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Implementation of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework for the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Region

Report of the Secretary-General

I. Introduction

1. The present report is submitted pursuant to Security Council resolution [2556 \(2020\)](#), in which the Council requested me to report to it every six months on the implementation of the commitments under the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework for the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Region and its linkages with the broader security situation in the region.¹ It provides an overview of peace and security developments in the Great Lakes region since the issuance of the previous report ([S/2021/306](#)) and covers the period from 16 March to 15 September 2021.

II. Major developments

A. Spread and implications of the coronavirus disease pandemic

2. The coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic continued to adversely affect the Great Lakes region. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), the signatory countries of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework had reported a total of 3,702,375 confirmed cases and 103,465 fatalities as at 14 September. In July, the United Republic of Tanzania resumed reporting of COVID-19 cases in the country, which had been suspended since May 2020. Several countries experienced another wave of the pandemic, leading to renewed containment measures, including partial lockdowns, although borders were mostly kept open. Meanwhile, vaccine shortages, among other factors, continued to limit the administration of vaccines in the region. As at 14 September, WHO reported that a total of 27,032,479 vaccine

¹ In this context, the region refers to the 13 signatory countries of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework, namely, Angola, Burundi, the Central African Republic, the Congo, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Kenya, Rwanda, South Africa, South Sudan, the Sudan, Uganda, the United Republic of Tanzania and Zambia. In addition, the following four intergovernmental organizations act as witnesses/guarantors of the Framework: the African Union, the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region, the Southern African Development Community and the United Nations.



doses had been administered in 12 of the 13 signatory countries, amounting to an estimated 6 per cent of the total population in the region.

3. The socioeconomic impact of the pandemic remained a cause for concern. While the economies of the signatory States of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework were expected to rebound in 2021, per capita incomes are, according to the International Monetary Fund (IMF),² unlikely to return to pre-pandemic levels before 2025. The slow roll-out of vaccinations in many countries, which is partly attributable to high costs, could further undermine economic growth, with IMF estimating that broad coverage is not expected before the end of 2023. In addition, the number of people living in extreme poverty is expected to increase in a context of rising food prices, high unemployment rates and mounting debt.

B. Security situation

4. While some areas of the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo witnessed a renewed surge in attacks by armed groups, the security situation along common borders in the region remained relatively stable, with four cross-border incidents, compared with three during the previous reporting period.

5. On 24 May, Rwanda stated that the Rwanda Defence Force had intercepted elements of the Burundian armed group Forces nationales de libération (FNL), which had allegedly come from the Mabayi commune in Burundi. Two FNL elements were reportedly killed by the Rwandan Defence Force. In a statement released on 25 May, Burundi denied the presence on its territory of any armed groups hostile to Rwanda.

6. On 12 June, the Rwandan Defence Force arrested a Ugandan soldier for allegedly trespassing on Rwandan territory, before releasing him to the Ugandan authorities the following day. On 14 June, Uganda sent a protest note claiming that the incident had occurred on Ugandan soil. There has been no public response from the Rwandan authorities to date.

7. On 16 July, clashes between the Uganda People's Defence Forces and suspected elements of the Congolese armed group Coopérative pour le développement du Congo reportedly occurred in Zombo District, Uganda, near the border with the Democratic Republic of the Congo. According to the Ugandan authorities, seven people were killed, including five attackers and a soldier of the Uganda People's Defence Forces.

8. During the night of 6 September, Congolese and Burundian naval forces reportedly clashed on Lake Tanganyika, resulting in the deaths of two Congolese soldiers and the capture of another by Burundian forces. According to the spokesperson of the Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (FARDC), the Burundian naval forces had mistaken their Congolese counterparts for criminals.

9. On 31 July, Rwanda handed over to Burundi 19 members of the Burundian armed group Résistance pour un État de droit au Burundi (RED Tabara) who had been intercepted by the Rwandan Defence Force as they illegally crossed the border into Rwanda on 29 September 2020. On 6 August, Burundi handed over to Rwanda seven Rwandan citizens who had been found to be illegally trading goods on Burundian territory.

10. In the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo, the security situation deteriorated as a result of armed group activity. In Ituri and North Kivu Provinces, the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF) intensified their attacks on civilians and FARDC. Between 15 March and 1 September, alleged ADF elements reportedly killed

² See International Monetary Fund, *Regional economic outlook: sub-Saharan Africa – navigating a long pandemic* (Washington, D.C., 2021).

273 civilians and abducted an estimated 249 civilians in 57 attacks in Ituri Province, including in Mambasa Territory, where the group had not been active since March 2020. During the same period, in North Kivu Province, 76 attacks attributed to ADF resulted in more than 264 fatalities, including 27 FARDC soldiers and a peacekeeper deployed as part of the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO). A concerning development has been the attacks allegedly carried out by ADF elements against leaders of the Muslim community, such as the assassination of an imam in Beni town and of another imam in Mavivi town, Beni Territory, on 1 May and 18 May, respectively. On 28 June, three improvised explosive devices reportedly placed by ADF exploded in Beni, with the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo describing one incident as a suicide attack.

11. The Forces démocratiques de libération du Rwanda (FDLR) reportedly maintained their presence in parts of Rutshuru Territory, North Kivu Province, where they continued to launch attacks against civilians.

