of National Understanding (Conférence d’Entente Nationale) and the appointment of an independent observer.

Preparations for the Conference of National Understanding caused fresh clashes among several actors. For instance, the CMA and the Platform mentioned the need to advance in the establishment of the interim authorities and the cantonment and DDR process before the conference took place, whereas the opposition groups questioned the fact that the agenda only focused on matters that were relevant to the north of the country and civil society sectors demanded a greater presence of women and youths. Finally, the conference took place in Bamako from 27 March to 2 April with more than one thousand participants, 32% women. Opposition parties remained on the side of the initiative and the CMA agreed to join after an agreement was reached with the Government. The outcome of this conference was a series of recommendations including the need to tackle issues such as the lack of inclusiveness in the political process, issues on governance and security and matters relating to Mali’s cultural diversity. The president of Mali rejected one of the recommendations that emerged from the meeting, relative to the establishment of negotiations with armed groups that had been excluded from the peace agreement, which included jihadist organizations like Ansar Dine and the Macina Liberation Front. During a visit to Bamako, the Ministers for Foreign Affairs of France and Germany also expressed opposition to negotiating with “terrorists”. The recommendations from the conference were aimed to enrich the Charter for Peace, Unity and National Reconciliation, as part of the 2015 agreement (a document containing some 60 pages that was presented as an outcome of the Conference of National Understanding). In May, a commission was created in charge of drafting this charter, with 53 members, only 6 of them women. This reduced number of women was in contrast to the greater presence of women in the conference. The text of the charter was delivered to President Keita on 20 June, but was rejected by some sectors, such as the CMA, which questioned the fact that Azawad was not recognized as a political entity.

In parallel, towards the middle of the year—coinciding with the end of the interim period as foreseen in the 2015 agreement—the parties reached a consensus on a revised road map for the implementation of the agreement and for the establishment of a coordination mechanism in Kidal (north). Nevertheless, these developments never materialized and were affected by a surge in violence between different armed actors that had adhered to the agreement, mainly between the GATIA organization—a part of the pro-national unity Platform—and sectors of the secessionist CMA alliance in the regions of Kidal and Ménaka. The increase in hostilities came in a context marked by the delays in appointing the interim authorities, the lack of progress in deploying civil servants to the north and centre of the country and the insecurities and problems to set up the DDR process, as set out in the peace agreement. Violence did not drop until the adoption of ceasefire agreements, in August and September, after the mission of good offices promoted by the Government of Mali and supported by international actors involved in the peace process. The mission of good offices was created at the end of June and was led by the leader of the High Council of Islam, Mahmoud Dicko, who held meetings with sectors close to both the CMA and the Platform. After weeks of confrontation, at the end of August the parties agreed to sign a cessation of hostilities agreement, initially for fifteen days, which was renewed in September for another month. In this context, in mid-September contacts were held between the CMA and the Platform, leading to the signing of a document containing commitments. The agreement included three central issues: the definitive cessation of hostilities; resuming dialogue to agree on a timeframe for the full implementation of the 2015 agreement; and trust-building measures for the cantonment and DDR process. At a later stage, reconciliation conversations were held from 5 to 11 October in Anéfis, in Kidal region, between the signatories of the agreement to discuss the release of detainees, the identification of disappeared persons, investigating the alleged crimes committed since 2017 by the organizations that signed the agreement by traditional judges, and other matters. These conversations were facilitated by the UN special representative in the country, in coordination with the governments of Mali and Algeria, and led to the
creation of reconciliation committees to disseminate the content of the agreement reached in Anéfis.

By the end of 2017 the truce was still in place. Nevertheless, different dynamics of tension were still at play. For instance, a coalition of factions from the armed groups excluded from the agreement (CME) demanded to participate in the supervision mechanisms in December, and threatened to block their establishment if their demands were not met. Some of the parties signing the agreement also denounced that Mali’s Government had adopted some measures unilaterally, such as promoting a law on territorial communities in October, defining the framework for the decentralization process in the country. Towards the end of the year, meanwhile, public focus was on the holding of regional elections, scheduled for the month of December; however, they were delayed by Mali’s Council of Ministers until April 2018. This came after the armed groups that had signed the agreement threatened to boycott the elections unless progress was made first in implementing the key aspects of the 2015 agreement and unless the decentralization law was reviewed. It is important to note that another issue affecting the political climate in 2017 was the process for a constitutional reform, especially with regards to the submission of the proposal on amendments, which aimed at strengthening the figure of the president (including competencies to appoint a quarter of the members of the Senate and to dismiss the prime minister). The constitutional reform had a strong mark on the country’s agenda since the middle of the year. The platform “An tè a banna! Touche pas à ma Constitution”, encompassing political parties in the opposition and civil society actors, among others, staged a series of demonstrations against the draft text of the constitution submitted by the Government to president Keita. In this scenario, the leader decided to suspend the constitutional referendum in August and agreed to carry out more inclusive consultations.

As for other aspects relative to the implementation of the 2015 agreement, it is worth noting that the report by the UN Secretary-General from the end of December 2017 highlighted that the context of insecurity was not only costing the lives of civilians and military –the MINUSMA was the UN mission with the largest number of casualties in 2017– but was also preventing the deployment of civil servants –including judiciary posts– to the north and centre of the country. In addition, the DDR process was still waiting for the provision of lists of participants from the armed groups –which had not yet drafted the lists of their participants– and the cantonment of forces, amidst disagreements between the Government and the armed groups in relation to the integration quotas of former combatants into the armed forces. A few relevant steps forward were taken in implementing the agreement, with the establishment of the Committee for Truth, Justice and Reconciliation; the deployment of interim authorities in all northern regions of the country and the setting up of joint patrols in Gao.

In addition, it is good to point out that the Supervisory Committee for the Agreement held regular meetings during the year. In the last quarter of 2017, the committee adopted some relevant decisions. On the one hand, it resolved that the Carter Center (USA) would adopt an independent observer role. On the other, it was agreed that representatives of Algeria and the MINUSMA would take part in all of the discussions between Malian actors to act as observers and, if necessary, as mediators or to provide technical assistance. Finally, it is important to note that in June 2017, the UN Security Council adopted resolution 2364, renewing the mandate for the MINUSMA until June 2018. In September, the Council also unanimously adopted resolution 2374, imposing sanctions –travel ban and the freezing of funds– on individuals and entities that threaten peace, security and stability in Mali and creating a new committee and panel of experts to examine violations.

Meanwhile, it is worth highlighting that Malian women continued to be marginalized and their inclusion in the process was not prioritized despite the mobilization of several local women’s organizations, the actions undertaken by UN Women and the MINUSMA, the international framework defined by resolution 1325 aiming to encourage the inclusion of women and the existence of a National Action Plan for the Implementation of UNSCR 1325, covering the period 2015-2017, and which includes among its goals to favour the participation of women in the implementation of the peace agreement. In this regards, as mentioned before, there was a very low participation of women in the drafting committee for the Charter for Peace, Unity and National Reconciliation –six women out of the 53 members (11.3%)– despite the fact that women represented 32% of participants in the Conference of National Understanding. Additionally, some analysts pointed out that women were under-represented in the mechanisms for the implementation and supervision of the peace agreement –including the Supervisory Committee for the Agreement, the DDR Committee, the National Council for the Reform of the Security Sector, and the Commission for Truth, Justice and Reconciliation given that, on average, the presence of women in these spaces was around 3%.

Taking into account the demands from Malian women activists on the need for women to play a greater role in the implementation and supervision mechanisms, some analysts suggest a more relevant presence on the Supervisory Committee for the Agreement and the establishment of parallel mechanisms to assess the implementation of the agreement taking into account gender indicators.

4. Ibid.
The islamist sect Boko Haram reclaims the creation of an Islamic State in Nigeria, and considers Nigerian public institutions corrupt and decadent. The group –the name of which means “Western education is a sin”– falls under the fundamentalist branch that other groups formed in Nigeria since independence in 1960 and that periodically organize larger or smaller violent episodes. Despite the strong pressure its members are under in different countries in the region by the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF) with Nigeria, Niger, Cameroon and Chad since 2016, the armed group remains active and the scope of its attacks has increased, contributing to a worsening of insecurity in the region and with a high impact on civilians. During the conflict, the Nigerian Government has held contacts with the different factions of the armed group to end the conflict and reach humanitarian agreements.

Amidst the ongoing conflict in the Lake Chad region between the armed group Boko Haram and the different countries in the region, the Nigerian Government has held contacts during recent years with the armed group to end the conflict; these contacts have not been made public and the administration of President Muhammadu Buhari has repeatedly declared its desire to enter into peace conversations with the armed group. In this regard, the Government revealed in 2016 that it had been holding contacts with the armed group since July 2015 to release the 270 girls kidnapped in the Chibok school (Borno State, northeast of the country) in April 2014. These contacts started shortly after President Muhammadu Buhari became president in May 2015. These contacts failed, but continued until May 2017, when BH freed 82 of the 270 girls kidnapped in Chibok in exchange for the release of five of its commanders. In parallel, on 10 February 2018 the group freed 13 people that had been kidnapped during 2017 in north-east Nigeria, according to the Government, among which there were 10 women who had been captured during an attack on a police convoy and three teachers from Maiduguri who had been retained during a mission to explore for oil. This humanitarian agreement was facilitated by the organization ICRC, which published a statement affirming it had participated in this action as a neutral intermediary and was not involved in the negotiations.

The Nigerian Government held bilateral contacts with Boko Haram to free hostages

In late 2017, an unofficial preparatory meeting was held in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) between representatives of the Ethiopian government and the Ogaden insurgency. This meeting was intended to lead to a second round of negotiations in early 2018. The first round of negotiations took place in 2012. There had been attempts to resume them ever since, but those efforts had not borne fruit. In mid-January 2018, Kenya sent a delegation to Sweden led by the MP representing Garissa County (Kenya), former Defence Minister Mohamed Yusuf Haji, to meet with ONLF representatives and facilitate official resumption of the talks, according to local sources. On 22 January, ONLF representatives held a meeting with the Somali Ogadeni communities in the US to hear their recommendations ahead of the talks between the Ethiopian government and the ONLF.

