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# Demilitarization and prison reform in Central African Republic

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## Acronyms

CAR	Central African Republic
CFA	Communauté Financière Africaine - African Financial Community (CFA franc – the national currency of CAR)
CSC	Correctional Service Canada
CSO	Civil society organisation
DGSP	Direction générale des services pénitentiaires - Directorate General of Prison Services
DPO	United Nations Department of Peace Operations
ENAM	École nationale d'administration et de Magistrature - National School of Administration and Judiciary
FACA	Forces armées centrafricaines – Central African Armed Forces
GoF	Group of Friends of Corrections in Peace Operations - a Member States-driven initiative providing support and expert advice on correctional issues to the Department of Peacekeeping Operations
INL	US State Department Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs
JCS	Justice and Corrections Section at MINUSCA
ICRC	International Committee of the Red Cross
MINUSCA	United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic
MoJ	Ministry of Justice
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
PA	Penitentiary administration
PRI	Penal Reform International
RESA	Rétablissement et de l'extension de l'autorité de l'Etat – reestablishment and extension of state authority
SCR	Security Council Resolution
ToT	Training of Trainers
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Program

*A note on terminology:* The term corrections is used in this report. Corrections is the term used by UN DPO missions. It refers to those functions of government associated with the implementation of sentences and sanctions to people convicted of criminal offenses, usually consisting of deprivation of liberty. Prisons, penitentiary service and penitentiary administration are also used.

# Executive Summary

## Introduction

Penal Reform International has been engaging in the Central African Republic as an implementing partner of the UN stabilisation mission, MINUSCA, since late 2017 to support the development and implementation of a demilitarisation strategy. The strategy would see the full replacement of the armed forces who are responsible for prison security and management with civilian personnel.

The purpose of this evaluation is to assess the outcomes of PRI's activity in CAR with a focus on the effectiveness and added value of the approach taken. The evaluation also seeks to establish lessons learned and recommendations for PRI's ongoing work in CAR as well as for any comparable projects PRI may undertake in other countries.

## Background and context

The Central African Republic has been engaged in a civil war for eight years and as a result is in a humanitarian crisis with high levels of instability and violence. There is weak governance and high levels of corruption within the country with parts of the country not under government control. Prisons are not a priority for the country and even though there has been a law since 2012 which mandates civilian control of prisons, it has been weakly enforced due to the conflict.

In the prisons under government control, security is provided by the FACA and there are few civilian prison officers and MINUSCA corrections officers. Overcrowding is extremely high (at over 200%), there is insufficient budget to provide for the basic needs of people in detention and there have been reports of human rights violations due to the poor conditions.

In 2016, through UN SCR 2301, demilitarisation of CAR's prisons was added to MINUSCA's mandate, however it lacked the internal capacity to support the development of a strategy or process, hence the need to partner with PRI.

## Methodology

This internal evaluation was conducted primarily through one-to-one interviews with 29 respondents from CAR government agencies, CSOs, MINUSCA, international organisations and donor agencies and PRI. Data were also collected and analysed from project documents and external sources. The evaluation was conducted by a three-person team, two PRI staff based in London and an independent consultant based in Bangui.

The evaluation team attempted to interview a wide range of stakeholders to obtain a comprehensive account of the project and plurality of views. A general question guide was drawn up and tailored to each respondent depending on their involvement in the project and the evaluation team also asked follow-up questions.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the London-based staff were unable to travel to Bangui to conduct the evaluation. The London-based team members undertook interviews over video conference and the local consultant carried out interviews with stakeholders in person where video conference would not be possible. The inability of the PRI staff members to travel to CAR has had an impact on the overall analysis of findings as it means they cannot be fully contextualised and understood in terms of the local conditions, culture and ways of working.

## Findings

### *Development of the strategy*

The main achievement from this phase of the project was the development and adoption of a demilitarisation strategy which was responsive and relevant to the needs and challenges in CAR. While developed by external consultants, the process for the strategy's development attempted to be inclusive and educational, by informing the most relevant stakeholders of why such a method for planning the demilitarisation process was necessary and how they would need to be involved in it. This could have gone further by using the opportunity of developing the new strategy to develop collaboration and cooperation between government ministries and an understanding of the responsibilities necessary for its implementation, especially among very senior government officials.

The final product is ambitious and appropriate to the priorities and particularly the security concerns of stakeholders, but unfortunately did not benefit from the expertise within PRI due mainly to a lack of language capacity in PRI at the time.

The strategy has been taken on board and owned by the CAR government; it was officially adopted by CAR's Prime Minister in January 2019. The former director general of Prison Services also reportedly referred to the strategy as *his* strategy.

### *Implementation of the strategy*

Following the successful development and adoption of the demilitarisation strategy, PRI began to support the penitentiary administration implement the strategy. The implementation has so far focused on component three of the strategy: "Security of the prisons and professionalisation of the penitentiary administration" and the development of human resources to create a strong and competent organisation which could fully take over and manage prisons professionally. PRI also attempted to integrate other demilitarisation efforts which were taking place simultaneously to the demilitarisation strategy, namely the training of 300 civilian prison officers by the PA, funded and managed by INL, UNDP and MINUSCA. PRI, in collaboration with MINUSCA, achieved this through first training a small group of existing prison officers to become the professional prison trainers and be involved in the training of the new civilian prison officers. In doing so, PRI contributed to plugging a gap in the demilitarization process, and ensured that the officers recruited to replace the military would actually receive the relevant training in prison management but also that the PA would have the capacity to manage these officers through the ongoing management training of senior staff at PA headquarters.

In order to widen involvement in the strategy implementation process, PRI helped create a civil society platform comprising national human rights organisations who would be able to oversee and support the government's implementation of the strategy, raise public awareness and help mobilize resources. This is the first such civil society platform involved in prisons in CAR and is already working productively with the PA and MoJ. The platform is diverse with each organisation having its own focus or group it represents, bringing a plurality of views to benefit the demilitarization process. Because they are CAR nationals, the group also brings national ownership to the strategy which is itself an achievement in a country with a very dominant UN peacekeeping presence. Having national civil society organisations visit prisons and talk to people in prison in their own language is a hugely beneficial element to the demilitarization and reform process. By engaging local non-governmental actors, PRI is ensuring sustainability by equipping them with the skills and tools to pursue the promotion of the human rights of people in prison in the long term.

The biggest challenge to fully implementing the strategy is the lack of financial resources and especially a dedicated budget. CAR is a very low-resource country and there are many other priorities for funds, not least the humanitarian needs of the population. However, PRI's approach in

providing support and achieving small wins, demonstrates to senior stakeholders the value of the prison reform and demilitarization process and may lead to their eventual greater participation and buy-in and prioritization of prisons. If PRI can link the demilitarization and reform process to the broader development of the country this may be key to bring senior members of government onboard.

## **Conclusion**

Thanks to PRI's support through mentoring, training, coalition and consensus building, as well as its adaptability, resilience and technical expertise, CAR is on track to achieving demilitarisation and being able to reform its prisons to bring them up to international human rights standards and ensure they have rehabilitation at their heart.

The main outcomes that PRI's work has contributed to are the development and adoption of the strategy and the increasing involvement of authorities in this process, the creation of a pool of prison trainers in the PA, building the capacity and professionalisation of the PA headquarters and the formation of the first civil society platform to be involved in prisons and the reform process.

PRI's involvement did not only enable the strategy to be created (because MINUSCA lacked the capacity, expertise and independence) but enabled it to be created in a way that reflected the context of the country and involved relevant stakeholders. More significantly, PRI's approach since the strategy was developed has been one which supports and promotes national ownership and leadership, builds on existing resources and structures, and provides technical expertise and knowledge of international best practice. This approach will likely have sustainable results because it has required the investment of national stakeholders.

Challenges such as the security situation, the turnover of senior staff and the ongoing COVID-19 global pandemic have created delays to some of PRI's planned activities, but they are not likely to prevent the eventual achievement of any goals due to the flexible approach and close contact of PRI with stakeholder groups.

PRI should continue to position itself serving a coordinating and resource role to ensure the continued strategic and systematic approach to the demilitarization process with support of national and international actors, but which is singularly lead by the CAR government.