12. On 3 May, the President of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Félix Antoine Tshilombo Tshisekedi, announced a state of siege in Ituri and North Kivu Provinces, which took effect on 6 May and has subsequently been renewed eight times during the reporting period.

13. In South Kivu, the Burundian armed group RED Tabara remained active and reportedly continued to cooperate with the Congolese Mai-Mai Ilunga, Mai-Mai René, Mai-Mai Yakutumba and Twirwaneho militias, which have been involved in abductions and kidnappings for ransom. On 15 July, RED Tabara released a communiqué denying any alliances with the aforementioned local armed groups or any involvement in attacks on FARDC.

C. Political developments

14. Despite the continued constraints imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic, during the reporting period there was an increase in high-level regional diplomacy and efforts to strengthen bilateral relations. This led to a series of bilateral cooperation agreements being signed and a number of bilateral commissions and other similar mechanisms being established or revitalized.

15. Building on the momentum witnessed during the previous reporting period, the Governments of Burundi and Rwanda took further steps to normalize their bilateral relations. On 1 July, the Prime Minister of Rwanda, Édouard Ngirente, participated in a ceremony in Burundi to celebrate the country's 59 years of independence. Speaking on behalf of the President of Rwanda, Paul Kagame, Mr. Ngirente confirmed his country's readiness "to build on the solid foundations of [its] historical and cultural ties" with Burundi. In turn, the President of Burundi, Evariste Ndayishimiye, noted that the presence of the high-level Rwandan delegation at the ceremony sent a strong signal that the two countries were opening a new chapter in their bilateral relations. The participation of Rwanda in the fourth meeting of the heads of the intelligence and security services, held on 6 July in Bujumbura, Burundi, and the handover by Rwanda to Burundi of members of the RED Tabara armed group were additional indicators of the progress made towards a rapprochement between the two countries.

16. The Democratic Republic of the Congo and Rwanda also demonstrated their continued commitment to strengthening bilateral relations. Following the eruption of the Mount Nyiragongo volcano near Goma, Democratic Republic of the Congo, on 22 May, Rwanda opened its borders to Congolese citizens evacuating from their homes, and, on 28 May, Mr. Kagame called for urgent global support to deal with the

humanitarian crisis. On 25 and 26 June, Mr. Tshisekedi and Mr. Kagame visited the border towns of Rubavu, Rwanda, and Goma, highlighting joint efforts to reduce insecurity and strengthen economic ties.

17. On 16 June, the President of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the President of Uganda, Yoweri Kaguta Museveni, met at their common border on the margins of the opening of the cross-border Mpondwe bridge and the launch of a construction project to build three major roads linking the two countries, which are part of a comprehensive infrastructure programme between them.

18. Following an exchange of confidence-building messages between the Presidents of Burundi and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, including through the conduit of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for the Great Lakes Region, the President of Burundi undertook a State visit to Kinshasa, from 12 to 14 July, during which bilateral agreements on political and diplomatic consultations, and on peace and security, were signed.

19. Relations between Rwanda and South Africa also improved following a meeting between the President of Rwanda and the President of South Africa, Matamela Cyril Ramaphosa, on 18 May in Paris. That meeting was followed, on 4 June, by the Minister for Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation of Rwanda, Vincent Biruta, paying a visit to Pretoria, where he met his counterpart, the Minister for International Relations and Cooperation of South Africa, Naledi Pandor. In a joint statement, the two ministers agreed a road map in support of the normalization of their bilateral relations and the establishment of a joint mechanism – to be led by them – to guide and manage the process. The mechanism held its first meeting on 6 and 7 July in Kigali.

20. No progress was registered with regard to the quadripartite process for the normalization of relations between Rwanda and Uganda, which is being facilitated by Angola and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, as no formal meeting has been held since June 2020. Nevertheless, Rwanda and Uganda have reiterated their commitment to improving their relations.

21. The Democratic Republic of the Congo maintained its efforts to nurture good relations with other countries in the region. In addition to the engagements with Burundi and Rwanda, the President of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Mr. Tshisekedi, received the President of Kenya, Uhuru Kenyatta, in Kinshasa from 20 to 22 April. As a result of the visit, four framework agreements on strengthening bilateral cooperation between the two countries were signed. On 24 April, Mr. Tshisekedi discussed bilateral and regional issues of mutual interest with his counterpart, the President of Zambia, Edgar Lungu, during the latter's official visit to Kinshasa.

22. In Burundi, the Government continued to implement its priorities, including measures to improve governance and fight corruption, and stepped up its diplomatic outreach, contributing to an improvement in the country's relations with its neighbours and international partners. From 11 to 14 May, Mr. Ndayishimiye travelled to Uganda, where he met with Mr. Museveni. The two Heads of State committed to the implementation of existing arrangements and agreed that their Joint Commission for Cooperation and Joint Business Forum should convene within six months. Mr. Ndayishimiye also undertook a State visit to Kenya, from 31 May to 1 June, where he met with his counterpart, Mr. Kenyatta. They signed several cooperation agreements and decided to revitalize their Joint Permanent Commission for Cooperation.