Finally, the second round of negotiations was held in Nairobi on 11 February 2018. The governor of Garissa County, Ambassador Ali Bunow Korane, who coordinates the peace talks, said that some progress had been made after almost six years of pressure on the ONLF and the Ethiopian government to return to the negotiating table, reaching a crucial stage in the process. ONLF spokesman Abdulkadir Sheikh Hassan Hirmoge (Adani) announced that the ONLF had participated in the peace talks with the Ethiopian government in Nairobi and that they had “important plans”, though he did not specify any details. Neither the government delegation, led by Colonel Gebre Egziabher Alemseged (Colonel Gabre), the former interim head of the Office of the Facilitator for Somalia Peace and National Reconciliation, nor

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Negotiating actors</th>
<th>Government, ONLF military political movement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Third parties</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relevant agreements</td>
<td>Humanitarian agreement between the Government of Nigeria and armed group Boko Haram, May 6, 2017</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Third parties</th>
<th>Mediation of Kenya, facilitation of UAE and Sweden</th>
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<td>Relevant agreements</td>
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Summary:
The regime that has ruled Ethiopia since 1991 maintains a confrontation with a number of ethno-political armed groups that demand greater autonomy or even independence from the central Government. One of them is the ONLF, which was founded in 1984 and operates in the Ogaden region in the southeast of the country. It demands independence for the region inhabited by the Somali community. The ONLF collaborated with the opposition to overthrow Mengistu, which was successful in 1991. In 1994, the legislative body of the Ogaden region, called the Somali Regional State (SRS), passed a resolution calling for a referendum on self-determination that led to its dissolution by the Ethiopian government. The ONLF has been fighting against the Ethiopian regime ever since, asserting that the conflict will only end when it accepts the principle to exercise the right to self-determination, as established under the Ethiopian Constitution, without preconditions or restrictions. Over the years unsuccessful sporadic contacts between the parties have taken place, against a backdrop of continual fighting, which since 2006 has been on the rise. It was not until mid-2012 when the most serious contacts to date got under way, in an attempt to resolve the conflict. Since then, rather sporadic secret meetings have been taking place between the parties under Kenyan mediation.

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<tr>
<th>Negotiating actors</th>
<th>Government of Nigeria, Boko Haram (Abubakar Shekau faction), Boko Haram (Abu Musab al-Barnawi faction)</th>
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</tr>
</tbody>
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Horn of Africa

Ethiopia (Ogaden)

Peace Talks in Focus 2018
Abdi Mohamoud Omar, the president of the Somali Regional State (SRS), made any statements. The high-level delegation of the ONLF included its political and military wings and consisted of its chief negotiator, Abdirahman Mahdi; the commander of the military wing (ONLA), Sulub Abdi Ahmed; ONLF Committee Chairman Ahmed Yasin Dirane and the group’s finance chief, Ibado Hirsi Mahad. These conversations took place amidst continuous clashes between the ONLF and the Liyu Police in the provinces of Degahbur and Nogob.

Days after the meeting, the Ethiopian government released 1,500 prisoners from Jail Ogaden, a prison located in the Ogaden region about 80 km east of the city of Harar and the scene of serious human rights violations according to the armed group and human rights organisations. The insurgent group announced that these prisoners were linked to the ONLF, though it added that there were still many other prisoners in Ethiopian prisons. However, it also repeated through social networks that no agreement had been reached with the government after different reports had circulated. Local sources had indicated that the release of these 1,500 prisoners (among which 100 were allegedly political prisoners) was part of the peace agreement reached.

Former Tanzanian President Mkapa, the EAC facilitator in the peace negotiations between the Burundian government and the opposition, was accused of bias in favour of the regime.

Three years after the last political crisis broke out in the country, triggered by the decision of the ruling party, the National Council for the Defence of Democracy- Forces for the Defence of Democracy (CNDD-FDD), to support President Pierre Nkurunziza’s candidacy for a third term as president, which he won in July 2015, the political situation remained at a total impasse and the atmosphere continued to deteriorate into violence. Regional efforts to resolve the crisis through inclusive political talks hosted by the East African Community (EAC) failed to make progress. In 2016, a national dialogue between various parties and the CNDD-FDD was held under the National Commission for Inter-Burundian Dialogue (CNDI), though it yielded no results. Established by the government, the CNDI’s legitimacy and inclusiveness was questioned by the UN. In 2016, Ugandan President Yoweri Museveni, appointed official mediator by the EAC, said that CNARED\(^5\) was the main opposition coalition in the country, so its involvement in the CNDI was crucial for legitimising the process and its participation would be decisive in any attempt at political negotiation.

Four rounds of the EAC-led talks have been held, headed by President Museveni, as the mediator, and former Tanzanian President Benjamin Mkapa, as the facilitator. The first was held in Entebbe (Uganda) in December 2015, the second and the third in Arusha (Tanzania) in May and July 2016 and the last one between 28 November and 8 December 2017, though with delays and with some parties failing to appear. In the meantime, talks were held separately with the government and some members of the political opposition between 2015 and 2017. However, there was no direct dialogue between representatives of the government and of the political and social coalition, CNARED. The fourth round was attended by representatives of the Burundian government but was boycotted by the opposition coalition CNARED and

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5. The CNARED is made up of 22 parties and opposition political movements and led by Jean Minani, a two-time former president of the National Assembly and leader of the FRODEBU party.
civil society representatives in exile. The facilitator, former Tanzanian President Benjamin Mkapa, did not invite the opposition represented by CNARED, which had asked to attend as a unified bloc. After rejecting this request, he selected one of its members to participate in the dialogue without the consent of the other coalition members, so they decided to boycott the meeting, calling it non-inclusive and insufficient with regard to security guarantees. The government said it was committed to the EAC-led dialogue but repeatedly refused to maintain contact with members of CNARED, including those involved in the failed coup of May 2015 and the civil society leaders of the “Halte au troisième mandat” movement, who are opposed to a third presidential term. The government requested that the talks take place inside the country and merge with the CNDI process, though this was rejected by the EAC. Benjamin Mkapa was described by the political and social opposition as biased after different decisions taken as the facilitator, and basically after calling Nkurunziza’s third term legitimate in December 2016 and saying that the dialogue would focus on preparing for free and fair elections in 2020. This was rejected by the political opposition and civil society representatives, who called the Tanzanian mediation amateurish, collusive and biased in favour of the Burundian regime.

CNARED demanded that the Tanzanian facilitation team step down and even called on the UN to replace Tanzania in the inter-Burundian dialogue. Given the difficulties in conducting these talks, in 2016 Mkapa asked the countries of the region to pressure the government and the opposition to force a commitment to dialogue without preconditions. However, the neighbouring countries differed in their opinions about the dispute, since Rwanda is clearly hostile to the Burundian government, Tanzania and Uganda are silently complacent and Kenya is indifferent, which makes a shared regional position difficult, according to various analysts. There are also different positions at the international level. On 20 May, the EAC held a summit calling on the EU to withdraw sanctions against Burundi so the EAC could sign an Economic Partnership Agreement with the EU, but the EU announced that it would keep the sanctions in place whilst the crisis persisted. Meanwhile, China agreed to provide 30 million dollars to support the Burundian budget in May.

Given the difficult relationship between the Burundian government and Jamal Benomar, the special envoy of the UN Secretary-General (who also holds the position of special advisor to the UN Secretary-General on Conflict Prevention, at the level of Under Secretary-General), the UN Secretary-General appointed former acting Burkinabe President Michel Kafando to be the new special envoy of the UN Secretary-General on 5 May. Kafando has over 30 years of extensive experience in international diplomacy and was president of Burkina Faso in 2014 and 2015. His role includes leading and coordinating political efforts to promote peace in the country and providing assistance to the regional EAC organisation. According to various analysts, Pierre Nkurunziza’s swift acceptance of the candidate suggested that he is not perceived as a threat by the government. On 29 June, the authorities announced that they hoped that the appointment of the new envoy could reactivate the process, but warned of possible bias in his approach towards opposition political parties. Kafando is the fourth UN envoy since June 2015, when the crisis began. In late October, President Pierre Nkurunziza signed the draft of the law to amend the Constitution via a referendum that is expected to be held in May 2018, which would allow him to compete in elections until 2034. He officially launched the campaign to hold the referendum on 12 December. The planned amendments aim to abolish the two-term limit and extend the presidential term of office to seven years. In January 2018, 23 civil society organisations launched the “Teshwa Ute” campaign to stop the referendum.