## **Recommendations**

Based on the findings, the evaluators make the following recommendations to PRI:

### *For the remainder of the project*

- 1 Recruiting local staff would allow for greater national ownership of the strategy and reform process, it would no longer be an entirely foreign driven process and would allow PRI to be able to contribute to the national debate on prisons, human rights and criminal justice. This has already begun with the creation of the civil society platform but it needs to expand to better engage parliament and the media to raise national awareness of prisons and their conditions.
- 2 PRI should continue to conduct capacity building for PA staff, as well as at the highest levels of government, and invest in continuous professional development to further specialize and upskill prison staff to enable to provide the support and services needed in prisons such as rehabilitation and dynamic security as well as help the PA define its role and capacity as an institution.
- 3 Although perhaps beyond PRI's direct influence and expertise, PRI should ensure it is involved in conversations about how the eventual transition from military to civilian

control will look especially regarding the redistribution of resources and redeployment of military personnel.

- 4 There needs to be a coordinated and common goal agreed within the international community but also between the international community and national stakeholders. PRI should aim to support the coordination of efforts to ensure the PA and MoJ is fully aware of all projects being undertaken and that they are in line with the strategy and its action plan.

*For new and similar work in comparable countries*

- 5 If external consultants are to be hired again in a similar manner to this project, PRI should ensure it has sufficient capacity and resources to make the relationship with consultants a collaborative one, so that the project can benefit from PRI's expertise.
- 6 From the outset, create the working dynamics required for the efficient implementation of the reforms/strategy during the development of the planned reforms/strategy. PRI and donors should not underestimate the time and costs involved to establish trust and good working relationships with government leaders and should allow for creative solutions to this.
- 7 The co-location of PRI's programme manager within the DGSP's office has been a particularly successful added-value element of PRI's approach in CAR. PRI should adopt this approach for similar contexts, where complex transformation is sought or where there are limited capacities in government institutions.
- 8 PRI should undertake a broader examination of criminal justice beyond prisons to including prisons, law enforcement, sentencing etc. Even if this lies beyond the scope of the initial task (i.e. a prison demilitarization strategy), it is an important endeavour to understanding the challenges faced by prisons and further reforms that PRI may support on.



## 1. Introduction

This report details the findings of an internal evaluation undertaken in August and September 2020 of Penal Reform International's engagement in the Central African Republic (CAR) since the end of 2017 to support the development and implementation of a prison demilitarisation strategy. Penal Reform International (PRI) serves as an implementing partner of the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA) under its mandate to take steps to demilitarise the prisons and replace the armed forces currently running them with civilian prison personnel.

For the purposes of this evaluation, the project has taken place in two phases, the first began late 2017 to early 2018 with PRI's support for the development of a strategy which would see the demilitarisation of CAR's prison system. The second phase began after the strategy was finalised and endorsed by the government and encompasses PRI's support to national stakeholders for its implementation.

This evaluation takes place almost three years after PRI was first approached by MINUSCA's corrections department to work in CAR and seeks to establish the outcomes of PRI's work so far and particularly how effective PRI's approach has been in the development and implementation of the strategy. Based on the evaluation's findings, lessons learned and recommendations are elaborated for the future of the project as well as for adoption in any comparable work PRI may do in other countries.

This evaluation falls under PRI's commitment to learning and sharing. PRI aims to ensure that all of PRI works in synergy, is reflective, and uses and builds internal and external expertise.

## 2. Background and context

### 2.1 Central African Republic and its prisons

Central African Republic has been engaged in a civil war between government authorities and non-state armed groups since 2012. The conflict is characterized by high levels of inter-communal violence especially between Christian and Muslim armed groups. Ceasefires were agreed in 2014 and 2015 but these have had a little impact on decreasing violence in the country. Because of the conflict and the presence of armed groups, the government does not have full jurisdiction over the country. There is weak governance and competition between government agencies over financial resources, most of which come from international donors.

The conflict has exacerbated poverty levels and stymied human development: 70 per cent of the population lives below the international poverty line, 41 per cent suffer from malnutrition and life expectancy stands at 53 years.<sup>1</sup> Due to the conflict there are also high levels of internal displacement, with over half a million currently internally displaced.<sup>2</sup> There are a high number of significant development and humanitarian needs across the country, not least, ending the conflict, protecting the rights of citizens and improving the country's infrastructure and public services.

In April 2014, the United Nations Security Council signed Resolution 2149 which gave the mandate to establish the deployment of a peacekeeping mission – Mission Multidimensionnelle Intégrée des Nations Unies pour la Stabilisation en République Centrafricaine (MINUSCA) initially for one year but its mandated has been renewed by the Security Council since. The mission's original mandate included protection of civilians, supporting the country's transition to peace and delivering humanitarian assistance and promoting human rights. It also required MINUSCA "To provide support

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/centralafricanrepublic/overview>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.internal-displacement.org/countries/central-african-republic>

and to coordinate international assistance to build the capacities and enhance the effectiveness of the criminal justice system ... as well as the effectiveness and the accountability of police and penitentiary system”.<sup>3</sup> Subsequently, demilitarisation of the country’s prisons where the FACA (Forces Armées Centrafricaines – Central African Armed Forces) would be replaced by civilian personnel and access to fair and equal justice for all would be ensured was added to the MINUSCA’s mandate by SCR 2301 in 2016. MINUSCA is required to support public safety in CAR through the arrest of those who have been responsible for serious human rights violations in connection to the conflict to ensure they are brought to justice. To achieve these, the mandate includes the deployment of corrections officers; in November 2019, the security council renewed MINUSCA’s mandate until November 2020, maintaining its personnel levels including 108 corrections officers.<sup>4</sup>

Few prisons in CAR are functioning fully with many having been destroyed in the conflict, others are in parts of the country not under government control. Perimeter security of CAR’s prisons is currently provided by the FACA, with some instances of the military operating inside prisons. FACA officers are not trained to manage prisons and as a result there have instances of corruption, mismanagement and abuse of detainees. MINUSCA’s corrections officers operate inside prisons across the country where the government has jurisdiction as well as a few penitentiary administration (PA) officers. The functioning prisons have a capacity for 1,088 persons but as of November 2020 held 1,380 detainees (including 37 adult women and 41 boys ) making an overcrowding level of 124.8 per cent. 85.7% (1,165) of the prison population are pre-trial detainees.<sup>5</sup> The annual budget of the PA to provide food and healthcare for all its detainees is 277,338,000 CFA (around €422,799). This is a significant increase in the budget since the demilitarisation strategy was written that quoted an annual budget of 21.06million CFA (around €32,000). It is however still insufficient to properly manage the prison population humanely and meet basic needs. There have been reports of human rights violations in CAR’s prisons due to the poor detention conditions and mismanagement of detainees.

## 2.2 Previous efforts at reform.

Although CAR’s prisons are *de facto* under the control of the military, CAR law (Penal law n°12/003 of 2012) states ‘the public penitentiary service is provided by civilian personnel...’ (Article 12). Because of the ongoing civil war, few efforts have been made by the national government to implement this law and management by the military continues. Since the addition of demilitarisation to MINUSCA’s mandate in 2016 there have been several attempts but these were unsuccessful as they were unrealistic or failed to garner sufficient buy-in from government authorities. However separate strategies were elaborated for reforming different areas in need of reform such as on social reintegration (the National Strategy for the Social Reintegration of Detainees 2017- 2022) and healthcare (National Healthcare Policy for Prison Establishments) but there was no overarching strategy developed.

## 2.3 Description of project

In late 2017, MINUSCA contracted PRI as an implementing partner primarily to support the CAR government to develop a strategy to demilitarize its prisons. The strategy would aim to transfer responsibility for prison security from the FACA to civilian management. PRI also proposed that the strategy encompass broader reforms to address the following priorities: reducing the prison population; Infrastructure ; Rehabilitation and reintegration of prisoners; Standard Operating Procedures; Human Resources – including phasing out of military personnel, recruitment and training of civilian staff; Liaison with other criminal justice stakeholders; Funding and budget

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<sup>3</sup> MINUSCA mandate <https://minusca.unmissions.org/en/mandate>

<sup>4</sup> UN SCR 2499 [https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BFCF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/S\\_RES\\_2499\(2019\)\\_E.pdf](https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BFCF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/S_RES_2499(2019)_E.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> MINUSCA Section des Affaires Judiciaires et Penitentiaires Unite des affaires penitentiaires “Résumé des statistiques de la population carcérale, période du 29 Octobre au 04 Novembre 2020”

resources and; Challenges and risks. PRI also proposed drafting standard operating procedures or regulations which would include reference to international standards and recommend changes in legislation or regulations as needed and also identify training needs and agree an outline for a professional training programme for prison managers and civilian staff.

