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Intervention of the Cardinal Secretary of State at the 74th Session of the United Nations General Assembly on the Central African Republic

The following is the intervention given by Cardinal Secretary of State Pietro Parolin, head of the Holy See Delegation, on 26 September in New York, at the 74th Session of the United Nations General Assembly, at the *Ministerial-Level Meeting on the Central African Republic*:

Intervention of the Cardinal Secretary of State

Mr. Chair,

During last year's High-Level Ministerial Meeting (27 September 2018), concern was expressed regarding the precarious humanitarian situation across the country. Lately, we have witnessed concrete signs of hope and some positive steps. Since the signing in Bangui, last February, of the long-awaited *Accord Politique pour la Paix et la Réconciliation en République Centrafricaine* between the Government and fourteen armed groups, levels of violence have dropped significantly. It must be reiterated that the complex crisis in the Central African Republic cannot and will not be solved by recourse to violence.

Now that the new electoral code has been validated in view of the 2020/2021 elections, it is imperative that both the season of campaigning and the return to the polls scheduled for late December 2020 be harnessed as a renewed opportunity to set the country on the road to lasting peace and stability. The international community is called to assist the Central African Republic to ensure safe, free, fair and democratic elections.

In this context, it is crucial to ensure the full protection of the civilian population and of humanitarian actors in accordance with the principles of International Humanitarian Law. The armed groups have committed specifically to upholding these principles in signing the Agreement. Even though the country is moving closer to stabilization, there is a danger that humanitarian needs may be overlooked. An indicator of this is the fact that the Humanitarian Response Plan for 2019 is less than 50 percent funded.

In particular, we cannot minimize the impact the conflict has had on children in a country where still, to this day, three million people, some two-thirds of the population, are in need of humanitarian assistance, over half of whom are children. In this regard, I would like to note the contribution the Holy See has made to support the general rehabilitation of the country's only children's hospital, the construction of a specialized center for therapeutic nutrition, and the continued formation of pediatric medical professionals, to ensure that the *Complexe Pédiatrique de Bangui* is able to offer high quality service for many years to come. Pope Francis personally championed these initiatives following his visit to Bangui in 2015.

Mr. Chair,

The Central African Republic is a country with remarkable potential, not only from the point of view of natural resources, but above all because of its young and vibrant population. It is time for it to emerge from poverty and conflict and for its citizens to move irreversibly along the path of integral development. While this responsibility primarily falls on the leaders of the country, it is incumbent upon the international community to help them to make it reality.

Thank you for your kind attention.