Finally, Burundi’s withdrawal from the International Criminal Court (ICC), decided a year earlier, became effective on 27 October. The African nation formalised its departure by accusing the court of bias and focused on crimes committed only by Africans. Burundi is the first member state to turn its back on the only permanent body that prosecutes genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity. The withdrawal deals a serious blow to international justice, but does not affect the court’s jurisdiction over a previous investigation into Burundi. Dating to 2015, it includes the death of 430 people in the protests staged after the announcement that President Pierre Nkurunziza, a former rebel leader of the country’s majority Hutu community, wanted to run for a third term of office. The United Nations was officially notified of Burundi’s withdrawal in 2016. Shortly thereafter, due to the ICC’s same alleged lack of impartiality, South Africa and The Gambia also announced their withdrawal, although both countries later changed their decision. The ICC’s chief prosecutor, Fatou Bensouda, went ahead with her work in Burundi. The investigation also covers the arrest of 3,400 people, the flight of around 230,000 more in search of refuge in neighbouring countries and cases of murder, torture, sexual violence and forced disappearance. In this regard, on 9 November the ICC announced its decision to open an investigation into the possible commission of crimes against humanity in Burundi between April 2015 and October 2017. The ICC stated that it has jurisdiction to try Burundi during the period in which it was still a member of the ICC. The Burundian government rejected the decision, which was also condemned by the presidents of Tanzania and Uganda.
CAR

Negotiating actors

Government, armed groups belonging to the former Seleka Coalition, Antibalaka militias

Third parties

African Initiative for Peace and Reconciliation (AU with the support of the ECCAS, ICGLR, Angola, Gabon, Rep. of the Congo and Chad) Sant’Egidio Community, OIC, International Support Group (UN, EU, among others), Humanitarian Dialogue

Relevant agreements

Republican pact for peace, national reconciliation and reconstruction in the CAR (2015), Agreement on the Cessation of Hostilities (June 2017)

Summary:

Since gaining independence in 1960, the situation in the Central African Republic has been characterized by ongoing political instability, leading to numerous coups d’état and military dictatorships. After the 2005 elections won by François Bozizé, which consolidated the coup d’état perpetrated previously by the latter, several insurgency groups emerged in the north of the country, which historically has been marginalized and is of Muslim majority. In December 2012 these groups forced negotiations to take place. In January 2013, in Libreville, François Bozizé’s Government and the coalition of armed groups, called Séléka, agreed to a transition Government, but Séléka decided to break the agreement and took power, overthrowing Bozizé. Nevertheless, self-defence groups (“anti-balaka”), sectors in the Army and supporters of Bozizé rebelled against the Séléka Government, creating a climate of chaos and generalized impunity. In December 2014 a new offensive brought an end to the Séléka Government and a transition Government led by Catherine Samba-Panza was instated. Regional leaders, headed by the Congolese Denis Sassou-Nguesso facilitated dialogue initiatives in parallel to the configuration of a national dialogue process, which was completed in May 2015. Some of the agreements reached were implemented, such as the holding of the elections to end the transition phase, but the disarmament and integration of guerrilla members into the security forces is still pending, and contributing to ongoing insecurity and violence. The Government is trying to negotiate with them with the mediation of the AU, in coordination with the ECCAS and the UN.

Although 2017 saw progress in promoting the authority of the State and dialogue initiatives in the country, the political context remains marked by an upsurge in violence. Criticism against the Government grew strong and several members in the opposition openly questioned the leadership of President Faustin-Archange Touadéra, portraying the Government as incapable of ensuring stability (70% of the territory is controlled by the groups), contributing to a reform of the Administration in September. Some political actors and from civil society criticized the MINUSCA for failing to forcefully disarm the armed groups and called for the rearrangement of the non-reformed national Armed Forces. The growing divisive rhetoric used by some national actors contributed to a rise of sectarian tensions, especially in the south-east of the country where Muslims in general, and Fulani in particular, fell victim of attacks, according to the UN. The organization stated that the inflammatory rhetoric, ethnic stigmatization and religious manipulation continued to have negative impacts on national policy and on the communication media, creating an environment where the risk of inter-ethnic confrontation was continuous and generated distrust in the attempt at strengthening the ongoing peace initiatives. This international organization had been promoting contacts among the different armed, political and social groups. At the end of 2016 the African Initiative for Peace and Reconciliation was established with the aim of coordinating all mediation efforts in the country. Led by the AU, it has the support of the countries in the region, through the ECCAS, the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region (ICGLR), Angola, Gabon, the Republic of the Congo and Chad. Due to persistent violence, in April the US imposed financial sanctions on former leaders of Séléka (Abdoulaye Hisseïne) and the anti-balaka (Maxime Mokom). The Government and representatives of the 14 armed groups and members of the international community met on 20 and 21 April in Bangui to agree a pilot programme together with the MINUSCA for the re-integration of former combatants, but the Patriotic Front for the Renaissance of the Central African Republic (FPRC) imposed some conditions, among which was the participation in the Government, as it had already demanded on previous occasions. The pilot programme was launched on 30 August, and aimed at re-integrating 560 combatants (40 from each of the 14 armed groups) to civil or military life; of these, 60 joined the AF on 19 September, albeit with difficulties, since the FPRC declared that their participation was conditioned to the release of prisoners.

Throughout the year there were several initiatives to promote the peace process in the country. Besides the parliamentary attempts and initiatives led by the Speaker of Parliament, Abdou Karim Meckassoua, it is worth noting the signature of an agreement of cessation of hostilities on 19 June in Rome between the Government and 13 of the 14 armed groups active in the country. The ceasefire was reached after a five-day meeting promoted by the Sant’Egidio Community. The agreement establishes that political representation will be granted to the armed groups and their members will be integrated into the Army. The groups expressed their commitment to ensure the free movement of persons and goods and their desire to lift all barriers and illegal checkpoints as an immediate reaction to the implementation of the ceasefire. In parallel, the Special Criminal Court (SCC) was created; this is a hybrid court composed of national and international judges. It is the first time that the judicial system of the CAR will judge crimes following international law. As part of the discussions, debates were held on the promotion of peace and justice, since the amnesty for the groups could represent an incentive to disarmament, but other mention that instead of ending grievances, the amnesty may lead to the perpetuation of a culture of impunity in the country, just as the conclusions of the 2015

Peace negotiations in Africa 43
National Forum had warned, which led to the creation of the SCC. In this regard, in January 2018 the court sentenced general Andilo, and anti-balaka leader, to life imprisonment, the first sentence handed since the start of the last phase of the conflict in 2013.

However, fresh confrontations broke out the day following the signature of the cessation of hostilities on 19 June, killing 40 people in the town of Bria, in the centre-east of the country, casting doubt on the process. On 21 June, in Brussels, the Government and all of the mediating actors, including the EU and the members of the African Initiative for Peace and Reconciliation and the Sant’Egidio Community agreed to a single roadmap for a broader mediation process. International members reaffirmed their support to the efforts made by the Government to achieve an immediate cessation of violence. In light of the crisis of the cessation of hostilities, in mid July the Sant’Egidio Community visited the country to contribute to the establishment of a national committee to boost the ceasefire agreement from 19 June.

In this regards, on 17 July, in Libreville, representatives from the AU, the ECCAS and the ICGLR, as well as the Foreign Affairs Ministers of Angola, Chad, Gabon, the CAR and the Rep. of the Congo adopted an integrated roadmap (Roadmap for Peace and National Reconciliation) for the African Initiative. This initiative aims to foster the implementation of said roadmap, bringing together all of the mediation efforts in the country. The roadmap affirms the legitimacy of the country’s constitutional system, the relevance of the conclusions from the Bangui Forum on National Reconciliation, held in 2015, and the need for a firm national ownership of the peace process to promote reconciliation. On 29 August, the AU Commission appointed Bédializoun Moussa Nébié as its Special Representative for the CAR. This new roadmap seeks to promote a dialogue between the Government and the armed groups, as well as between the members of the Disarmament, Demobilization, Reintegration and Repatriation Advisory and Monitoring Committee so as to reach an agreement for the general disarmament of the country, creating a contributions fund for the implementation of the roadmap established in the agreement reached on 17 July in Libreville. The UN Secretary-General co-chaired a high level meeting on 19 September together with the chair of the AU Commission, in association with the ECCAS, the EU and the WB, to study the political and security situation alongside the 72nd regular session of the UN General Assembly. The participants condemned the attacks on civilians, expressed their support to President Touadéra and to the African Initiative for Peace and Reconciliation. It was agreed to convene a meeting of the International Support Group for the CAR, ISG-CAR, established in August 2016 to replace the International Contact Group for the CAR, ICG-CAR, within six months, to support post-conflict reconstruction and peace building.

The Initiative has a facilitation team that held its first meeting in Bangui on 11 and 12 September 2017. This facilitation group is chaired by the AU and is composed of representatives from among the members of the Initiative, and is set to facilitate direct contacts among the parties. The Government announced that Jean Wilybiro-Sako would be the national coordinator of the facilitation group. The President, in an attempt to meet the demands of the recalcitrant armed groups and also to overcome internal tensions, appointed 16 new ministers to join an extended cabinet with 34 ministerial positions, which included 18 members of the previous government. Among the new members of the cabinet there were four representatives of the armed groups and five Muslims, meaning that the number of Muslim representatives rose to eight.

The creation of 11 new ministries will place greater pressure on the State budget. These measures, which broadened the Government’s political base, may calm the sectarian tensions and create a more favourable environment for the peace process. With regards to the gender perspective, among those appointed by the president in September there were five women in the new Government, compared to four in the previous one, meaning that, in overall terms, the proportion of women in office dropped. This restructuring was accompanied by initiatives aiming to increase the State’s authority, by appointing prefects to the 16 prefectures, although none of them from the Muslim community. From the 73 sub-prefects, appointed in September, they were ethnically more diverse and included several members from active former Séléka groups, 21 members from the Armed Forces and six women. By the end of 2017, 14 of the 16 positions for prefectures and most sub-prefectures had been covered, with an important support from the MINUSCA. In some cases, some of the main armed factions opposed this deployment, and this called for broad consultations to facilitate acceptance at a local level. In this regards, on 31 January 2018, the FPRC declared it accepted the prefects for Yakaga, Nana Grebizi and Bamingui-Bangoran. According to the Front, it was adopting this decision in response to the calls made by the African Initiative for Peace and Reconciliation and before the second round of the Initiative’s facilitation group. In November 2017, the UN Security Council approved increasing the military contingent by another 900 soldiers (reaching 13,000) and in December it adopted an exception to the arms embargo so that Russia could supply these arms to the armed forces trained by the EU mission. On 16 February 2018 the facilitation panel of the Initiative held its third meeting with the country’s 14 armed groups in Bangui.