Shortly after the project began PRI discovered that there was already a series of decrees which provided standard operating procedures for prison administration and management prepared by MINUSCA and being used in three prisons. This component was therefore dropped at the time to avoid duplication of efforts (although PRI has now started developing SOPs where it has identified gaps and deficiencies). The training component also did not take place until after the strategy was adopted.

The strategy development process was led by two external consultants recruited by PRI with some involvement from PRI's Executive Director at the time and PRI's Deputy Director of its Middle East and North Africa programme. The consultants led a series of consultations with representatives of government agencies including the Ministry of Justice (MoJ) and the penitentiary administration (PA), international organisation and donors and national civil society to gain their input into the strategy. In late 2018 the strategy was finalised and published and endorsed by the Minister of Justice and in January 2019 the Prime Minister, Simplicie Sarandji, gave his endorsement.

The strategy addresses five areas for reform:

1. Security and humanisation of detention: ensuring that the basic needs of people in prison are met including access to water, adequate food and healthcare.
2. Security and safety of prisons: transferring the responsibility of security to an exclusively civilian personnel and administration, as well as ensuring the physical security of prisons, implementation of rules and procedures and developing prison intelligence (dynamic security).
3. Improving of the professionalism of the penitentiary administration: developing an organisational structure and a training programme for recruits and staff which responds to the duties required as well as ensuring strategic workforce planning.
4. Legality of detention: ensuring that detention is legal and legitimate through increasing access to justice for people in detention and strengthening judicial reviews of detention.
5. Public security and social reintegration policy for detainees: the development of rehabilitation and reintegration programmes to help prisons be more secure but also contribute to reducing reoffending.

Since the endorsement and adoption of the strategy, PRI's efforts have been centred around supporting its implementation. The first step was to help establish and coordinate a series of MoJ committees which would provide political backing to the implementation process, coordinate activities and exchange of information and administer activities. The committees are led by senior MoJ and penitentiary officials as well as representatives from national CSOs, MINUSCA, international organisations, UN agencies and PRI. PRI drafted the decrees to establish these committees and held meetings with all these stakeholders to communicate the purpose of the committees, their role in the committees and attain their agreement to be involved the process.

PRI also conducted a training of trainers so penitentiary administration (PA) staff can train new civilian prison staff and a training workshop for senior PA leaders on management, human resources and finance for the purposes of building capacities and competencies required to implement the strategy and manage a fully functioning prison system. PRI also provided office equipment, computers, supplies, IT and internet connections to the PA headquarters.

In order to expand involvement in and oversight of the strategy to civic actors, PRI helped establish a civil society platform in February 2020. The group, named the Plateforme d'appui aux réformes du

système pénitentiaire en République centrafricaine - PARSP-RCA (platform to support reforms of the prison system in Central African Republic) comprises eight Central African civil society organisations including human rights organisations and women's rights orgs. The purpose of the platform has been to act as an independent, civic body ensuring the government stick to its commitments regarding the strategy through raising public awareness nationally and internationally, conducting advocacy and lobbying to support and push through reforms and promoting and defending the rights of people in detention and conducting public monitoring of places of detention.

The platform has conducted a few visits to prisons in Bangui but, due to the COVID-19 global pandemic, has had to postpone most activities. The only substantive activity conducted so far has been a workshop for prison officers and people in detention at two prisons in Bangui (a men's prison and women's prison) on how to prevent the spread of COVID-19. PRI involved an NGO with public health expertise to train the platform members to be able to conduct these workshops. PRI also provided hygiene materials and facemasks to distribute to detainees and staff.

A national conference on the demilitarization process so far in CAR was supposed to be organised in May 2020 but was postponed to October 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The conference, when it does take place in October, will present all the work done since the start of the strategy implementation.

## **2.4 Purpose of evaluation**

The purpose of this evaluation is to assess the outcomes, effectiveness and added value of PRI's work on the development of the demilitarisation strategy and its implementation since late 2017, particularly looking at the actions PRI has taken and the distinctiveness of its approach in the achievement of the strategy and its successful implementation thus far. PRI is an implementing partner of MINUSCA and works under its mandate as laid out by the relevant UN Security Council resolution. PRI supports MINUSCA to take steps to demilitarise the prisons and replace the armed forces currently running them with civilian prison personnel, thus outcomes and achievements should be viewed through this lens.

The evaluation will capture lessons learned that can feed into improved practice in PRI's ongoing work in both CAR and future work in comparable countries, especially post-conflict countries and stabilisation and peacebuilding settings where PRI aims to increase the value of criminal justice reform. The evaluation will also serve as a useful assessment for MINUSCA on how it works with NGOs in its interventions.

PRI intends to use the evaluation as a learning document to understand how its involvement and particular methodology adds value to projects and contexts like these. The evaluation will be useful for MINUSCA and CAR government stakeholders to track the efforts which have taken place so far, serve as a comprehensive account of the project and demonstrate the utility of PRI's approach.

## **3. Methodology**

The evaluation was conducted through the following six steps 1. Definition of the terms of the evaluation, its scope, focus and how its findings will be used 2. Tracing what took place and examining the activities PRI has undertaken in CAR since the first talks began with MINUSCA 3. Identifying sources of information about the project including internal and external project documents produced by PRI, sources from MINUSCA and third parties, and compiling a list of stakeholders associated and/or impacted by the project to be interviewed by the evaluation team 4. Conducting interviews with identified stakeholders as well as gathering relevant information from identified documents 5. Analysis of the data, identifying outcomes, successful processes and methods and recommendations for improvement, and drafting the report 6. Sharing the report with PRI staff responsible for the project for feedback and finalizing the report for publication.

Data collection for the evaluation was primarily conducted through a series of semi-structured one-to-one interviews over Microsoft Teams and in person. Interviews took place with 29 individuals from the following stakeholder groups:

- Penitentiary administration
- Ministry of Justice
- National civil society organisations
- The Justice and Corrections Section (JCS) at MINUSCA headquarters in Bangui and those deployed to prisons
- UN DPO headquarters in New York
- International organisations and donors involved in justice and corrections in CAR
- PRI staff, as well as external consultants recruited by PRI and former staff involved in the project

Analysis of the following internal and external project documents was also undertaken:

- Project proposals drafted by PRI to MINUSCA
- Reports produced by PRI to MINUSCA
- National Demilitarisation Strategy for Central African Republic
- Action plan
- As well as associated documents related to prisons in CAR, news articles from MINUSCA and PRI, UN Security Council Resolutions etc.

The evaluation was undertaken by PRI's Strategy and Impact Manager based in London with support on data collection and analysis from the Fundraising and Programme Development Coordinator also based in London and from an independent consultant based in Bangui. Stakeholder interviews were divided among the evaluation team members with the independent consultant conducting interviews in Bangui with those for whom a video call would not be possible, other interviews with French-only speakers were conducted by the Fundraising and Programme Development Coordinator and the remaining were conducted by the Strategy and Impact Manager.

Due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, travel to Central African Republic by the London-based team members was not possible, hence the need to involve a local consultant to conduct some interviews in person. The inability of the other members of the evaluation team does impact the overall analysis of findings as we were unable to fully appreciate the local conditions, culture and ways of working in CAR which would provide context and a deeper explanation to the findings.

The selection of stakeholders for interview was based primarily on a list of persons provided by the project's manager. Because the evaluators wanted to get as comprehensive an overview of the project as possible it was decided to attempt to interview everyone on this list as well as a few others signposted by interviewees or identified through project documents. Despite multiple attempts by the consultant based in Bangui, she was unable to interview a few government representatives associated with the project. It is speculated that their refusal was due to personal differences with those in charge at the Directorate General for Prison Service (DGSP). One interviewee was also unavailable to be interviewed in person but agreed to respond to questions over email.

All the members of the evaluation team explained the purpose of the evaluation and how their responses would be used at the start of each interview. A general interview question guide was drawn up and made specific for each stakeholder interview through removing questions not relevant to the individual and adding in more appropriate questions. The questions served only as a guide and evaluation team members were free to probe and ask further follow up questions depending on how the interview was flowing (see the Annex for the general interview guide).