23. On 27 April, the Peace and Security Council of the African Union decided to remove Burundi from its agenda, citing significant progress in the political and security situation in the country. The Council further decided that the deployment of

African Union human rights observers and military experts in Burundi would be concluded by 31 May. On 31 May, the Office of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Burundi was officially closed. On 21 June, the European Union announced its decision to lift the budgetary and financial restrictions it had previously imposed on the Government of Burundi pursuant to article 96 of the Partnership Agreement between the members of the African, Caribbean and Pacific Group of States of the one part, and the European Community and its Member States of the other part.

24. Following her inauguration on 19 March, the President of the United Republic of Tanzania, Samia Suluhu Hassan, signalled her resolve to reinvigorate her country's role in the region by embarking upon a series of State visits to Burundi, Kenya, Rwanda and Uganda, which resulted in the signing of several bilateral cooperation agreements.

25. The region also witnessed several presidential elections during the reporting period. In the Congo, elections held on 21 March resulted in the re-election of the incumbent, Denis Sassou Nguesso, who was sworn in for a fifth term on 16 April. On 15 May, shortly after his inauguration, Mr. Sassou Nguesso travelled to the Democratic Republic of the Congo to discuss bilateral relations and the regional political and security situation with Mr. Tshisekedi. In the Central African Republic, Faustin Archange Touadera was sworn in for a second term on 30 March, following his victory in the presidential election of 27 December 2020. In Uganda, Mr. Museveni was sworn in for a sixth term on 12 May, following his victory in the election held on 14 January 2021. In Zambia, Hakainde Hichilema, the leader of the United Party for National Development, won the presidential election held on 12 August and was sworn in on 24 August.

26. On 20 August, the Court of Appeal of Kenya upheld a High Court decision of 13 May ruling that the Constitution of Kenya amendment bill of 2020 was unconstitutional. The proposed amendment had been the outcome of the Building Bridges Initiative aimed at improving governance and preventing a repeat of the post-electoral violence witnessed in 2017.

27. An encouraging trend in the region was the appointment of several women to senior leadership positions, including Malangu Kabedi-Mbuyi as the Governor of the central bank of the Democratic Republic of the Congo; Martha Koome as the Chief Justice of Kenya; Jemma Nunu Kumba as the Speaker of Parliament of South Sudan; Jessica Rose Epel Alupo as Vice-President of Uganda; Robinah Nabbanja as Prime Minister of Uganda; and, in the United Republic of Tanzania, Liberata Mulamula as Minister for Foreign Affairs and East African Cooperation and Stergomena Lawrence Tax as Minister of Defence.

D. Humanitarian situation

28. Forced displacement and an overall dire humanitarian situation continued to affect the Great Lakes region. According to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), about 15 million people remain displaced in the region. As at 15 August, over 962,000 Congolese refugees were being hosted in 20 African countries, a 2 per cent increase on figures from July 2021. Uganda continued to host the majority of Congolese refugees (433,062), followed by Burundi (81,050), the United Republic of Tanzania (78,634), Rwanda (77,561) and South Africa (57,595). The Democratic Republic of the Congo hosted over 519,000 refugees and asylum seekers, notably from Burundi, the Central African Republic, Rwanda and South Sudan.

29. Some 5.26 million people remained internally displaced in the Democratic Republic of the Congo owing to insecurity and violence, with 1.53 million having been forced to flee and almost 430,000 having returned to their homes since the beginning of 2021. In Ituri Province, 220,000 people have been internally displaced since April, while more than 5,000 Congolese have reportedly crossed into Uganda as a result of insecurity. In May, the eruption of the Mount Nyiragongo volcano temporarily displaced an estimated 232,344 people, including about 30,000 people who were temporarily evacuated to Rwanda.

30. Refugees continued to return to Burundi, reducing the number of Burundian refugees in the region to 327,006 as at 31 August. This figure includes 131,799 Burundian refugees in the United Republic of Tanzania, 51,039 in Uganda, 47,943 in Rwanda, and 42,725 in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. On 19 May, during the twenty-second meeting of the Tripartite Commission for the Voluntary Repatriation of Burundian Refugees, held in Bujumbura, Burundi, the continued voluntary repatriation of Burundian refugees who wished to return to their country of origin was reaffirmed. Participants noted that, while some refugees might opt to return now, others should continue to benefit from international protection in the United Republic of Tanzania. They furthermore decided to jointly develop a road map to promote refugee returns.

31. Between April and August, 7,229 Burundian refugees were returned from Rwanda, with the support of UNHCR, bringing the total number of returns from Rwanda to 29,874 since the two countries reached an agreement in August 2020.

32. During the reporting period, there were a number of cases of the refoulement of asylum seekers and refugees in the region. According to UNHCR, between January and August, at least 10,338 Mozambican asylum seekers fleeing insecurity in northern Mozambique were denied asylum and refouled by the United Republic of Tanzania.

33. On 3 May, the Minister for Public Health, Hygiene and Prevention of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Jean-Jacques Mbugani Mbanda, declared the end of the resurgence of the Ebola virus disease in the country, less than three months after the first new case had been reported in North Kivu Province, on 7 February 2021. Eleven cases and six deaths were recorded.