It is worth mentioning that, in a context of growing violence and the signature of partial cessation of hostilities agreement between the groups, such as the one reached on 9 October between the ex-Séléka factions (FPRC, UPC and MPRC) and the anti-balaka Rassemblement des Republicains in Ouaka and Basse-
Kotto provinces, conversations among the armed groups continued, within the framework of the Disarmament, Demobilization, Reintegration and Repatriation Advisory and Monitoring Committee, although with little progress. At several meetings, the national authorities questioned the armed groups about the reigning insecurity, while they engaged in a direct dialogue with them. Despite the participation of the FPRC in the Committee, the group continued to take hold of new territories and establish new military structures, announcing the deployment to Bria and Kaga Bandoro of new “mixed” brigades composed of members of the Central African Patriotic Movements (MPC). It was not yet clear if the inclusion of FPRC members into the Government would help to reduce its destabilizing military activities.

Although the Government and the opposition reached an agreement on 31 December 2016 whereby a transition phase would start and where President Joseph Kabila would remain in office until the celebration of presidential elections in December 2017, the implementation of said agreement was slow, incomplete and not inclusive, contributing to a worsening of the social and economic situation and an increase in repression from the national security forces, fuelling unrest in the Capital and main cities. Hence, the country continued to be affected by a serious political and social crisis at a national level as a consequence of the expiry of President Joseph Kabila’s mandate in December 2016 and the postponement of the national elections, as well as by the serious escalation of violence in the Kasai region.

Several factors contributed to the worsening of the political and social context. First, the death of the historic opposition leader, Étienne Tshisekedi, of the UDPS opposition party, deeply affected the implementation of the peace agreement. A member of Patrice Lumumba’s Government and later an eternal opponent to the kleptocratic regime of Mobutu Sese Seko, who was four times Prime Minister in the country, he represented the fight for democracy and the defence of a multi-party system in DRC. His leadership was recognized by half of the fragmented opposition. His death caused a struggle for leadership and divisions within the UDPS party and the rest of the opposition to lead the new stage, and this was used by the Presidential Majority. Second, the escalating violence and insecurity in the Kasai region, raising concern over the consequences this may have for the implementation of the agreement and the electoral process. Third, the political and social opposition tried to keep pressure on the Government and Presidential Majority through mobilization and protests to push for the 31 December agreement and call elections before the end of 2018; these protests were followed unequally and were heavily repressed by the security forces. The brute force applied caused dozens of fatalities and hundreds of injured during the year. Although more moderate than in previous years, because of the systematic repression used by the security forces and the fragmented opposition, the Government increased pressure. The UN warned that the democratic space was shrinking and that civil and political rights were being violated, especially the freedom of peaceful assembly, opinion and expression. Some journalists, political opponents and civil society activists continued to be threatened, harassed and subject to violence.

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<tr>
<td><strong>Negotiating actors</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Government, Alliance for the Presidential Majority, political and social opposition grouped under the coalition Rassemblement (party Union pour la Démocratie et le Progrès Sociale (UDPS), the Dynamic Opposition and the G7, among others), Union pour la Nation Congolaise and other political parties</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Third parties</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Congolese Episcopal Conference (CENCO), Angola, Tanzania, Uganda, Support Group for the Facilitation of the National Dialogue in the DRC (led by the AU, SADC), International Conference on the Great Lakes Region (ICGLR), EU, UN, OIF and USA</td>
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<td><strong>Relevant agreements</strong></td>
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<td>Sun City Agreement, Pretoria Agreement and Luanda Agreement (2002); Global and Inclusive Agreement on Transition (2002); Global and Inclusive Agreement on Transition in the DRC (2016)</td>
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**Summary:** The demands for democratization in the nineties led to a succession of rebellions that culminated with the so-called “African first world war” (1998-2003). The signing of several peace agreements from 2002 to 2003 led to the withdrawal of foreign troops and the shaping of a Transitional National Government (TNG) integrating the previous Government, the political opposition and the main insurgent actors, in an agreement to share political power. Since 2003, the TNG was led by President Joseph Kabila and four vice-presidents, two of whom from the former insurgence. The TNG drafted a Constitution, voted in 2005. In 2006 legislative and presidential elections were held and Kabila was elected president in a climate of tension and accusations of fraud. In the 2011 elections, which Kabila also won, there were many irregularities, contributing to fuel the instability. Since then the political discussion has focused on ending his second mandate. In today’s deep crisis, there is a confluence of broken promises of democratization (Constitutional breaches and the holding of elections on the date agreed), ubiquitous poverty and chronic violence, and the Government’s control is growingly dependant on security forces that are largely dysfunctional. President Kabila’s attempts to hold on to power beyond the end of the second term (the last permitted by the Constitution) which should have ended on 19 December 2016, is squandering over a decade of progress. The governmental majority hopes to retain power by delaying the presidential elections, while the opposition wants to force the start of a rapid transition that will end Kabila’s mandate and lead to elections. The AU facilitated a political dialogue between the Government and the main opposition platforms and parties, although it was the Episcopal Conference (CENCO), who managed to bring the Government and the main opposition coalition, Rassemblement, to sit at the negotiating table and reach an agreement on 31 December 2016.
One of the main components of the agreement was the establishment of a transition government up until the future elections were held. It was not until April that Kabila chose Bruno Tshibala as the new Prime Minister. Tshibala was a dissident from the main opposition party in the country, the UDPS, and this was considered a tactical move by the Government to use the division in the opposition. His Government, appointed in May, included several defectors from the opposition who had moved close to the Presidential Majority (PM) and key posts remained within the PM. The nomination of members to the National Council for the Monitoring of the Agreement (CNSA) caused tensions, as did the nomination of its chairperson. It was not until July when the Government finally appointed the CNSA and Joseph Oleghakoy, a historical opponent who was accused of being a defector by some of the opposition, as its chair.

In July the CENI stated it was impossible to organize elections in 2017, as established in the agreement of 31 December 2016 because, even if the voter register was almost completed, with delays in Kasai due to the security situation, there remained many logistical, technical and financial aspects of the process to be resolved that made it impossible to move forward with the process. The CENCO declared that this decision should be the outcome of a dialogue within the framework of the CNSA, and the political opposition condemned the announcement. In August, a group of civil society organizations' workers published its sixth report on the ways of making the agreement of 31 December 2016 effective, highlighting the lack of political will to implement said agreement, the shared responsibility of all signatories with regards to the political crisis, and the dominance exerted by the governmental majority on the political scene, and also the divisions in the opposition and a marginalized civil society. The working group stressed the need to adopt an agreed electoral calendar, compliant with the political agreement, giving priority to the presidential elections. On 18 August, 32 representatives from civil society organizations met in Paris and signed the “Manifesto of the Congolese Citizen”, among the signatories were LUCHA, Filimbi and the new Congolais Debut, calling on the Congolese people to take non-violent measures to force Kabila to resign if the elections were not held in December 2017. The leaders of Rassemblement expressed their support to this manifesto.

In October, the CENI declared that, after completing the voter register, it would still need a further 500 days to organize the elections, foreseeing a timeframe that would extend until mid 2019, which immediately caused an international outcry and was qualified as a declaration of war by the opposition leader Félix Tshisekedi. The USA announced that a calendar postponing the elections beyond 2018 would lose international support. Finally, on 5 November the CENI published the electoral calendar. This calendar planned for national (legislative and presidential) and provincial elections to take place on 23 December 2018, and for the president to be appointed in January 2019, more than one year after the date originally planned in the agreement of 31 December 2016. The political opposition and civil society unanimously rejected this calendar and the announcement led to a call for new strikes and mobilizations with an unequal participation in different towns, to show rejection to the new electoral delay and President Joseph Kabila remaining in power. These mobilizations were prohibited and systematically dispersed. Many members of the opposition were arrested. The Government justified the delay in the elections due to the security situation and because of logistical and technical difficulties. The Episcopal Conference (CENCO) called for Kabila to make a public statement promising not to be a candidate for re-election. The UN Security Council validated the electoral calendar submitted, as did the AU and the CENCO, insisting there should be no further delays. The USA and the EU imposed sanctions on senior officials of the security forces and several organizations and countries threatened to stop the flow of resources into the country in the event of new breaches. On 19 December, one year after the end of Kabila’s last and final mandate, renewed mobilizations were organized, but were not really followed, and the year ended amidst a climate of worry and gloom over the negative evolution of the situation and the disproportionate actions of the security forces dispersing the demonstrations called for 31 December, where seven people were killed.

The death of historical opposition leader Étienne Tshisekedi opened a struggle for leadership in the opposition in DRC, which was used by the governmental majority

The new electoral calendar in DRC plans for elections to take place two years after the initial date, in December 2018

Rep. of the Congo

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Negotiating actors</th>
<th>Government, Ninja militias and the National Council of Republicans (CNR) of Frédéric Bintsamou (Ntoumi pastor)</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Third parties</td>
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<tr>
<td>Relevant agreements</td>
<td>Kinkala agreement (December 2017)</td>
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Summary:
Since gaining independence from France in 1960, the country has lived in a climate of political instability and violence. Denis Sassou-Nguesso governed it since 1979 – through a military coup– until 1992, during a single party regime with a Marxist-Leninist ideology. After the fall of the
communist block and of the Soviet Union, and under pressure from its main ally, France, the country started a transition to democracy, establishing a multi-party system and holding elections in 1992, where Sassou-Nguesso was defeated by Pascal Lissouba. The country has been victim of several armed conflicts (1993-1994, 1997-1999). Its capital, Brazzaville, was destroyed by the war and the many militias fighting to seize power. Among these were the Ninja militias, loyal to Frédéric Bintsamou (Ntoumi pastor) and to the political leader Bernard Kolélas, the Prime-Minister after the peace agreement that put an end to the conflict from 1993-1994; the Cocoyes militias, loyal to the coup president Nguesso. France’s support to Nguesso was a key factor in this war, which ended with the invasion of Angola troops and the return of Nguesso to power, who has remained in power until this day. Sassou Nguesso has repeatedly been criticized for being nepotistic and cutting back democracy and freedoms in the country and his Governments have been ripe with corruption. Reverend Ntoumi’s Ninjas remained active in their feud, in Pool region, and confronted Nguesso in 2002 and 2003. Nguesso’s attempts to reform the Constitution to remain in power led to important mobilizations against him, under the #Sassoufit motto, created in 2014 for the mobilizations. The Government promoted a constitutional reform in 2015, opening the door to presidential elections in March 2016, which were considered fraudulent and were won by Nguesso, starting a new phase of instability. There have been several contacts to promote a peace process between pastor Ntoumi and the Government.