## 4. Findings

### 4.1 Development of the strategy

#### 4.1.1 Description of method

Although CAR's 2012 penal law has stated that prisons should be under civilian management, the CAR government was yet to initiate this process. The proposal for a demilitarization strategy came from MINUSCA after it was included in the renewal of its mandate through SCR 2301 in 2016. The chief of the corrections unit at MINUSCA was keen to develop a process for this but keenly aware of their own capacity limitations in designing such a strategy. PRI, having had some contact in the past with DPO representatives at various conferences and events and a previous project involving the training of DPO corrections officers, was a known entity and had a good reputation so was approached by MINUSCA to support the development of a strategy. Due to a lack of French speaking staff with the capacity to carry out this work at the time, PRI outsourced the task of developing the strategy to two independent consultants. The consultants who were selected had both worked for PRI as heads of mission in sub-Saharan African countries in the early to mid-2000s and have extensive experience as penal reform experts. Two PRI staff members and the consultants travelled to Bangui in early 2018 for introductory meetings with national government stakeholders and MINUSCA. This first visit helped elaborate the plan for developing the strategy. The two consultants then went on a second visit primarily to consult with stakeholders and collect data and information for the strategy. They had meetings with over 50 stakeholders and held focus group meetings to gain a more in-depth understanding of the priority topics such as overcrowding and detention conditions including the provision of health services, the role of civil society in access to rights and services, professionalisation of the penitentiary administration and prison security challenges of the demilitarisation process.

The strategy was drafted by the consultants based on what was proposed by PRI to MINUSCA as well as their findings from their visits to CAR. In late 2018 the strategy was finalised and adopted by the Minister of Justice and in January 2019 by the Prime Minister. A two- year action plan to guide the implementation of the strategy was also drafted by the consultants. The demilitarisation strategy now forms part of the MoJ's larger justice sector strategy and takes account of all of its components.

#### 4.1.2 Analysis

##### 4.1.2.1 Ownership of the process and involvement of stakeholders

Although the impetus to demilitarize CAR's prisons came from MINUSCA, the proposed design for how the strategy would look and what it would address that was included in MINUSCA's contract with PRI was developed by PRI.

Due to the push coming from MINUSCA for the demilitarization, there were questions around the commitment of government stakeholders and the ability to mobilise the required resources for its implementation. The external consultants recruited by PRI tried to overcome initial reluctance by government stakeholders through holding a series of mainly bilateral meetings to inform them of what the strategy was and its purpose. Nearly all government interview respondents who were consulted on and involved in the strategy development commented on the inclusive approach taken by PRI although some said it could have been even broader to include people in prison themselves, local authorities and opinion leaders. According to the consultants it was a very challenging process as even the concept of a strategy was new to government representatives so much time had to be spent by the consultants informing them of what it would entail. In actuality, MoJ and PA stakeholders were not fully on board with the strategy until it had been drafted and finalised.

The demilitarization strategy expands the concept of demilitarization beyond replacing military personnel with civilians, in that it considers a broader definition of security to include human security through ensuring the needs of people in prison are met and envisaging a professionalized

civilian workforce, however there are some gaps in the strategy. Several interview respondents commented that it was unfortunate that the strategy was not even wider in its consideration of prisons to examine the entire criminal justice system and question the use of imprisonment. Others stated that there was not sufficient concern for accountability and for protecting human rights.

The rather narrow focus of the strategy on prison conditions is probably down to MINUSCA's mandate and the original proposal to focus on prison demilitarization and through this process focusing on improving prison management and detention conditions. An inclusion in the strategy of why people are imprisoned is important but probably beyond the scope of what was envisaged by MINUSCA and PRI at the time. In addition, there are other agencies which work on other areas of criminal justice reform in CAR, thus there may not have been scope or need for PRI to also work on these areas.

#### **4.1.2.2 Appropriateness of approach**

Several respondents commented that more could have been done to obtain the cooperation and participation of government stakeholders in the strategy development process, especially cooperation between ministries. Due to the conflict and lack of government resources there are high levels of competition between ministries. Such cooperation is essential for the success of the strategy and its implementation as it will require the involvement of not just the PA and MoJ but the Ministry of Defence which governs the FACA, the Ministry of Health and Ministries which would need to be involved in the rehabilitation and reintegration of people who have served their sentence. One respondent suggested that trust and team building could have been achieved through a retreat for senior leaders in these ministries and government agencies but there was a very real concern that this would be viewed as corruption.

The consultants leading on the development of the strategy also could have undertaken more visits to CAR to engage with stakeholders but only missions for the development of the strategy the gathering of data and information were planned.

Another deficiency in the development of the strategy was that there was little guidance and input from PRI on how the strategy could be developed, the process was very much left to the decision of the consultants who were working within the guidance and budget limitations set by MINUSCA and PRI in terms of number of days they were contracted for and input into the actual approach.

Representatives of international organisations and donors were involved somewhat in the strategy consultation process. However, one or two respondents to the evaluation were not fully aware of the strategy process or did not become fully aware of it until after the strategy had been finalised and PRI had begun supporting its implementation. Perhaps due to the lack of in-country visibility PRI had during the strategy development phase, due to not having a permanent presence, international actors were fully aware of or engaged in the process. On the whole though, representatives of international organisations have welcomed PRI's approach to the strategy and found its content appropriate.

#### **4.1.2.3 PRI's added value**

MINUSCA stated that the reason for contracting PRI was because they lacked the expertise and capacity internally to lead the strategic planning process itself. PRI, being an entirely prisons and criminal justice focused organisation, brought very technical expertise and as well as an independent, nonpolitical voice to the process. MINUSCA, as a large peacekeeping operation with a very visible presence which wields substantial power in CAR would not be perceived as nonpartisan in this process. Most stakeholders in the PA and MoJ are under little illusion of the status of PRI as an implementing partner, yet PRI is still seen and valued as a trusted partner with relevant expertise.

PRI was selected by MINUSCA for its practical approach to penal reform processes. PRI has experience in seeing through whole processes from the development of strategies and guidelines and the practical implementation of these. Although demilitarization, working with UN peacekeeping missions and to an extent working in conflict settings is unfamiliar territory for PRI (PRI had done some training for DPO corrections officers previously and it has worked in a few conflict zones before), its specialist expertise in all aspects of penal reform and ability to understand the full picture and all the necessary components allowed it to make achievable and appropriate proposals, making it uniquely suited to this project.

In terms of the drafting of the strategy, PRI's actual added value was limited. Due to a lack of capacity and language skills available at PRI at the time, PRI was unable to take on the project alone and had to outsource the task to external consultants. Although these consultants were actually former PRI staff and were selected partly because of this as they understood PRI's method of working with local partners to gain their trust and buy-in there was, according to the consultant interviewed, little participation or input from PRI in the strategy development process. The strategy does offer a realistic reflection of needs and deficiencies in the CAR prison system and provides realistic and tangible strategies but would still have benefitted from the input of PRI's current staff. At the very least, the strategy did not benefit from a peer review and critical interrogation of its content from the wealth of expertise available in PRI. And at the most, it is missing an inclusion of relevant aspects of reform that comprise PRI's core work and approach to criminal justice reform, for example an overarching accountability approach – both internal and external.

PRI's initial engagement in CAR was not the usual way for PRI to work or approach working in a new country. Before starting the strategy, PRI did not have local partners, knew very little about the country and the context, were not invited by the government and had not had any contact with them. PRI's first step is usually to assess needs and priorities of government and civil society stakeholders. The approach here was entirely different due to the presence and mandate of MINUSCA.

PRI recruited external consultants who lead the development of the strategy with national stakeholders, however the project was designed by PRI and the two consultants were former PRI members of staff, therefore we can be somewhat confident in the conclusion that the strategy was carried using a PRI approach despite lack of input in the document from PRI. Had current PRI staff members been more involved or given more support, the consultants may have been given more support and guidance to spend more time gaining the buy-in of stakeholders as a first step in the project.

#### **4.1.2.4 Outcomes**

The main outcome at this stage of the project was the development and adoption of the strategy. This outcome was cited as PRI's main achievement by most respondents in the evaluation and should not be understated. Furthermore, the inclusive process in which it was developed can also be remarked on as a significant outcome which can only be attributed to PRI's approach to work with a range of stakeholders. However, the way stakeholders contributed and participated to the strategy could have been done in a way as to create collaborative relationships and an understanding of the responsibilities necessary for its implementation.

Given that the strategy development process took place over two years ago, and PRI's approach and engagement in CAR has changed substantially compared to how it approached the development of the strategy, it is difficult to isolate respondents' impressions of the strategy development process from the rest of the project. Many respondents commended PRI's inclusive approach, albeit with some comments that more groups could have been involved. Others more closely involved stated that senior leaders in the MoJ and PA were not really engaged and involved until the strategy had



been adopted and PRI had a more permanent presence in the country (see the next section below). In addition, it does not entirely marry with the actual steps taken and the efforts required to bring stakeholders on board once the strategy had been finalized.