34. According to the results of the latest Integrated Food Security Phase Classification analysis published in March 2021, the Democratic Republic of the Congo has the highest estimated number of people facing food insecurity in the world, with 27.3 million people facing extreme levels of food insecurity – or worse – between February and July 2021. Moreover, the prevalence of global acute malnutrition stood at 6.5 per cent and that of chronic malnutrition at 42 per cent. Some 4.4 million Congolese are expected to be acutely malnourished in 2021.

E. Human rights and rule of law

35. Human rights violations and violations of international humanitarian law continued to occur in the region, especially in areas affected by armed conflict where accountability remained low.

36. In eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo, grave human rights violations continued to be reported, including a sizeable number in Ituri and North Kivu Provinces. Between March and August, 64 per cent of all documented violations were committed by armed groups and other non-State actors, particularly in Ituri and North Kivu Provinces. ADF and Nyatura were among the main perpetrators, with 329 violations attributed to the former and 316 to the latter. Among foreign armed groups, FDLR combatants were also responsible for 66 violations during the reporting

period. State agents were responsible for the remaining 36 per cent of reported violations. Sexual and gender-based violence continued to be used as a weapon of war, with 178 cases of conflict-related sexual violence reported as at 31 August. Armed groups were responsible for 76 per cent and State agents for 24 per cent of the reported cases.

37. In Burundi, on 16 June, the National Communication Council lifted a suspension on the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) and the online media outlet Ikiriho, whose operations had been banned since March 2019 and October 2018, respectively. Furthermore, on 21 June, the Ntahangwa Court of Appeal in Bujumbura reduced the term of imprisonment of human rights defender Germain Rukuki, who had been arrested in 2017 on charges including rebellion and undermining State security, from 32 years to 1 year.

38. In Kenya, on 8 June, standard operating procedures for the investigation and prosecution of human rights violations committed by police officers were adopted by the competent authorities as part of efforts to strengthen human rights compliance, including during electoral cycles.

39. The Democratic Republic of the Congo and Uganda appeared before the International Court of Justice during public hearings, held from 20 to 30 April, on the question of reparations in the case concerning *Armed Activities on the Territory of the Congo (Democratic Republic of the Congo v. Uganda)*, which relates to the period between 1998 and 2003. The Court is currently reviewing the arguments presented during the proceedings and will deliver its ruling on a date still to be determined.

III. Implementation of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework

A. Commitments of the Democratic Republic of the Congo

40. On 12 April, the Prime Minister of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Jean-Michel Sama Lukonde Kyenge, formed a new Government, supported by a coalition of political forces collectively known as the Union sacrée de la nation, which was endorsed by the National Assembly on 26 April. The Government's programme of action for the period 2021 to 2023, which is estimated to cost around \$12 billion annually, covers the stabilization of the eastern provinces, the re-establishment of State authority, the promotion of good governance, the furtherance of the decentralization process, the improvement of infrastructure and basic social services, the establishment of good relations with neighbouring States, and the review and reinvigoration of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework.

41. On 7 April, the National Assembly established a special commission of inquiry on insecurity in the east of the country. On 5 July, the President signed a decree establishing the Disarmament, Demobilization, Community Recovery and Stabilization Programme, which merges the previous National Programme for Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration and the National Stabilization and Reconstruction Programme for Areas Emerging from Armed Conflict. On 7 August, the President appointed Tommy Tambwe Ushindi as National Coordinator of the Disarmament, Demobilization, Community Recovery and Stabilization Programme. Steps were also taken to strengthen security and defence cooperation with other signatory states of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework, including through the creation, on 12 May, of a joint operations coordination centre with Uganda in Beni, North Kivu Province, to share intelligence and coordinate actions against ADF, and the signing, on 13 July, of a memorandum of understanding on peace and security with Burundi.

B. Commitments of the region

42. The region witnessed an accelerating momentum in high-level diplomatic initiatives to strengthen cooperation. Efforts also continued to be made to strengthen security cooperation, resulting in the establishment by Burundi, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Rwanda, Uganda and the United Republic of Tanzania of a Contact and Coordination Group. The Group has been tasked with coordinating the implementation of non-military measures to complement ongoing military operations against negative forces in the region. Senior military representatives of several countries also met bilaterally to enhance cooperation on border control and the sharing of information and intelligence.

43. Countries in the region also strengthened economic cooperation, including with regard to the management of natural resources. On 20 March, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Uganda signed a memorandum of understanding on fisheries management in Lake Albert and Lake Edward. On 21 April, during his visit to Kinshasa, the President of Kenya signed agreements with the President of the Democratic Republic of the Congo on economic cooperation and maritime freight management. During her visit to Kenya on 4 and 5 May, the President of the United Republic of Tanzania met with the President of Kenya and agreed measures to remove barriers and facilitate the flow of trade and people between the two countries. In June, the Heads of State of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Rwanda agreed joint measures to protect and promote investment, prevent double taxation and tax evasion, and cooperate on gold mining, as well as to strengthen joint mechanisms to prevent and respond to natural disasters.

44. Cross-border infrastructure development was another priority for several signatory countries. On 11 April, the President of the United Republic of Tanzania and the President of Uganda signed agreements regarding the construction of the East African Crude Oil Pipeline. On 27 May, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Uganda approved the joint construction of three strategic roads linking Ugandan border posts with urban centres in North Kivu Province. An agreement was also concluded between Burundi and the Democratic Republic of the Congo to develop the railway linking Gitega, Bujumbura, Uvira and Kindu.