In recent years, the country has lived immersed in a cycle of instability and political and social mobilization ever since the Government promoted a constitutional reform in October 2015 to lift the two presidential mandate limit, which allowed President Denis Sassou-Nguesso (72 years old) to run for a new mandate in 2016, which he won and managed to extend his 32 years in power. The results of said elections were rejected by his opponents, who called to launch a campaign of civil disobedience. After the elections, violence surged and continued throughout 2017. The Government strongly repressed the protests, supposedly led by reverend Ntoumi’s Ninjas. These former militias had been led by the once Prime Minister Bernard Kolélas, father of the current presidential candidate Guy Brice Parfait Kolélas, and by the pastor Ntoumi, since the nineties. Parfait Kolélas denied having anything to do with the group. Nevertheless, Ntoumi expressed his support to candidate Guy Brice Parfait Kolélas, who was defeated in the elections. The crisis worsened after September 2016, when violence escalated once again and the actions of the Ninja militias in Pool region continued into 2017. Ntoumi declared that his youths had resumed the armed struggle as a consequence of the fraudulent elections in March and in response to the governmental violence, which had intensified since Nguesso’s re-election. Ntoumi called for a dialogue mediated by the international community. In this regard, during 2017 instability persisted in Pool region and the actions by the Ninja militias against the security forces, alongside contacts with the governmental actors and sectors linked to Ntoumi’s Ninja militias. On 8 June, the UN stated that 81,000 people had been displaced in Pool region since the beginning of the Ninja militias’ actions in mid 2016.

In November, the Government made a gesture of good will and released two people close to reverend Ntoumi, and this was seen as a trust-building measure to facilitate the contacts. Those released were his spokesperson and the secretary-general of the National Council of Republicans (CNR), Jean-Gustave Ntondo, from Ntoumi’s political party, who had been imprisoned for several months. These steps contributed to the Congolese government signing a ceasefire agreement in Kindala, in Pool region, with representatives from reverend Ntoumi’s opposition on 23 December. The Congolese Minister of the Interior, Raymond Zéphyrin Mboulou supervised the signing of the agreement, aiming to put an end to the rebellion initiated against the Government in April 2016, after Sassou-Nguesso was re-elected following the elections. The CNR’s secretary-general, Jean-Gustave Ntondo, and Ntoumi’s political party, announced the entry into force of the agreement. Based on this agreement, reverend Ntoumi agreed to facilitate the disarmament of his combatants, reinstating the State’s authority in Pool, and the Government agreed to guarantee the disarmament process, demobilization and social and economic integration of the former combatants, as well as to compensate the population displaced by violence in the area and ensure their freedom of movement. There are plans to establish a joint commission in charge of monitoring the implementation of the agreement.

### The Congolese Government and pastor Ntoumi reached a ceasefire agreement towards the end of 2017

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>South Sudan</th>
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<td><strong>Negotiating actors</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Third parties</strong></td>
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**Summary:**

After years of armed conflict between the Central Government of Sudan and the south of the country, led by the SPLM/A guerrilla, South Sudan became an independent State in 2011, after holding the referendum that was planned in the 2005 peace agreement (Comprehensive Peace Agreement –CPA–) facilitated by the mediation of the IGAD. The Peace between Sudan and South Sudan and achieving independence, however, were not enough to end the conflict and violence. South Sudan has remained immersed in a series of internal conflicts promoted by disputes to control the territory, livestock and political power, as well as by neopatrimonial practices and corruption in the Government, all of which has impeded stability and the consolidation of peace. As part of the peace negotiations promoted in April 2013, the
President offered an amnesty for six commanders of the rebel groups, but this was not successful initially. At a later date, in December 2013, tensions broke out among the factions loyal to President Salva Kiir and those loyal to the former Vice-President Riek Machar, the SPLA-in-Opposition (SPLA-IO) gave way to a new escalation of violence in several of the country’s regions. In January 2014, with the mediation of the IGAD, the Government and the SPLA-IO launched peace conversations in Addis Ababa (Ethiopia). Diplomatic efforts have come up against many obstacles to achieve effective ceasefire agreements, after signing nine different commitments to the cessation of hostilities and transitory measures between December 2013 and August 2015, which have been systematically violated and have rendered it impossible to lay the foundations for a political solution to the conflict. On 17 August 2015, after strong international pressure and threats of blockades and economic sanctions, the parties signed a peace agreement promoted by the IGAD Plus, although there is still much uncertainty surrounding its implementation.

The disputing parties made little progress in achieving peace in the conflict reigning in South Sudan. There is a persistent and serious humanitarian crisis, systematic human rights' violations (arbitrary arrests, extra-judiciary executions) and a climate of broad instability. According to OCHA, in November 2017 there were 1.86 million internally displaced persons and 2.1 million refugees in neighbouring countries. In 2017, South Sudan became one of the countries where humanitarian action is most dangerous, with the killing of 28 humanitarian workers. During the second half of the year, the political process was re-launched with the celebration of two meetings of a forum to reactivate the peace process fostered by the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), known as the High Level Revitalization Forum to bolster the peace process, and the Agreement on Cessation of Hostilities, Protection of Civilians and Humanitarian Access. However, mutual distrust and the violation of the agreements and commitments made were constant. The implementation of the Peace Agreement from August 2015 deteriorated during 2016 and in July that year new confrontations erupted in Juba, with hundreds of fatalities, according to some sources, leading to the collapse of the agreement.

In September 2016, Riek Machar, the leader of the SPLA-IO issued a statement in Khartoum declaring the collapse of the Peace Agreement and calling on his followers to resume war against the Government. Since then, throughout 2017 a climate of violence and insecurity has reigned, despite the repeated calls from the international community and the efforts made by the IGAD to reactivate the peace process. The implementation of the Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in the Republic of South Sudan ("the 2015 Peace Agreement") remained blocked, with no significant progress to ensure a greater inclusiveness of the Transitional Government of National Unity. Nevertheless, on 22 May 2017, President Salva Kiir officially launched a process of national dialogue, in the presence of Ugandan President Museveni, and administered oath to 60 members of the Committee present in Juba. He also announced a unilateral ceasefire to generate an enabling environment for dialogue and facilitate humanitarian assistance; he ordered security bodies not to arrest any opposition members wishing to join the dialogue and provided for the review of the situation of political prisoners. On 31 May, President Kiir appointed three women to the governing body of the Steering Committee for National Dialogue, made up of nine members, according to the June report by the UN Secretary-General. Nevertheless, according to figures for June 2017, provided by the coalition of women organizations Women's Monthly Forum on the Peace Process (WMF), in the National Dialogue there were only 18 women, from a total of 110 people, and all the posts of co-chair, secretaries and deputies were occupied by men. The WMF submitted a set of recommendations in 2017 to strengthen the participation of women and gender perspective in the peace process, as an outcome of a study by the WMF on the 2015 peace agreement.

However, this unilateral cessation of hostilities did not bring an end to the offensive actions by the SPLA (Governmental armed forces loyal to Salva Kiir), constituting a flagrant violation of their own commitment, as pointed out in the June 2017 report by the UN Secretary-General. The plenary meetings of the Steering Committee for National Dialogue took place from 29 May to 22 June. The Co-Chairs of this initiative declared their intention to hold consultations with the opposition leaders within and outside the country, including Riek Machar. The Plenary established 15 sub-committees in charge of organizing local and thematic consultations. Two special delegations contacted relevant figures of the opposition living outside the country, in Khartoum and Nairobi.

On 28 June, the Co-Chair of the Steering Committee led a special delegation that travelled to South Africa to contact Riek Machar, although they were not able to meet him. Other delegations travelled to Khartoum, Addis Ababa and Nairobi to try and contact prominent figures. From 3 to 28 July, with technical support from the UN and other members, the Steering Committee organized a seminar on the experience acquired by its members in managing the dialogues. On 28 July, the Steering Committee announced the preparations to start consultations at a sub-national level in September. However, several opposition groups rejected the National Dialogue in its current format since it was not an inclusive platform and did not meet the conditions for a genuine dialogue to take place.
The UN Secretary General himself pointed out that the Steering Committee for National Dialogue had done everything it could for the dialogue process to be as broadly representative and participatory as possible, but the opposition leaders continued to be sceptical regarding the credibility and inclusive nature of the process.

In parallel, with the stalemate of the situation, the IGAD took a step forward and held its 31st extraordinary summit on South Sudan on 12 June, in Ethiopia, where it decided to call on the parties to the peace agreement and on groups left outside the agreement to a High Level Revitalization Forum for the 2015 Agreement so as to establish a permanent ceasefire and comply with the peace agreement. Since then, the IGAD has been promoting this Forum, in what is considered a final attempt to redress the peace process. In this regard, the IGAD held separate meetings with different actors (Government, opposition, and civil society actors) in October. An IGAD delegation met with the opposition leader and former Vice-President Riek Machar in South Africa, where he is living in exile since 2016, on 4 October. However, it was not until the end of the year that the peace process was boosted. The Government continued to promote the National Dialogue, despite internal and international criticism, and alongside, the Ugandan Yoweri Museveni promoted an initiative to bring together the different factions of the SPLM, to contribute to a broader peace process. In this regard, several SPLM factions were able to sign a reunification agreement in Cairo, in November. However, the SPLM faction led by former Vice-President Riek Machar rejected the reunification agreement, declaring that it would not serve the country’s interests. Egypt hosted the reunification meeting from 13 to 16 November. Other meetings took place to promote the reunification in Uganda’s capital, Kampala. The agreement, signed at the general headquarters of the Egyptian secret services under the auspices of President Abdel Fatah al-Sisi and the President of Uganda, Yoweri Museveni, brought together the SPLM-FD factions led by Pagan Amum and the one led by Salva Kiir’s Government (represented by the Minister of Defence, Kuol Manyang). This agreement aims to boost the reunification agreement reached in Arusha in 2015.