Respondents found the strategy to be highly relevant and responsive to the realities of CAR. However, in actuality, it is the action plan which is the most relevant document. The most useful strategies are those which are revised and made meaningful in their implementation and this was done in CAR through the development of the action plan as will be shown in the next section.

The strategy was adopted by CAR's Prime Minister in January 2019. It can be concluded that there is ownership of the document as the published version only displays the emblem of the CAR government and not MINSUCA's or PRI's logos. However, the biggest indicator of ownership of the strategy is the fact that the former Director General of Prison Services (DGSP) reportedly referred to it as *his* strategy.

## **4.2 Implementation of the strategy**

### **4.2.1 Description of method**

After the strategy was finalised, it was the decision of PRI's new Executive Director to recruit a member of staff who would be based permanently in CAR. The logic behind this decision was that for PRI to properly support the PA and CAR government in the implementation of the strategy, they would require someone based in country who could develop and maintain relationships and follow up and provide support on a regular basis with stakeholders responsible for the implementation which would have been more difficult to do with external consultants only visiting sporadically. PRI subsequently recruited a former MINUSCA corrections officer from Burkina Faso in January 2019 as a full-time project manager based in Bangui. One of the first things which happened after the Project Manager began working for PRI was that he was invited to be co-located in the DGSP offices by the Director General himself.

As part of the approach to ensure ownership of the strategy and its implementation by government authorities and the PA, PRI helped the formation of three MoJ-led committees established by decree which would provide political backing to the implementation process, coordinate and administer activities and exchange information. The three committees are led by senior MoJ and PA officials as well as representatives of CAR CSOs, MINUSCA, international organisations and UN agencies and PRI. PRI drafted the decrees to establish these committees and held meetings with all these stakeholders to communicate the purpose of the committees, their role in the committees and attain their agreement to be involved the process.

The implementation then focused on component three of the strategy "Security of the prisons and professionalisation of the penitentiary administration". The first substantial activity was a two-week training of trainers (ToT) course organised in Burkina Faso at the Burkinabe Penitentiary Administration's training academy. The training was organised in collaboration with the Group of Friends of Corrections in Peace Operations (GoF) of which Burkina Faso is a member and was chair of the group in 2019. Nine CAR prison officers responsible for training of new officers took part in the training in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso. The trained officers would go on to become trainers of the new cohort of 300 civilian officers (see below). Burkina Faso was also selected as the location for the training because it would serve as a realistic example for prison officers on what could be achievable in CAR. It is culturally similar to CAR, has recently gone through its own prison demilitarisation process and, importantly, has its own prison officer academy. The training was aimed at younger, mid-level employees with the assumption that they would be more open to reform and change, and would have been provided with a foundation to implement the strategy practically.

Prior to the PRI-organised ToT, GoF also conducted a 3-day ToT on basic instructional techniques, for 17 prison staff (9 of whom also took part in the training of trainers in Burkina Faso), as well as a

training on the Bangkok Rules to increase the knowledge competencies of staff who work with female offenders for 25 officers..

Following the training in Burkina Faso, the focus for capacity building moved to the management skill needs of staff in the PA headquarters, especially on strategic management, project management, human resources and financial management. This training aimed to build the capacity of PA headquarters through creating an organisational structure with roles and enable staff to draft the required policies and procedures to manage a fully functioning prison system. This proposal came jointly from PRI and the GoF specifically Canada, Sweden and Burkina Faso who were prominent members and took an interest in the work in CAR, drawing on the strengths of each member state to provide a project management-based approach training programme for senior PA leaders. The full training programme was supposed to take place in March or April 2020 but was postponed due to COVID-19. In the meantime, a preparatory training on some of the same areas for the same senior staff was held in the PA headquarters in Bangui. This training, which took place over three sessions included training on human resource management, project management and budgetary and financial management. Trainees were then identified by the cabinet of the Minister of Justice based on the recommendations of the DGSP to lead these departments at the PA headquarters. PRI also provided office equipment, computers, supplies, IT and internet connections to these departments.

At the same time as the strategy was being developed, the PA via funding from INL (the US State Department Bureau of Narcotics and Law Enforcement) and support from UNDP (UNDP provides per diems for trainers and for trainees as they carry out their internships, as well as uniforms and training materials) and MINUSCA (which supports the planning of recruitment and training, as well as technical support for training) began the recruitment and training of 300 new civilian prison officers who would go on to staff the country's prisons, providing sufficient capacity and security guarantees that the military could withdraw. The training is being done across two cohorts, 150 at a time and is taking place at the ENAM (the National School of Administration and Judiciary). The concept behind this recruitment and training of such a large cohort of civilian prison officers is part of a broader strategy alongside similar initiatives for the police, magistrates, and lawyers, a programme known as RESA (restoration and extension of state authority). The first cohort of 150 officers are now undertaking paid work experience in prisons across the country.

The last substantive activity led by PRI to support the implementation of the strategy was the establishment of a civil society platform (Plateforme d'appui aux réformes du système pénitentiaire en République centrafricaine -PARSP-RCA. The purpose of the platform has been to expand involvement in the strategy and reform process, and ensure an element of independent oversight in prisons as well as of the government's commitments to the strategy and reform process, raise public awareness nationally and internationally, conduct advocacy and lobbying to support and push through reforms and promoting and defending the rights of people in detention and conducting public monitoring of places of detention.

The platform comprises eight national organisations including the Association of Female Lawyers, the Central African League for Human Rights, Action by Christians for the Abolition of Torture and the Death Penalty in CAR and the coordination of Central African Muslim Organisations. All have some expertise or experience with the criminal justice system and governance oversight in CAR.

The members of the platform were able to conduct one visit to prisons before the COVID-19 pandemic. However, they were able to conduct a workshop for prison officers and people in detention at two prisons in Bangui (a men's prison and women's prison) on how to prevent the spread of COVID-19. PRI involved an NGO with public health expertise to train the platform members to be able to conduct these workshops. PRI also provided hygiene materials and facemasks to distribute to detainees and staff.

## **4.2.2 Analysis**

### **4.2.2.1 Ownership of the process and involvement of stakeholders**

Despite the strategy development process not gaining sufficient participation and engagement of government stakeholders, due partly to the approach taken by PRI, there have been high levels of engagement among PA staff in its implementation. Nearly all PA respondents conveyed that they were motivated and engaged in the strategy implementation process and had taken part enthusiastically in several activities such as the committees or one of the training workshops organised by PRI. Although the co-location of PRI's programme manager in the DGSP's office indicates an openness from the DG to work on this strategy, there remains a lack of participation and ownership of the strategy implementation among senior government leaders. Most notably, the Minister of Justice, who was extremely slow to sign the decrees drafted by PRI needed to establish committees charged with overseeing the implementation of the strategy. This greatly slowed down the start of the implementation of the strategy's action plan. Several PA respondents expressed frustration at the weak engagement in the project from senior members of government, difficulty in coordinating and ensuring attendance at meetings as it is continuing to slow progress and delay the achievement of goals and ultimately bringing senior leaders around to the vision of the DG. PA respondents stated that the PA and prisons lack visibility and recognition and, therefore, importance within the government and the country in general which could contribute to the lack of interest and engagement from more senior leaders. In a country where there are so many urgent needs and priorities, it is difficult to keep prisons at the top of the agenda. A significant impact of this lack engagement and participation in the implementation of the strategy from higher level government representatives is that it hampers the allocation of an adequate budget to the PA to implement the strategy and carry out the reforms required.

Furthermore, there is high turnover among the senior leadership. There have been four DGSPs of the PA since 2014 and in July 2020 the DGSP was again replaced. The new incumbent lacks a background in prisons and time will need to be spent by PRI and its project manager building trust and understanding of the project to ensure its continuation. These frequent changes in leadership slow momentum and create delays and challenges to long-term planning and forecasting, especially when leaders come with their own agendas.

Training was identified as a crucial need of the PA by PA staff themselves and by other stakeholders. PA respondents were very enthusiastic about the training and there was keenness to participate. However because the training targeted younger, mid-level employees and did not include senior leaders at the headquarters or from the MoJ, it can be frustrating when they are unable to implement what they learned as they are blocked by senior leadership who are unaware of how to implement the reforms. This perhaps speaks to the overall perception of lack of interest and participation in the project by senior leaders. However, this is perhaps addressed by PRI through the strategic management training which is to take place for senior PA officials at headquarters.