45. Regional and subregional organizations continued to support cooperation efforts, including with regard to electoral and dialogue processes, joint responses to crises, economic cooperation, natural resources and the rule of law. At the 1005th meeting of the Peace and Security Council of the African Union, held on 21 June, progress in the Great Lakes region was welcomed and the persisting challenges related to security, natural disasters and the COVID-19 pandemic were acknowledged. The Council also underlined the need to fully implement the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework.

46. In its capacity as Chair of the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region (ICGLR), Angola convened, on 20 April and 16 September respectively, the second and third mini-summits on the revitalization of the Political Agreement for Peace and Reconciliation in the Central African Republic. At the second summit, it was decided to establish a working group, co-chaired by the Minister for External Relations of Angola and the Minister for Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation of Rwanda, to implement, in collaboration with the Central African authorities, the recommendations put forward by the President of Angola, João Manuel Gonçalves Lourenço, following consultations with armed groups and the Government of the Central African Republic. During the third summit, the Heads of State approved a joint road map seeking, among other aspects, the continuation of consultations with the leaders of armed groups and a renunciation of violence, a

ceasefire declaration by the Government of the Central African Republic, and the launch of the activities of the working group created during the second summit. Furthermore, the ICGLR Executive Secretariat stepped up its political support to member States through a series of diplomatic visits to Angola, Burundi, the Congo, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Kenya and Uganda, and through the deployment of electoral observation missions to the Congo and Zambia.

47. At the forty-first summit of the Southern African Development Community (SADC), held on 17 and 18 August in Lilongwe, Elias Mpedi Magosi of Botswana was sworn in as Executive Secretary of the organization. The President of Malawi, Lazarus McCarthy Chakwera, was elected as Chairperson and the President of the Democratic Republic of the Congo as the incoming Chairperson. The President of South Africa became the Chairperson of the Organ on Politics, Defence and Security Cooperation. In a separate development, experts from the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Zambia met in Pweto, Democratic Republic of the Congo, on 20 August to update the demarcation of parts of their common border, as agreed with an SADC facilitation team in 2020.

48. Efforts were made to implement the decisions of the high-level meeting of ministers in charge of refugees of the member States of the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region, held in 2019 in Kampala. On 28 June, ICGLR, together with UNHCR, established a working group and launched a study in preparation for the development of a strategy on durable solutions for displaced populations in the region. Furthermore, the Regional Committee of ICGLR on the Prevention and Punishment of Genocide, War Crimes, Crimes against Humanity and all forms of Discrimination adopted, during a meeting held on 18 May, a regional action plan on the fight against impunity, prevention of genocide and other mass atrocities, which envisages, inter alia, the development of an ICGLR manual of principles and guidelines for truth and reconciliation commissions.

49. With regard to the COVID-19 pandemic, regional response and recovery frameworks continued to be implemented, as a complement to measures adopted at the national level. Key interventions included trade facilitation to ensure the smooth and uninterrupted movement of goods and services, support for access to medical supplies, advocacy for resource mobilization and equitable access to vaccines, and support for the implementation of logistical and administrative prerequisites for vaccine roll-outs. Bilaterally, Kenya and the United Republic of Tanzania agreed to establish a joint mechanism to tackle cross-border challenges linked to the COVID-19 pandemic. In addition, several countries began to build domestic capacity for the production of COVID-19 vaccines.

50. On 31 May, the twenty-ninth meeting of the Technical Support Committee of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework, which was held virtually, focused on the formulation of an action plan to implement the United Nations Strategy for Peace Consolidation, Conflict Prevention and Conflict Resolution in the Great Lakes Region (hereinafter, the regional strategy). Meanwhile, consultations continued among the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Uganda and the guarantors of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework with regard to the holding of the tenth high-level meeting of the Regional Oversight Mechanism, set to be hosted by the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

C. International commitments

51. On 27 April, during its fourth meeting, the Management Board of the Great Lakes Regional Strategic Framework, co-Chaired by the Special Envoy for the Great Lakes Region and the Director of the United Nations Development Programme

Regional Bureau for Africa, acknowledged the regional strategy as the new guiding framework and, in this regard, handed its responsibilities to the Senior Policy Group established as part of the implementation of the regional strategy. Meeting participants stressed the need to build on the lessons learned from the Regional Strategic Framework during the implementation of the regional strategy.

52. During a workshop on the development of the action plan to implement the regional strategy, held on 9 and 10 June in Kinshasa (see para. 55), international partners reiterated their commitment to supporting the countries of the region and the Office of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for the Great Lakes in the implementation of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework and the priorities identified in the regional strategy.

53. On 26 July, during a meeting on the Great Lakes region, the Peacebuilding Commission welcomed the action plan to implement the regional strategy and reiterated its support for the region's efforts to build lasting stability and prosperity. Members of the Commission emphasized the role expected to be played by the Contact and Coordination Group in the implementation of non-military measures, including disarmament, demobilization and reintegration, and the importance of promoting inclusiveness through cross-border, community-based initiatives.