After several consultations and meetings, the IGAD managed to convince the parties to participate in the High Level Revitalization Forum. The Government affirmed on 17 December that the Forum should not become a re-negotiation of the 2015 agreement, while the SPLM/A-IO reiterated on the following day that the 2015 Agreement had collapse after the events in Juba in July 2016. Towards the middle of December, the Government replaces several commanders and leaders by persons less compromised by the process, according to the International Crisis Group. On 18 December, the IGAD Council of Ministers inaugurated the Forum calling on the parties to commit to reaching an agreement for the cessation of hostilities. From 18 to 21 December, the IGAD convened the first stage of the High Level Revitalization Forum for the Agreement for a Solution to the Conflict in the Republic of South Sudan in August 2015. On 21 December, 14 parties signed an Agreement for the Cessation of Hostilities, Protection of Civilians and Humanitarian Access, with representatives of the stakeholders from South Sudan, the IGAD, and the AU as guarantors, and IGAD mediators and international partners as witnesses. The signatories were the Transitional Government of National Unity, the SPLM/A-IO, the “former detainees” of the SPLM, the National Salvation Front and 10 other movements and opposition parties. Since 24 December, the day on which the agreement entered into force, breaches to the cessation of hostilities have been reported and verified on both sides. In January, the president of the AU Commission and the UN Secretary-General issued a joint statement condemning the violations of the agreement on the cessation of hostilities and expressing the need to establish punitive measures on the parties. The Troika formed by Norway, the UK and the USA condemned the violations of the agreement and suggested imposing sanctions and an arms embargo on the Government.

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<tr>
<th>Sudan</th>
<th>Negotiating actors</th>
<th>Third parties</th>
<th>Relevant agreements</th>
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<td>Government of Sudan, the opposition coalition “Sudan Call” formed by national opposition parties, Sudan Revolutionary Front (SRF, coalition comprising the armed groups of South Kordofan, Blue Nile and Darfur)</td>
<td>African Union High-Level Implementation Panel (AUHIP), Troika (USA, United Kingdom, Norway), Germany</td>
<td>Roadmap Agreement (2016)</td>
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**Summary:** Different armed conflicts (Darfur, Blue Nile and South Kordofan) remain active in the country, as well as tensions between the government and the opposition. Amidst this climate of political instability, in early 2014 Sudanese President Omar al-Bashir called for a “national dialogue” to address the political and economic problems that could alleviate the poverty, war and political instability gripping the country. The government announced that this dialogue would have four priority objectives: to achieve peace, protect constitutional rights, reinvigorate the economy and revive national identity. The Sudanese government said that the initiative did not exclude any sector and that it was time to carry out reforms after 25 years under the regime. From the start, the initiative enjoyed the involvement of former South African President Thabo Mbeki and the African Union High-Level Implementation Panel for Sudan (AUHIP) to promote peace negotiations and democratic transformation.
The peace process in Sudan in 2017 was affected by disagreements between the government and the opposition, with the government saying that it had made progress in implementing the National Dialogue, which officially concluded in 2016 and was boycotted by most of the political opposition and main insurgent groups, and the opposition accusing the government of cling to power. The Sudanese president announced that progress had been made in implementing the National Dialogue in March with the appointment of incumbent First Vice President Bakri Hassan Saleh as prime minister. While did this involve restoring a political office that had been eliminated after the coup d'état in 1989, the appointment of Saleh, a member of the ruling party, disregarded the previous agreement to appoint a representative of the opposition and accumulated offices under him, as he remained the First Vice President. Prime Minister Saleh announced a new government in May consisting of 31 ministers, including only four women. Though described as a national consensus government, it was dominated by the ruling NCP party, and faced the challenge of implementing the recommendations resulting from the National Dialogue and of adopting a new Constitution. The new government was criticised by several opposition parties, which refused to join it, including the Sudan Call alliance. In February, the head of the opposition Umma party, Sadiq al-Mahdi, returned from exile in which he had remained since 2014 and denounced in June the National Dialogue’s lost opportunities, accusing the government of failing to fully implement the recommendations issued by the committees of the National Dialogue, joining other critics opposing the direction taken by the process to consolidate the regime’s power. At various times of the year, the Sudanese president urged the political opposition to join the reconciliation process.

Meanwhile, the controversial National Dialogue, which the road map signed by the government and insurgent groups in 2016 acknowledged as not inclusive enough, continued without the armed rebels of the country, whilst little progress was made in the so-called two-track process (negotiations in Darfur between the government and the SLM-M and the JEM and in the Two Areas of South Kordofan and Blue Nile between the government and the SPLM-N), facilitated by the African Union High-Level Implementation Panel (AUHIP). The Sudanese government called on the country’s insurgents to abandon violence and join the peace process and the National Dialogue without preconditions. The government extended the ceasefire in Darfur, South Kordofan and Blue Nile for six months in January, again for four months in July and until 31 December in October. The two-track process was affected by factors such as escalating clashes at different times of the year, divisions within the SPLM-N and other developments. Meanwhile, the rebels continued to refuse to negotiate on the basis of the Doha Document for Peace of 2011.

### Sudan (Darfur)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Negotiating actors</th>
<th>Government, Movement for Justice and Equity (JEM), Sudan Liberation Movements, SLA-MM and SLA-AW factions</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Third parties</td>
<td>AU, UNAMID, Chad, Qatar</td>
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**Summary:**
The political, economic and cultural marginalization of the Darfur region relative to Sudan as a whole is at the core of the conflict that, beginning in the 1980s, also includes growing competition for water and pastures due to drought conditions. In addition, the exploitation of religion and existing ethnic differences, as well as interference from neighbouring Chad and Libya, made the situation worse. In the midst of peace talks to resolve the historical dispute between the north and south of the country, various armed groups in Darfur, mainly the JEM and the SLA, revolted in 2003 to demand greater decentralization and regional development. Contacts between the parties were organized by Chad initially, and later by the AU, in an attempt to facilitate humanitarian access and launch peace negotiations that would bring the violence to an end. In 2006 the Darfur Peace Agreement (DPA), was reached in Abuja, but included only the SLA faction led by Minni Minawi. Meanwhile, the conflict continued, as well as failed attempts at dialogue that were mainly fostered by Qatar as part of the Doha peace process, with different actors gradually joining in.

The process remained deadlocked, with no progress since the road map was signed in 2016 by the government and insurgent groups in Darfur and the neighbouring Two Areas. The government extended the unilateral ceasefire in Darfur, South Kordofan and Blue Nile for six months in January for, again for four months in July and until 31 December in October. Despite the government’s assertion that the war in Darfur had already come to an end, violence continued throughout the year, albeit at lower levels than in previous years. In February, the Troika (USA, UK and Norway) called on the signatories of the 2016 road map agreement to implement what was agreed. The road map had been signed by the government in March 2016 and by the main insurgent groups in Darfur, South Kordofan and Blue Nile in August 2016. It also urged the armed group SLA-AW, which did not sign the road map in 2016, to implement a ceasefire and to join the peace process facilitated by the African Union High-Level Implementation Panel (AUHIP). In this sense, the main insurgent groups in Darfur continued to refuse to negotiate on the basis of the Doha Document for Peace of 2011 (DDPD) and

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7. See the summaries on Sudan (Darfur) and Sudan (South Kordofan and Blue Nile) in this chapter.
pressed their criticism of the National Dialogue for its lack of inclusiveness and domination of the ruling NCP party. In light of the rising violence in East and North Darfur in May and early June, the Troika and the EU urged the Sudanese government and the armed group SLM-MM to end the fighting. The government, which accused the SLM-MM of launching the attacks by crossing over from Libya and South Sudan, called on the Troika and the EU to step up pressure on the insurgent groups to join the negotiating process.

The JEM and the SLM-MM declared a joint six-month unilateral ceasefire in early May after a meeting in Paris between the leadership of both insurgent groups and the new joint AU-UN special representative for Darfur and head of the United Nations-African Union Mission in Darfur (UNAMID), Jeremiah Mamabolo. The meeting sought to reinvigorate the peace process. Representatives of the SLM-MM and the JEM also met with government representatives in Berlin in May. In July, Mamabolo pointed out that the armed conflict in Darfur had been mostly located where the SLA-AW was present in the western Jebel Marra area. In October, UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said that efforts to achieve peace through a negotiating process remained beset by difficulties and that despite the parties’ proclaimed desire to continue the negotiations, the establishment of preconditions hindered their progress. Guterres called on the government and the insurgent groups to respect their unilateral ceasefires and to resume talks aimed at reaching a ceasefire agreement. Meanwhile, some minor factions joined the National Dialogue over the course of the year. In February, the SLM-PD, led by Al-Sadiq Abdel-Karim, a splinter group of the SLM-AW led by Abdel-Wahid al-Nur, signed the National Dialogue Document after first signing a peace agreement with the government of North Darfur in January. In May, Khartoum announced that a JEM breakaway group that included former JEM Secretary of Organisation and Administration Abu Bakr Hamid and former Humanitarian Secretary Suleiman Jamous had joined the peace process and signed the National Dialogue Document. The JEM complained that the negotiations were not serious, describing the developments as cases of individual surrender. Another SLM-AW splinter faction led by Commander Haroun (aka Kalmang Koi) also joined the peace process in Central Darfur State in June.