The creation of the civil society platform is cited by many as another significant achievement of PRI in supporting the implementation of the strategy and of its multi-stakeholder approach. The proposal came from PRI in order to widen involvement in the strategy implementation process and ensure a measure of independent oversight and participation in its direction. When proposed the idea by PRI, the MoJ was fairly enthusiastic about engaging with the platform and understood its purpose and potential contribution to the reform process. The platform is recognized as a member of the steering committee of the new sectorial policy due to the good relationship between them and its views are being accounted for in this process.

The civil society platform is the first of its kind in CAR. Respondents felt that national CSOs had not had much engagement in these kinds of processes yet CSOs are widely seen as instrumental when it comes to mobilising resources and increasing government authorities' involvement. Many in MINUSCA did not think such a platform would be successful due to perceptions about the capacity

and motivation of civil society in the country however they do recognise the importance of their inclusion in this process to ensure local ownership and are pleased with its success so far.

Members of the platform who responded to this evaluation were very enthusiastic and satisfied with the process for its development. PRI held meetings with each of the organisations and together an action plan was put together as well as an internal strategy setting out each member's role in the platform through a general assembly. PRI provided some financial and advisory support throughout the whole process. The platform now plans some lobbying with government and ministers to ensure the dedication of resources to planned reforms.

There are several international organisations operating in CAR providing support to prisons (as well as other humanitarian response and development and stabilization). Support to prisons includes provision of emergency aid, prison monitoring and observation, renovation of prison infrastructure and training of personnel (for example the training of 300 new civilian prison officers). Because the field is fairly saturated and there weak governance within the PA and MoJ, these activities are often uncoordinated, not communicated well and not responsive to the needs and priorities of the PA. PRI, through its support of the coordination committees has involved these international agencies in an attempt to bring them on board and ensure their future activities are in line with the strategy and that the PA and MoJ, and other international agencies, are fully aware of them. Most respondents from international agencies and donors were satisfied with the support PRI had been giving the PA and MoJ and found it relevant and much needed and found value in the coordination mechanisms established.

#### **4.2.2.2 Appropriateness of approach**

The focus on component three of the strategy "Security of the prisons and professionalisation of the penitentiary administration" is really a focus on developing human resources capacities of the PA to be able to see through the demilitarisation process, manage prisons properly and be responsible for their security. None of the other components of the strategy can really happen before there is a properly functioning PA headquarters. It would be unsustainable and disempowering to work on the implementation of the other components of the strategy if the institution responsible does not have the capacity to lead on it and it is the antithesis of PRI's approach.

Prior to PRI's intervention, there were no professional prison trainers in CAR, training of new prison officers was conducted primarily by magistrates. PRI sought to develop skills and competencies of prison staff to be able to undertake training and be able to manage the prisons themselves. While the FACA still run prisons and are slow to leave, a ToT is required to ensure the availability of prison-specialised trainers at the national training school (ENAM) so that training for newly recruited civilian prison officers is delivered by trainers from the PA itself. In addition, PRI has been working to develop the competencies at headquarters, building ownership of the strategy, and ensuring investment of national stakeholders could the strategy stand any chance of being implemented as well as ensure they would eventually be able to take on and manage the required number of civilian officers.

Nearly all PA respondents stated that activities chosen were appropriate to the needs and priorities of the PA, that they responded to key identified needs, and that sufficient expertise and resources were provided. The activities were all designed to accelerate the process of demilitarization. Several PA respondents echoed this and stated that human resources remains the top priority for the PA – they need well-trained staff, a need for international experience, international study visits where staff can see how things can be improved in a feasible and practical way.

All PA stakeholders are clearly highly motivated and bought-in to the demilitarization and reform process. They are aware of the problems in their prisons and want to make improvements to implement human rights standards and make prisons places of rehabilitation and they understand the implications to the safety and security of the country if this is not addressed.

Many respondents summed up PRI's approach as strategic but also holistic. PRI is tackling the demilitarization process from the top down by empowering and enabling the actors who are ultimately responsible for prison management and ensuring prisons will be managed in a fair, professional and transparent manner. While this approach takes time to effect significant transformation, it is the appropriate method as it requires investment from national stakeholders themselves. It is building on a resource which already exists and can be sustained long-term and the outcomes are resilient to changes in context or even to a lack of injection of resources. However, because PRI's approach is different to that of other international agencies and donors, in that it requires commitment and buy-in and not just activities delivered on their behalf then progress is slow as it requires the allocation of resources, especially funding, for actual reform measures.

The co-location of PRI's programme manager has a distinctive feature of PRI's method. It has allowed not only close day to day contact with the DGSP and other senior leaders in the PA and MoJ, and provide necessary support and follow up on the strategy's implementation, but demonstrates PRI to be a serious and sincere partner. Through the co-location, PRI has made itself available to the PA and MoJ as a resource and its presence allows for the relationships and collaboration necessary for transformation.

Nearly all PA stakeholders identified the co-location of the programme manager in the DGSP as a hugely beneficial and added-value aspect of the project. His physical presence has been a key catalyst to the mobilization of PA staff, obtaining their interest and excitement in the project and being able to push forward the aims of the project.

Several respondents from international organisations and donor agencies were impressed with PRI's approach to training and commented on PRI's leadership and understanding of the situation in CAR and regarding the state of its prisons and in coming up with realistic suggestions regarding what was needed and how to go about it. PRI's own training and capacity building work nicely complemented the larger training programme for 300 new civilian staff. With PRI's training and developing the capacity of the PA headquarters, there is more chance that they will have the capacity to manage and integrate the new cohorts.

The development of the PA headquarters through management training, defining roles and provision of office and IT equipment to create a professional and competent institution which can effectively manage and be responsible for its prison population creates accountability and in doing so raises the profile of prisons in the country through demonstrating their effectiveness.

The first ToT for prison officers in Burkina Faso aimed to demonstrate a realistic and attainable model for prison management. Furthermore, it helped promote south-south cooperation, showing that there is much to learn from neighbouring countries which share a language and similar culture and offer a realistic model for reform. Such cooperation can be significant in contributing to successful peacebuilding and stabilisation.

A feature of PRI's approach globally is its collaboration with and involvement of civil society in reform processes. Not only does this add an element of transparency and accountability but it also adds diversity, plurality and helps open up prisons and the criminal justice system to the public – that these are state institutions that everyone is responsible for, which in turns will support fairer and more humane standards and treatment. PRI has used this same approach and philosophy in CAR in supporting the creation of the civil society platform comprising diverse human rights organisations all of whom had an interest in prisons. They are diverse in their expertise and who they represent – journalists, torture prevention organisations and women's rights - and in their actual representatives who are diverse in age, gender and religion. This diversity is one of the great strengths of the platform, allowing them to represent different populations in prison and bring a variety of perspectives to the platform and demilitarisation and reform process.

When COVID-19 emerged, PRI managed to adapt its methodology and engage the platform in response activities by training members to conduct COVID-19 sensitisation and training sessions in two places of detention, the women's prison, Bimbo, and Ngargba main prison. Members were the first to provide protective equipment to both detainees and prison staff. Respondents stated that PRI's adaptability had been greatly beneficial to both the platform and places of detention in light of COVID-19. This activity is a good demonstration of how PRI draws on civil society resources and acts as a facilitator to increase their involvement in prisons, demonstrating that they can play a highly useful role in these situations especially in a resource-poor country like CAR.

#### **4.2.2.3 PRI's added value**

As stated previously, the design of the implementation phase, the goal of PRI's work in CAR and the context and existing capacities and competencies within the PA and MoJ and level of political buy-in and engagement when the strategy was adopted necessitated PRI to have a permanent member of staff in Bangui. By recruiting a former MINUSCA corrections officer who knows the country and its prisons well and who was known somewhat to some PA and MoJ staff, PRI was able to earn the respect and confidence of government representatives. The project, and the new programme manager, also gained high level involvement from PRI's Executive Director, as well as more substantive support from operations and policy teams at PRI. The programme manager was soon given an office inside the DGSP enabling access to the director general but also to the Ministry of Justice. No other organisation has such access.

The recruitment of a permanent member of staff also proved to be much more efficient and value for money method. The combination of the co-location of PRI's programme manager in the DGSP's office and the provision of top-level training to leaders in the PA means that these competencies can be built through the more traditional method of training programmes but can also be reinforced through mentoring, day to day support and in-depth discussions to get the commitment and involvement of staff. His presence was therefore key in driving forward the implementation of the strategy process by government authorities and also be able to engage civil society.