IV. Implementation of the United Nations Strategy for Peace Consolidation, Conflict Prevention and Conflict Resolution in the Great Lakes Region

54. My Special Envoy for the Great Lakes Region continued to lead efforts to implement the United Nations Strategy for Peace Consolidation, Conflict Prevention and Conflict Resolution in the Great Lakes Region (S/2020/1168), most notably through the establishment of the Senior Policy Group – the steering body responsible for providing overarching political guidance on the implementation of the regional strategy – and the development of an action plan for the period 2021 to 2023.

55. During its inaugural meeting, on 20 May, members of the Senior Policy Group endorsed a road map for the formulation of the action plan. After a series of prior consultations with different stakeholders, a workshop was held on 9 and 10 June in Kinshasa (see para. 51), organized by my Special Envoy, with support from MONUSCO and facilitated by the think tank Conflict Prevention and Peace Forum. The workshop was attended, in person or virtually, by representatives of signatory countries and guarantor institutions of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework, international partners, civil society organizations and United Nations entities at Headquarters and in the region. Based on the outcome of prior consultations and the workshop, the Office of the Special Envoy for the Great Lakes, together with other United Nations entities, finalized the draft action plan, which was subsequently examined and adopted by the Senior Policy Group on 8 July.

56. The action plan is designed to be a tool for accountability, resource mobilization, programming, coordination, and monitoring and evaluation. It builds on five interlinked clusters, namely: (a) promoting dialogue and strengthening trust; (b) reducing the threat posed by armed groups; (c) promoting sustainable and transparent management of natural resources and trade and investment; (d) finding durable solutions to forced displacement; and (e) promoting regional preparedness for public health crises. The inclusion, participation and empowerment of women and youth, as well as the promotion and protection of human rights and the fight against impunity are cross-cutting issues to be considered under all five clusters.

57. Implementation of the action plan, which began on 15 July, will be carried out in a phased manner with an initial focus, until 31 December, on the most pressing initiatives, including ongoing initiatives and projects. This will be followed by the implementation, in 2022 and 2023, of other key activities identified during the consultations. Funding needs and a further breakdown of the initiatives for 2022 and 2023 will be formulated by the Implementation Support Mechanism – the technical arm of the Senior Policy Group – as part of the development of a comprehensive resource mobilization strategy, in the last quarter of 2021.

A. Promoting dialogue and strengthening trust

58. My Special Envoy for the Great Lakes Region continued his efforts to support dialogue processes and build confidence among the leaders of the region through virtual and in-person consultations. During the reporting period, he consulted with senior officials from Angola, Burundi, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Rwanda, the Sudan, Uganda and the United Republic of Tanzania, both in person and virtually, on recent political and security developments in the region, progress in the implementation of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework and the development of the action plan for the regional strategy.

59. As part of his good offices mandate, the Special Envoy offered his continued support for the ongoing dialogue and rapprochement between Burundi and Rwanda, Burundi and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and Rwanda and Uganda, including through discreet shuttle diplomacy, with the aim of promoting good neighbourly relations. In his engagements with the leaders of the region, he encouraged dialogue between the parties on ways to reduce tensions, and sought solutions to unblock persisting differences. In his introductory audiences with the President of the United Republic Tanzania, Ms. Hassan, on 5 May, and with the Prime Minister of the Sudan, Abdalla Hamdok, on 2 September, my Special Envoy advocated their continued participation in all mechanisms and processes in the implementation of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework.

60. My Special Envoy also continued to advocate pursuing multilateral cooperation at the regional level to complement and bolster ongoing bilateral efforts to strengthen military operations against foreign armed groups operating in the eastern part of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. In this regard, he highlighted the tenth high-level meeting of the Regional Oversight Mechanism, set to be hosted by the Democratic Republic of the Congo, as an opportunity for strategic dialogue among the leaders of the region on this and related issues.

B. Reducing the threat posed by armed groups

61. The operationalization of the Contact and Coordination Group during a workshop held from 3 to 6 May in Goma, Democratic Republic of the Congo, with the support of the Office of the Special Envoy, marked a milestone in efforts to reinforce non-military cooperation against negative forces in the region. The workshop brought together the statutory expert members of the Group from Burundi, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Rwanda, Uganda and the United Republic of Tanzania, as well as delegates from Angola, the Central African Republic and Kenya as observers. The Group agreed an action plan covering the period from 2021 to 2023 that centres on the disarmament and repatriation of negative forces; the disruption of their supply of weapons, combatants and funding; the strengthening of national disarmament, demobilization and reintegration programmes; and the strengthening of

cross-border economic cooperation, with a view to promoting income-generating opportunities, particularly for young people.

62. The action plan of the Contact and Coordination Group was endorsed by the chiefs of the intelligence and security services of Burundi, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Rwanda, Uganda and the United Republic of Tanzania during their fourth meeting, held on 6 July in Bujumbura and facilitated by the Office of the Special Envoy, the African Union Liaison Office in Bujumbura and ICGLR. Participants further agreed on the deployment of an operational cell, comprising security experts from the five participating countries, to coordinate and support the implementation of the action plan, with a focus on engagement with foreign armed groups. The operational cell will also ensure close liaison with other stakeholders, including the national disarmament, demobilization and reintegration commissions.