In September, the government announced the launch of a new disarmament campaign in Darfur. According to the Sudanese president, only regular forces would have access to weapons by the end of the year. However, the disarmament process encountered difficulties, including serious clashes in North Darfur in November between members of the RSF and fighters loyal to Musa Hilal, a former ally of the Sudanese president, which claimed around a dozen lives. After Hilal's arrest that same month, the government imposed an ultimatum on the armed groups of Darfur to surrender their weapons.

Regarding the international UNAMID peacekeeping mission, in June the UN Security Council approved cutting back its troops and police by 30% and reconfiguring its operations. Human rights organisations warned of the risks that UNAMID’s withdrawal poses for the security of the civilian population given the continuous abuse committed by government forces. As part of its withdrawal, UNAMID reported that it was closing 11 bases of operations in Darfur in October, whilst making plans to deploy the Jebel Marra Task Force, given the greater fragility of the situation in Jebel Marra. UNAMID also worked with local organisations to host various activities to promote the participation of women in reconciliation initiatives in the country throughout the year. In January 2018, an international coalition called the NGO Working Group on Women, Peace and Security urged the UN Security Council to provide updates and monitor this support in subsequent reports on UNAMID, as well as to provide lessons learned.
Internal tensions in the SPLM-N led to delays in resuming the peace talks between the Sudanese government and the insurgents in South Kordofan and Blue Nile

The divisions within the SPLM-N affected the peace process during the year. SPLM-N Deputy Chairman Abdel-Aziz al-Hilu resigned in March over disagreements with the group’s top leader, Malik Agar, and its negotiating position, which opposed the issue of self-determination for the Nuba Mountains, as al-Hilu advocated. In June, the Nuba Mountains Liberation Council, the political body of the SPLM-N, approved delegating Agar and appointing al-Hilu as the new leader and general commander of the group. It also approved dismissing secretary general and chief negotiator Yasin Arman and preventing Agar and Arman from entering areas under the group’s control. The political body justified these moves by citing Agar and Arman’s refusal to include the issue of self-determination for the Nuba Mountains in negotiations with the government. Clashes broke out between the factions at various times of the year, such as in May, July, and August. The fighting in August claimed several dozen lives. During its general conference in October, the SPLM-N confirmed al-Hilu as its new leader and repeated the demand for self-determination, whilst closing the door to rapprochement with the faction led by Agar. Internal tensions in the SPLM-N led to delays in resuming the peace talks between the government and the armed groups of South Kordofan and Blue Nile, initially scheduled for April under the mediation of the AU’s chief negotiator, Thabo Mbeki, as part of the African Union High-Level Implementation Panel (AUHIP). Mbeki and the SPLM-N agreed to put off the talks until July so the armed group could resolve its internal crisis. Nevertheless, fighting between the factions continued. The mediating team met with both factions in August, but a joint position could not be established. In September, government representatives said that they would not negotiate with Agar’s faction because it lacked the ability to implement any possible agreements. However, after al-Hilu took over as leader of the SPLM-N, the group claimed that it had not undergone a split, but just a change of leadership, whilst Agar’s faction proposed a joint delegation or coordination between both factions before the process resumed. In November, Khartoum approved the call made by the SPLM-N led by al-Hilu to restart the negotiating process based on the road map. In January 2018, it announced that peace talks with the SPLM-N led by al-Hilu would resume in February.

The relations between both countries remained fragile, with mutual accusations of threats against state security, although at the end of the year both governments made partial progress towards normalising relations. For example, the Sudanese Intelligence Services (NISS) accused the South Sudanese government of holding meetings with the SPLM-N in April, which is fighting against the Sudanese government in the Two Areas, and therefore of promoting an extension of the war in Sudan. Both presidents met in Khartoum in November to sign various agreements on security and oil. According to the South Sudanese Government, its leader, Salva Kiir, travelled to Sudan sought to normalise relations between both countries. Yet during the visit, South Sudanese President Salva Kiir accused the Sudanese Government of supplying weapons that fuel the internal conflict in South Sudan and of supporting opposition leader and former Vice-
President Riek Machar. Nevertheless, both leaders agreed not to carry out military or political actions that posed a threat to the neighbouring country and to establish a security zone, according to Sudanese President Omar al-Bashir, who described the meeting as a step forward for bilateral relations.

With regard to the negotiating process to delimit the border area to be defined between both countries, which affects Abyei, the 14-Mile Area, Joudat Al-Fakhar, Jebel al-Migainais, Kaka and the enclave of Kafia Kingi, the Joint Technical Committee for Border Demarcation (JTCB) issued a detailed report covering the points of agreement and disagreement, according to what was agreed during a new meeting in Addis Ababa in December. Held under the auspices of the UN Interim Administration in Abyei (UNISFA) and other members of the UN, Arab League, AU, EU (Quartet); Maghreb – North Africa mission, as well as leaders of both communities. The interim head of UNISFA and other members of the UN Security Council renewed the mandate of the United Nations Interim Security Force for Abyei (UNISFA) and extended the support it gives to the Joint Border Verification and Monitoring Mechanism (JBVMM). However, the UN Security Council’s resolution in November warned that the last time that the mission’s support for the JBVMM would be renewed if the parties to the conflict did not commit to specific measures before 15 March 2018, including full freedom of movement for UNISFA, also within the so-called Safe Demilitarized Border Zone (SDBZ); the opening of the first phase of border corridors; the holding of at least one meeting to resume discussions on border demarcation and the reactivation of the specific committee on the disputed 14-Mile Area, among other measures, already established in 2015 by the UN Secretary-General in his S/2015/439 report for the full operation of the MCVVF.

Concerning the participation of the population in peacebuilding efforts, 80 female representatives of the Misserya and Ngok-Dinka communities in a town north of Abyei, which have been in conflict in recent years, met in February as part of the “global open days on women, peace and security” aimed at addressing strategies to promote peace in Abyei. This was the first meeting of women from both communities and was attended by the interim head of UNISFA and other members of the mission, as well as leaders of both communities.

### Maghreb – North Africa

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Negotiating actors</th>
<th>Libyan Political Agreement or Skhirat Agreement (2015)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Third parties</td>
<td>UN, Arab League, AU, EU (Quartet); Algeria, Egypt, Tunisia, Morocco, UAE, Netherlands, Italy, France</td>
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**Relevant agreements**

**Summary:**

After the fall of Muammar Gaddafi’s regime in 2011, Libya has experienced a transition process characterized by multiple political, economic, social, institutional and security challenges and by the presence of numerous armed groups. Since 2014, the North African country has been the scene of increasing violence and political instability, which led to the formation of two major poles of power and authority. Given the developments in the country, mediation efforts by the UN have tried to find a solution to the crisis. Negotiations have confronted several obstacles due to disputes of legitimacy, the diversity of actors involved, multiple interests at stake and the persistent climate of violence in the country, among other factors. In late 2015, the Libyan Political Agreement or the Skhirat Agreement was signed under the auspices of the UN, amidst a climate of persistent divisions and scepticism due to the foreseeable problems in implementing it.

In line with events in 2016, the difficulties in implementing the Skhirat agreement, signed in 2015, became evident throughout 2017 and by the end of the year the pact promoted by the UN continued to be questioned, despite many efforts to reach consensus and foster its implementation. Efforts by various regional and international actors to try to facilitate a solution to the Libyan crisis continued during the year, though they did not yield significant progress. Throughout the year, the UN mission in the country (UNSMIL), whose mandate includes mediation and good offices to support implementation of the Libyan Political Agreement and the transition process in the country, maintained contact with various Libyan stakeholders to reactivate the political process and seek ways to overcome the hurdles to making the Skhirat Agreement effective. In this context, a broad consensus emerged that certain aspects of the pact should be modified to facilitate its implementation. In January and February, German national Martin Kobler, the UN special representative for Libya and head of UNSMIL, who would be replaced by Lebanese national Ghassan Salamé in July, met in Tunisia with the president of the House of Representatives (HoR), Agila Saleh, as well as with the head of the High Council of State, Abderrahman Swefhi, in order to work on possible amendments to the Skhirat agreement. The Libyan Political Dialogue acted as a consultative forum to study options to address some of the most controversial issues with representatives from multiple sectors. The Troika of the Libyan Political Agreement, consisting of the UN, the Arab League and the AU, decided to add the EU in January 2017, making it what would go on to be called the “Quartet”, and reiterated its commitment to the pact in March. The situation was then affected by the persisting violence in the country and by other dynamics, such as obstacles to establishing the authority of the Government of National Accord (GNA) promoted by the UN and led by Fayez Sarraj; internal divisions within the Presidential Council (another institution created by the Skhirat Agreement) and the decision of several dozen legislators in the House of Representatives to vote to withdraw from the UN-sponsored dialogue in March, though this bid ultimately failed.
Thus, in April and May the delegations of the HoR and the High Council of State were designated to discuss possible changes to the agreement: a HoR dialogue committee consisting of 24 people, including three women, and a High Council of State committee with 13 members, including one woman. However, these committees had still not formally convened by mid-year. They only met informally in The Hague in May and July, under the auspices of the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Meanwhile, meetings were held between senior Libyan representatives, including a meeting between the HoR spokesperson and the head of the High Council of State in Italy in April and a meeting in Abu Dhabi (UAE) in May between Prime Minister Sarraj and opposition general Khalifa Haftar, who de facto controls the eastern part of the country and has extended its dominance to other areas of Libya. This was the first meeting in a year between the two leaders, following arrangements made by Egypt. During the meeting, Sarraj proposed his own road map for the transition in July, which included a ceasefire across Libya, the gradual merger of both rival parliaments and parliamentary and presidential elections in 2018. The second meeting between Sarraj and Haftar took place in late July in France and resulted in a 10-point statement that picked up some of these ideas, calling for a ceasefire, work on early elections and the spread of control over the territory to stop trafficking and terrorism activities. However, days later Haftar said that it would not be possible to implement everything agreed in Paris.