PRI is perceived by PA and MoJ respondents as an honorable and reliable partner and has not pushed its own agenda or made funding contingent on cooperation. In fact, to gain the trust and cooperation of government authorities it has agreed to support certain needs which may have been extra or beyond the scope strict bounds of the strategy's implementation.

Furthermore, in working so closely and consistently with the CAR government authorities, PRI has kept prisons on the agenda and has maintained momentum for the strategy, the strategy did not become a neglected document but, through the action plan and PRI's continued efforts, has become a realistic goal.

Although PRI is an implementing partner of MINUSCA, it has been able to exercise a degree of independence. It is clearly an independent entity from MINUSCA, and all respondents understood the relationship, however some PA and MoJ respondents commented that PRI remained under MINUSCA's shadow. Despite being recognized for its unique expertise, it lacks the full independence and recognition for its work because it is working in partnership with MINUSCA. However it is the opinion of the evaluators that this partnership has not negatively impacted the attainment of any outcomes, PRI has been able to guide the direction of the project and drive forward its own approach, while still reaching for the same goal of demilitarization and reform. Indeed, PA and MoJ respondents actually appreciated the partnership with MINUSCA as it allowed PRI to be positioned as a kind of go-between or mediator between the two bodies. The partnership also allowed PRI access in the country, especially at the beginning of the project, which would have been impossible or very difficult to gain without.

PRI's unique approach can be illustrated through its creation and support of a national civil society platform with the purpose of widening public engagement in the reform and demilitarization

process as well as overseeing the government's implementation of the strategy and reform process. The diversity of the platform is an asset, which allows it to represent and cover a variety of human rights issues. By engaging national human rights organisations, PRI is ensuring sustainability of its work in the country, equipping civil society representatives with the skills and tools to pursue the promotion of human rights of people in detention in the long term.

During the COVID-19 outbreak, PRI demonstrated flexibility by adapting its methodology to engage the platform on COVID-19 sensitization and training sessions in two prisons. The platform, through funding from PRI, provided PPE, soap and other hygiene items to people in detention and staff. PRI was the first to respond to prisons during the pandemic in this way. Respondents stated that PRI's adaptability had been greatly beneficial to both the platform and places of detention in light of COVID-19.

This approach of involving civil society actors in the reform and demilitarization process is exactly where PRI has added value in its work in CAR. PRI's approach globally is to engage and cooperate with a broad and diverse constituency, including civil society organisations who may have had little previous experience in prisons. Their participation adds an element of accountability - more actors are involved in prisons which opens them up and makes them more transparent and brings prisons into the community. They are also able to contribute to the public debate on prisons and raise awareness with citizens. The participation of a diverse group of stakeholders also brings diversity of experience into prisons, as well as differing perspectives given the civic, non-governmental identity of the organisations and who they represent.

#### **4.2.2.4 Outcomes**

In its support for the implementation of the strategy, PRI's work has resulted in a number of tangible outcomes. Firstly, the training of a small group of prison officers who were able to become the first professional prison trainers and train the new cohort of newly recruited prison officers is an achievement. Not only did it provide the first prison trainers in the country, it demonstrated that PRI was able to integrate ongoing prison demilitarization processes and provide added value where useful. In doing so, PRI plugged a gap in the demilitarization process, and ensuring that the officers recruited to replace the military would actually receive the relevant training in prison management but also that the PA would have the capacity to manage these officers through the ongoing management training of senior staff at PA headquarters.

The civil society platform is also a major outcome of this phase of the project and is perceived as such by most respondents. It is the first such platform for civil society organisations engaged in prisons and the criminal justice system. CSOs see themselves as widely instrumental when it comes to mobilizing resources and increasing government authorities' involvement in prisons.

Being able to bring together a diverse group of human rights civil society organisations and harness their interests and expertise can benefit not only the organisations themselves but the demilitarization process. By engaging local non-governmental actors, PRI is ensuring sustainability by equipping them with the skills and tools to pursue the promotion of the human rights of people in prison in the long term.

An immediate impact of the platform has been its visits to prisons which have facilitated contact for detainees with the outside world and allowed them to communicate in their own language, Sango, with people who they do not see as foreigners or "politically motivated" like international actors can seem. Members of the civil society platform reported that the use of the local language made detainees feel more comfortable and trusting with the platform members and began to share with them the problems they experience in prison. One respondent from the platform described their first visits to places of detention as 'eye-opening' on the importance of penal reform and the achievement of national stabilisation. They stated that most organisations' efforts so far had been concentrated on victim reparation and access to justice – but not all of the platform members had

been able to access places of detention. Such access was made possible and organised by PRI, who provided the platform with expert advice, capacity-building training, office supplies, and contacts with the penitentiary administration and the Ministry of Justice as well as visibility for their work. Following places of detention visits, members of the CSO platform were left with an empowering feeling that they had to make a change. Another significant achievement for the platform so far is that the MoJ has now signed a decree officially including the platform in all discussions on the strategy's implementation. One CSO respondent stated he was confident this will allow them to keep pushing government officials to make the strategy a priority, push for reforms to take place quicker and to increase involvement from the MoJ's side. They hope that PRI will continue to provide capacity building and advisory support while they keep growing in importance.

The inclusion of national civil society brings a crucial element to this project – not only are members able to speak to their fellow citizens in their language, but it adds to the sense of national ownership of the prison demilitarisation and reform process. It further demonstrates that although the strategy was developed by outside actors, it has really been taken on board and owned nationally.

Government still does not have a budget line for the implementation of the strategy. It is perhaps the full lack of engagement and awareness during its development process that has contributed to this situation. However, PRI's approach in providing support and achieving small wins, demonstrates to senior stakeholders the worth of the prison reform and demilitarization process and may lead to their eventual greater participation and buy-in and prioritization of prisons. Prisons do not rank high on the agenda in CAR as there are so many other urgent development and reform issues, related to the conflict and the ongoing humanitarian crisis. If PRI can link the demilitarization and reform process to the broader development of the country this may be key to bring senior members of government onboard.

## 5. Conclusion

The goal of PRI's work and role as an implementing partner of MINUSCA in CAR has been to support the development and implementation of a demilitarisation strategy for its prison system. Thanks to PRI's support through mentoring, training, coalition and consensus building, as well as its adaptability, resilience and technical expertise, CAR is on track to achieving being able to demilitarisation and reform its prisons to bring them up to international human rights standards and ensure they have rehabilitation at their heart.

The main outcomes that PRI's work has contributed to are the development and adoption of the strategy and the increasing involvement of authorities in this process, the creation of a pool of prison trainers, progress towards the proper functioning of the PA and the formation of the first civil society platform to be involved in prisons and the reform process.

PRI's involvement enabled the strategy to be created. MINUSCA did not have the capacity, expertise nor was it a suitable organisation to be supporting this process in a way that would be seen as credible and non-partisan. PRI had the capacity, through hiring the consultants and having a good overall picture of the strategy and reform process. PRI had a role in how that final product looked, but it was very much fulfilling a piece of work for MINUSCA. Since then, PRI has really tried to evolve the relationship and become more involved in designing and taking ownership of its intervention through its methods and multi-stakeholder approach. PRI's presence and engagement in the country was solidified after the recruitment of a permanent member of staff in CAR. Thanks to this involvement, PRI has been able to draw on its expertise to design and implement a programme of support which is responsive to the context and the needs of those in the PA as well the broader needs of ensuring accountability and inclusion in reform processes. Nearly all those interviewed for this evaluation stated they thought PRI's approach was highly appropriate to the needs of the PA



and broader context as well as one that would achieve transformation as it was a holistic and strategic approach.

The strategy brings prison reform in line with corrections in peacekeeping mandates – using the language of security, but a human security definition which puts the protection and wellbeing of those in prison at its centre. Without that, security cannot be maintained – this is a very basic principle for maintaining order and safety in prisons and ensuring the successful rehabilitation of people imprisoned.

This evaluation can point to several factors which have been key to its ongoing success. They include the recruitment of a project manager based in Bangui, and the high-level involvement of PRI's Executive Director, giving PRI a permanent presence in the country and being considered a serious partner by the PA and MoJ. Furthermore, the co-location of the project manager with the DGSP enabled him to take on a kind of mentoring and support role, to ensure that the strategy remains on the agenda and that the PA has the capacities it needs to oversee the implementation of the strategy and manage its own prisons professionally.