C. Promoting sustainable and transparent management of natural resources and trade and investment

63. My Special Envoy intensified his advocacy for a holistic approach aimed at addressing the illicit exploitation of and trade in natural resources. In addition to bilateral engagements, on 30 July the Special Envoy briefed the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution [1533 \(2004\)](#) during informal consultations on the illicit trade in gold, tin, tantalum and tungsten in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and internationally. The consultations provided a platform to review the latest trends with regard to the smuggling of strategic minerals and the steps under way to tackle the issue.

64. A key step towards ensuring a holistic approach to natural resources management was the high-level workshop convened by the Office of the Special Envoy, ICGLR and the Government of the Sudan, held from 31 August to 2 September in Khartoum. Workshop participants agreed a set of strategic recommendations aimed at curbing the illicit exploitation and trade in natural resources, including by contributing to improved national ownership, promoting the effective implementation of the ICGLR Regional Initiative against the Illegal Exploitation of Natural Resources and ensuring the full involvement of all stakeholders along the value chain.

65. As part of efforts to help improve the business climate and support responsible investments, the Office of the Special Envoy, together with ICGLR and the International Institute for Sustainable Development, held a high-level workshop on international investment agreements and sustainable development in the Great Lakes region on 23 and 24 June. Participants agreed on recommendations addressed to ICGLR member States aimed at enhancing coherence on international investment agreements and developing a unified regional approach to ongoing negotiations on the African Continental Free Trade Area investment protocols.

D. Finding durable solutions to forced displacement

66. The Office of the Special Envoy continued to support regional efforts to prevent forced displacement and promote voluntary returns of refugees, including by participating in the working group established by ICGLR and UNHCR to prepare a comprehensive strategy on durable solutions. On 30 April, the Special Envoy met with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees in Nairobi to discuss displacement trends in the region and the importance of interlinking political and humanitarian efforts in addressing this challenge.

E. Promoting regional preparedness for public health crises

67. In a context of increased socioeconomic instability due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the attendant potential risks to efforts to achieve lasting stability, the Special Envoy continued to advocate broader access by countries of the region to COVID-19 vaccines and the financial resources needed to launch an effective post-pandemic economic recovery, including during a visit he undertook to Brussels to meet with European Union officials on 19 and 20 July. The Office of the Special Envoy further supported ICGLR in following up on the ICGLR meeting of health ministers, held on 10 July 2020, during which the ministers had agreed on the establishment of a ministerial coordination committee, supported by a network of health experts, to share best practices in tackling the pandemic. This platform aims to promote political advocacy and other initiatives to ensure increased and equal access to vaccines for people in the region.

F. Advancing the inclusion, participation and empowerment of women and youth

68. In an effort to further accelerate the implementation of the women and peace and security agenda in the region, the Special Envoy convened, together with the Special Envoy of the Chairperson of the African Union Commission on Women, Peace and Security, Bineta Diop, the thirteenth meeting of the Advisory Board for Women, Peace and Security in the Great Lakes Region, on 5 May. The virtual meeting resulted in the endorsement of a set of initiatives that focus on the root causes and drivers of conflict and their impact on women, as well as on knowledge-sharing and capacity-building for women's participation in peacebuilding, mediation and cross-border economic activities.

69. In collaboration with the ICGLR Regional Civil Society Forum and the Mwalimu Nyerere Foundation, the Special Envoy carried out consultations on 19 May with regional civil society organizations and representatives of academia to discuss priority actions linked to the regional strategy. Participating civil society organizations agreed to contribute to the monitoring and evaluation of the strategy's action plan, through the development of a biennial gender barometer to measure efforts by ICGLR member States of the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region to promote gender equality and combat gender-based violence.

70. On 28 May, the Office of the Special Envoy, in collaboration with ICGLR, held a meeting with women representatives from South Kivu Province and the non-governmental organization Interpeace to reflect on the role of women in community peacebuilding and conflict prevention. Noting the past contributions of women in North Kivu Province to raising awareness among armed groups of demobilization processes, participants stressed, among other issues, the need to mobilize and develop mechanisms to further involve women in peacebuilding efforts in South Kivu Province.

71. The Office of the Special Envoy, in conjunction with the Network of African Women in Conflict Prevention and Mediation (FemWise-Africa) and the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region, ran a training workshop in Kigali, from 6 to 10 September, for members of FemWise-Africa from Burundi, the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Rwanda, South Sudan, the Sudan, Uganda and the United Republic of Tanzania. The training aimed to strengthen members' conflict analysis, negotiation and mediation skills and enable them to better contribute to dialogue processes at the local level – in response to the threats posed by armed groups – and in high-level preventive diplomacy and mediation. It also

included an interactive session with members of the African Ombudsmen and Mediators Association from the Great Lakes region, notably those from Burundi, Kenya, Rwanda, South Africa, the United Republic of Tanzania and Zambia.

72. The Office of the Special Envoy continued to advocate a greater role for youth in conflict prevention, peace consolidation and peacebuilding efforts. As a result of this engagement, the Contact and Coordination Group on non-military measures adopted a youth- and community-focused prevention approach, which not only envisages direct engagement with and through communities, but also provides for targeted activities aimed at promoting economic opportunities for youth in conflict-affected border areas. Preparations are also under way, in cooperation with other United Nations entities, to implement capacity-building initiatives for youth leaders and groups with a view to further empowering them as messengers and builders of peace and prosperity.