Diplomatic and political activity concerning the Libyan crisis intensified in September, when new UN envoy Ghassan Salamé unveiled a three-point plan to break the political impasse in the North African country by: 1) renegotiating some aspects of the 2015 agreement, 2) organising a national conference to re-energise political leaders for what remains of the transition and 3) holding elections. The plan received international support, including from the Quartet, and led to the first meeting of the dialogue committees of the HoR and the High Council of State in Tunisia in September. Each committee appointed delegates, including one woman, to form a joint drafting committee that decided to restructure the Presidential Council and establish a new executive authority. In November, UNSMIL presented both parties with a proposal based on what had been discussed in the talks, but there was no agreement in this area by the end of the year. At the same time, efforts to update the electoral census got under way. Marking the second anniversary of the Skhirat Agreement, the UN Security Council repeated in December that it was still the only viable framework for resolving the Libyan political crisis and warned of “incorrect deadlines” for its validity. Nevertheless, Haftar publicly rejected the Libyan Political Agreement and called all the institutions resulting from it obsolete, including the GNA. In a televised speech broadcast on the second anniversary of the Skhirat Agreement, Haftar declared it dead and the political entities stemming from it illegitimate. In response, the French Foreign Minister travelled to Libya and met with Sarraj and other members of the GNA in Tripoli and with Haftar in Benghazi in order to kick-start the peace process.

In addition to the aforementioned initiatives, other North African countries, European countries and regional organisations were involved in the Libyan crisis during 2017. Libya’s neighbours Tunisia, Algeria and Egypt held various meetings to address the situation there. Egypt organised meetings between military delegations from Misrata and the Libyan National Army, linked to Haftar, and Morocco hosted several meetings of the UN special envoy for implementing the action plan. The AU High Level Committee on Libya also remained active, meeting in Brazzaville in January and September; sending members of the committee to meet with the AU High Representative for Libya, former Tanzanian President Jakaya Kikwete, in May; and holding a meeting to coordinate a common approach to the Libyan crisis as part of the AU summit in Addis Ababa. In addition to efforts at these levels, other strata of Libyan society, including women, youth, tribal councils, NGOs and municipal authorities were involved in reconciliation efforts at the local and community levels. UNSMIL reports highlighted the results of bottom-up or grassroots initiatives to facilitate solutions to local conflicts in cities such as Sabha and Tripoli.

In January, a conference dedicated to the Libyan women’s agenda for peace was held in Tunis. More than 60 women participated in the conference, which was promoted by UNSMIL and UNDP and agreed on the framework to develop local and nationwide peaceful coexistence campaigns. Seven women from the different regions of Libya were designated as “focal points” of the outreach campaign, to which UNSMIL pledged technical support. Part of UNSMIL’s mission is to promote and support Libyan women’s political participation through capacity-building activities aimed at reaching 30% representation by 2018. Thus, training activities were developed for women forming part of the HoR; a study on Libyan female leadership was launched in coordination with the Ministry of Women’s Affairs and Community Development, highlighting the small percentage of women in decision-making positions; and a meeting was held on lessons learned regarding Libyan women’s participation in the political dialogue process. As previously mentioned, the delegations of the HoR and the High Council of State charged with addressing the changes to the 2015 Skhirat Agreement included women (three of 24 and one of 13, respectively). The joint committee with members of both delegations, formed after the implementation of the UN plan to break the political impasse in Libya in September, also included women (one per delegation). UNSMIL provided them with technical assistance to encourage women’s perspectives to be incorporated into the changes to the Libyan Political Agreement.
One of UN, Algeria and Mauritania (observers), 2017. The POLISARIO Front announced that it would the sustainability of the ceasefire and urged the UN Guerguerat had fuelled some deep misgivings about the environment for restarting the political negotiations. The UN Security Council admitted that the crisis in Western Sahara as part of Morocco. Rabat protested the Moroccan insignia or that displayed maps showing the passage of civilian and commercial vehicles with the member countries of the Group of Friends of Western Sahara (France, USA, Spain, United Kingdom and Russia). The UN Security Council hailed the move as a way to build trust and goodwill. In any case, the POLISARIO Front stressed that any solution to the crisis necessarily required a process of decolonisation in Western Sahara and set conditions to sustain its withdrawal, including the total departure of Moroccan forces and demonstrable progress in the negotiating process. The situation in Guerguerat remained relatively calm and free of armed actors during 2017 until late December, when a small POLISARIO delegation established a kind of monitoring post. In June, the secretariat of the UN Security Council sent verbal messages to Morocco and the POLISARIO Front proposing to address the issue of the ceasefire, such as by deploying a mission of experts, for example.

Another important event in 2017 was the change of the UN special envoy to the Sahara following the resignation of Christopher Ross. Having held the post since 2009, the US diplomat had faced increasing hostility from the Moroccan authorities, who had stated that they did not intend to hold any further meetings with him. The UN Secretary-General appointed former German President Horst Köhler to succeed Ross. Sahrawi leaders and Rabat both expressed their willingness to cooperate with the new special envoy. Thus, Köhler made his first visit to the region between 15 and 24 October and met with the highest authorities of Morocco, the POLISARIO Front, Algeria and Mauritania. In Rabouni, Köhler also met with Sahrawi youth and women. During the final quarter of the year, the special envoy held meetings with the member countries of the Group of Friends of Western Sahara (France, Russia, Spain, the United Kingdom and the United States). Before the end of 2017, Köhler proposed that the parties to the conflict and neighbouring countries hold bilateral meetings for in-depth consultations that were accepted by both sides and began in January 2018.

Also of note was the Moroccan king’s speech to mark the 42nd anniversary of the Green March in November 2017, in which he declared that his country’s commitment to Western Sahara was based on four principles: 1) the rejection of any solution that does not involve Morocco’s full sovereignty over Western Sahara and its bid for autonomy; 2) the participation of all parties that share responsibilities for the conflict in a final solution (Rabat is in favour of involving Algeria more directly); 3) the recognition of the UN Security Council as the only body responsible for supervising the process; and 4) the rejection of “obsolete proposals” that diverted attention from the terms of reference that Morocco believes should govern any agreement. Leaders of the POLISARIO Front said that the king’s speech showed that Morocco was wriggling out of its commitments to the peace process.

Another significant event in 2017, which occurred just

The conflict between Morocco and the POLISARO Front for Western Sahara was characterised by ongoing deadlock in the negotiations and by various dynamics that showed the tension between the parties. One of the most problematic events, originating in late 2016, was related to tension in Guerguerat, in an area near the border with Mauritania, where both sides deployed armed forces. The incident began after Morocco began work to pave a road in the region, which is considered a “buffer zone”, and whose access is therefore restricted between the actors in dispute, the inability of the UN to set up a consultation on the future of this territory, and regional rivalry between Morocco and Algeria – a key support for the POLISARIO Front – and by the support given to Rabat by some key international actors, such as the USA or France. This, in real terms, has meant a prevalence of the Moroccan thesis when approaching the conflict.

The UN Security Council admitted that the crisis in Guerguerat had fuelled some deep misgivings about the sustainability of the ceasefire and urged the UN Security Council to explore formulas to address the issue. Morocco decided to withdraw its troops in February 2017. The POLISARIO Front announced that it would reciprocate on 28 April, the same day that MINURSO’s mandate was renewed for another year. According to the leaders of the Sahrawi movement, their decision to pull back their forces sprang from their desire for a negotiated solution to the conflict and was taken in response to appeals from friendly countries. Members of the UN Security Council hailed the move as a way to build trust and goodwill. In any case, the POLISARIO Front stressed that any solution to the crisis necessarily required a process of decolonisation in Western Sahara and set conditions to sustain its withdrawal, including the total departure of Moroccan forces and demonstrable progress in the negotiating process. The situation in Guerguerat remained relatively calm and free of armed actors during 2017 until late December, when a small POLISARIO delegation established a kind of monitoring post. In June, the secretariat of the UN Security Council sent verbal messages to Morocco and the POLISARIO Front proposing to address the issue of the ceasefire, such as by deploying a mission of experts, for example.

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after the year began, was the African Union’s decision to readmit Morocco, which had not been a member for more than three decades. The AU expressed its hope that reinstating Morocco’s membership could facilitate a settlement of the dispute over Western Sahara. Rabat decided to leave the AU in 1984 after it decided to incorporate the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic (SADR). The readmission of Morocco, which was supported by 39 of the 54 countries that make up the AU, was considered a diplomatic defeat for Algeria. The POLISARIO Front claimed that Morocco was admitted under the premise that the SADR would continue to be part of the African Union and said that its statutes do not allow for the suspension or expulsion of any of its members. However, analysis said that Morocco has not changed its policy on Western Sahara despite its unconditional return to the AU, so there is a prospect of permanent struggle in the pan-African organisation. In fact, Morocco chose not to attend the AU’s Peace and Security Council in March to assess the situation of Western Sahara.

Furthermore, in April 2017 Morocco permitted the return of 17 MINURSO members who had not been able to resume their duties since March 2016, when Rabat took issue with statements made by the UN Secretary-General at the time, Ban Ki-moon, alluding to the (Moroccan) “occupation” of Western Sahara. This episode led to the expulsion of most of the civilians working on the mission. Meanwhile, the programme of confidence-building measures remained at a standstill. It has been suspended since mid-2014. According to figures collected by UNHCR, more than 12,000 people were still awaiting the possibility of benefiting from family visits. In terms of human rights, Morocco continued to delay the visit of the special rapporteur on torture and other cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment, originally scheduled for April 2015. As such, complaints continued about the lack of investigation into allegations of abuse against Sahrawi people, as well as the problems faced by Sahrawi human rights NGOs in pursuing their activities and the harassment of activists. Rabat also upheld its policy of expelling foreigners from the territories it considers part of its “southern provinces”, including journalists and human rights advocates.