PRI provides a great deal of value and expertise to CAR, not only through its technical know-how of prisons and the criminal justice system, but also in its inclusive and developmental approach. It builds on existing structures and available resources and requiring the investment of national stakeholders to ensure sustainability.

The creation of the CSO platform to participate in and oversee the demilitarisation and reform process cannot be underestimated as a success in a country where there is a huge foreign humanitarian and peacekeeping presence where participation in these efforts is perceived to be their responsibility and not that of national actors.

Challenges such as the security situation, the turnover of senior staff and the ongoing COVID-19 global pandemic have created delays to some of PRI's planned activities, but they are not likely to prevent the eventual achievement of any goals due to the flexible approach and close contact of PRI with stakeholder groups.

PRI has successfully integrated itself in CAR both filling a gap in technical expertise and delivery of support to the PA, drawing on and cooperating with resources and actors already present in the country. PRI should continue to position itself serving a coordinating and resource role to ensure the continued strategic and systematic approach to the demilitarization process with support of national and international actors, but which is singularly led by the CAR government.

## 6. Lessons learned and recommendations

For the remainder of the project		
1	<b>Lesson learned</b>	PRI is a very trusted partner in CAR among both government authorities and CSOs and is seen has a very good and reliable resource. However, there are some gaps which prevents it expanding involvement in CAR which come from it being an international organisation with foreign staff.
	<b>Recommendation</b>	Recruiting local staff would allow for greater national ownership of the strategy and reform process, it would no longer be an entirely foreign driven process and would allow PRI to be able to contribute to the national debate on

prisons, human rights and criminal justice. This has already begun with the creation of the civil society platform but needs to expand to better engaging parliament and the media to raise national awareness of prisons and their conditions. Recruitment of local staff should be made in consultation with partners given the need to ensure national institutions can be staffed with adequate levels of qualified staff.

2	<b>Lesson learned</b>	The capacity building training has been the most appreciated and valued aspect of the project from PA and MoJ respondents as it clearly fills a long-standing need and responds to clearly identified needs. Furthermore, the learning exchange with Burkina Faso, which shares the same language and has cultural similarities as well as having gone through a similar demilitarization process making it easy for participants to learn and be inspired, provides an excellent model for future capacity building.
	<b>Recommendation</b>	PRI should continue to conduct capacity building for PA staff together with MINUSCA, as well as at the highest levels of government, and invest in continuous professional development to further specialize and upskill prison staff to enable to provide the support and services needed in prisons such as rehabilitation and dynamic security as well as help the PA define its role and capacity as an institution. PRI and MINUSCA should also explore capacity building and study visits to neighbouring countries which would also allow PA staff and officials opportunities to network and exchange ideas with their counterparts and be part of the wider African prisons' community
3	<b>Lesson learned</b>	The focus of the strategy has rightly been on human resources and ensuring the PA has the capacity within itself to train and manage a civilian officer cadre, however little consideration has been given to how the transition from military to civilian management will take place and was not mentioned very much by evaluation respondents.
	<b>Recommendation</b>	This process is still some years away and it is perhaps beyond PRI's direct influence and expertise, however PRI should ensure it has a stake in these conversations when they take place. Careful consideration needs to be given to the actual transition process and the gradual replacement of military personnel with civilians and how resources will be redistributed after this process especially regarding how military personnel will be deployed.
4	<b>Lesson learned</b>	There are multiple donors and international agencies involved in providing support and services to prisons in CAR but sometimes little knowledge or strategic coordination of these projects and without the proper buy-in of national stakeholders or recognition of priority needs.

**Recommendation**

There needs to be a coordinated and common goal agreed within the international community but also between the international community and national stakeholders. PRI can be an important partner in the coordination of international actors, with MINUSCA as the lead coordinated as mandated by the UN Security Council as well as ensuring the PA and MoJ is fully aware of all projects being undertaken and that they are in line with the strategy and its action plan.

**For new and similar work in comparable countries**
**5 Lesson learned**

The use of external consultants at the beginning of the project was essential as PRI did not have sufficient language capacity. However, PRI was able to make use of its network and recruit former PRI staff members who were familiar with PRI's approach and who also had expertise working on penal reform in sub-Saharan Africa. However the project did not fully benefit from existing and updated PRI capacity (the consultants worked at PRI over ten years ago) because of the lack of capacity and the way the consultants had been managed.

**Recommendation**

If external consultants would be hired again in a similar manner to this project, PRI should ensure it has sufficient capacity and resources to make the relationship with consultants a collaborative one, so that the project can benefit from PRI's expertise.

**6 Lesson learned**

The strategy development process did not sufficiently gain the buy-in, participation and collaboration of national government stakeholders to both work with PRI on the strategy but also to work with each other.

**Recommendation**

From the outset, create the working dynamics required for the efficient implementation of the reforms/strategy during the development of the planned reforms/strategy. PRI and donors should not underestimate the time and costs involved to establish trust and good working relationships with government leaders and should allow for creative solutions to this.

**7 Lesson learned**

The co-location of PRI staff within the DGSP's office is an accomplishment for PRI and a huge contributor to the success of this project and was key for gaining buy-in from PA and MoJ officials but also for expanding the involvement of other stakeholder groups, e.g. the creation of the CSO platform. It was an efficient solution which responded to the context, the needs and capacities of the PA and would contribute to the achievement of the goal.

**Recommendation**

PRI should adopt this embedding approach for similar contexts, where complex transformation is sought or where there are limited capacities in government institutions.

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8	<b>Lesson learned</b>	<p>The strategy meets the terms that were originally given by MINUSCA to PRI, in that it is a prison demilitarization strategy. And although it is responsive to the current situation in CAR and focuses on security which is relevant for a context like CAR it does not look beyond prisons to examine issues in the criminal justice system which impact on prisons, for example the reasons for the high proportion of detainees who are in pre-trial detention.</p>
	<b>Recommendation</b>	<p>Undertake a broader examination of criminal justice beyond prisons to including prisons, law enforcement, sentencing etc. Even if this lies beyond the scope of the initial task (i.e. a prison demilitarization strategy), it is an important endeavor to understanding the challenges faced by prisons and further reforms that PRI may support on.</p>

## References

Central African Republic Law n°12/003 *Setting out the fundamental principles of the penitentiary system in CAR*

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## **Annex: General interview guide**

### **Introduction**

1. What is your job title, role and involvement in this project?
2. In your own words what is the main purpose of this project/PRI's work in CAR?
3. What did you hope the project would achieve?
4. What activities were you involved in?
  - a. How have they been going?
  - b. What is your assessment of them?
5. In your own words, what are the main needs of the CAR prison system and has the project and its achievements met your expectations and these needs?
  - a. If not, in what ways has it failed to meet your expectations/needs of CAR?
6. Has any other work taken place by other agencies/actors or are there any other factors in CAR which may have contributed to the outcomes of this project and the successful development and demilitarisation of CAR's penitentiary system? Have you been involved in any of these?

### **PRI's methodology and added value**

7. Do you think it chose the right activities/methodology to achieve the aims (successful development of the strategy, its implementation so far)?
8. Has PRI done anything differently compared to other stakeholders and actors in CAR who work on reform/ demilitarisation of the penitentiary system? Was anything we did particularly unique?
9. What made you want to participate in the project? What was it about PRI's approach that motivated/interested you in joining?
10. How was the process for developing the strategy?
11. How do you perceive the role of MINUSCA in this project? What is the added value of its role in supporting an organisation such as PRI to lead on the strategy drafting and implementation effort?

### **Achievements and impact**

12. What do you think the main achievements of this project have been so far?
13. What are the priorities of the current criminal justice situation in CAR and does the strategy and the project's activities to implement the strategy reflect this and the needs and priorities of stakeholders?
14. Have there been any unexpected outcomes as a result of this project? Anything that surprised you as a result of this project?
15. Have there been any negative results/outcomes of the project?
16. Were there any external factors which assisted in the success of the project or prevented its success (political factors, lack of engagement from key stakeholders etc.)?
  - a. Have there/are there any major obstacles to the achievement of the project's outcome?
  - b. Could PRI have done anything or taken steps to mitigate these?

### **Recommendations for the remainder of the project:**

17. Thinking back to your previous answers, did PRI choose appropriate activities for the context in CAR and for the aims of the project?
18. Did we engage the right people? Was there anyone we should have involved that we didn't?
19. Is there anything we need to change or adjust about our approach in terms of activities, the way we engage stakeholders, the actual stakeholders we engage etc.?
20. Do you have any recommendations/suggestions to PRI for its ongoing work in CAR? Anything we could do differently?