G. Promotion and protection of human rights and the fight against impunity

73. In line with the action plan to implement the regional strategy and the Secretary-General's call to action for human rights, the Special Envoy continued his advocacy for the protection of fundamental freedoms and rights, including in the context of political and electoral processes and COVID-19 prevention and recovery efforts.

74. My Special Envoy also continued to promote the rule of law and regional judicial cooperation as part of efforts to further the implementation of the Nairobi Declaration on Justice and Good Governance, adopted in 2019. In this context, on 3 and 4 June, the Office of the Special Envoy, together with ICGLR and the International Institute for Justice and the Rule of Law, facilitated the sixth meeting of the Great Lakes Judicial Cooperation Network, under the leadership of its incoming Chair, Angola. The Judicial Cooperation Network agreed a set of recommendations for harmonizing of procedures concerning mutual legal assistance in criminal matters, ahead of Great Lakes Regional Ministerial Conference on Enhancing Judicial Cooperation, planned for November 2021.

V. Partnerships with regional organizations and mechanisms, international partners and United Nations entities

A. Regional organizations and mechanisms

75. My Special Envoy continued his efforts to strengthen cooperation between his Office and regional and subregional organizations. On 30 April and 6 July, my Special Envoy and the Executive Secretary of the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region discussed ways to enhance cooperation between the United Nations and the ICGLR Executive Secretariat, including with regard to a joint workshop on natural resources being held in Khartoum at the end of August. They agreed to hold a joint planning meeting before the end of 2021.

B. International partners

76. My Special Envoy continued his consultations with international partners on regional developments and the implementation of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework and the action plan of the regional strategy, notably through bilateral meetings with members of the Security Council and other partners. He also

consulted with representatives of the diplomatic community during his missions in the region, including to Burundi, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Rwanda. From 19 to 24 July, he held consultations in Belgium and France with representatives of the Belgian and French Governments and the European Union. He also continued to advocate concerted international support for ongoing and planned initiatives through engagements with the International Contact Group for the Great Lakes Region.

C. Other United Nations entities

77. In the context of the Senior Policy Group established to steer the implementation of the regional strategy, my Special Envoy collaborated with the Heads of MONUSCO, the United Nations Regional Office for Central Africa (UNOCA) and the United Nations Office to the African Union to ensure coherence in the delivery of United Nations support for political processes in the region. In this context, between April and September, my Special Envoy paid several visits to Kinshasa, during which time he and my Special Representative for the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Head of MONUSCO discussed ways to enhance cooperation between the two missions.

78. My Special Envoy participated in the fifty-first ministerial meeting of the United Nations Standing Advisory Committee on Security Questions in Central Africa, which was facilitated by UNOCA and held from 24 to 28 May in Bujumbura. From 23 to 25 June, the Office of the Special Envoy participated in a workshop, jointly organized by UNOCA and the Economic Community of Central African States, on the prevention and resolution of conflicts related to pastoralism and cross-border transhumance in Central Africa. The Office of the Special Envoy also contributed to a workshop on climate security in Central Africa held by videoconference on 29 July.

79. On 7 July, my Special Envoy and my Special Representative to the African Union discussed the electoral process in Zambia. On 16 July, he discussed with the Director and Deputy to the Under-Secretary-General of the Office of Counter-Terrorism ways to enhance joint analysis and programming to help prevent violent extremism in the Great Lakes region. He also consulted with the Resident Coordinators in Burundi, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Kenya, Rwanda, the Sudan and Uganda to discuss regional dynamics and opportunities for enhanced cooperation.

VI. Observations

80. I applaud the commitment demonstrated by the signatory countries of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework to continue strengthening and improving their relations. In particular, I am encouraged by the steps taken by the Governments of Burundi and Rwanda to normalize their relations. I also take note of the status of the quadripartite process for the normalization of relations between Rwanda and Uganda and urge the two countries to revive the process. Good neighbourliness and strong bonds between the leaders of the region are essential to achieve our shared vision of a peaceful, stable and prosperous Great Lakes region. In this regard, I encourage the early convening of the tenth high-level meeting of the Regional Oversight Mechanism as a platform for high-level political dialogue on these and related issues. The United Nations, through my Special Envoy, remains committed to supporting this endeavour.

81. I welcome the actions taken by the signatory countries to enhance regional security cooperation, particularly through the launch of the Contact and Coordination Group, which constitutes a critical step towards a comprehensive response to the

threat posed by armed groups. It is now urgent to implement the Group's action plan, notably by establishing its operational cell without delay. I call upon the participating countries to honour their commitments promptly and urge partners to scale up their support for the initiatives to be undertaken by the Contact and Coordination Group. My Special Envoy will continue to support this process in close collaboration with representatives of the other three guarantor institutions of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework.

82. These efforts are particularly important in the context of the alarming security and human rights situation in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo, where armed groups continue to prey on civilians. I reiterate my call upon the leaders of the region to redouble their efforts to ensure that the perpetrators of these crimes, including conflict-related sexual and gender-based violence, are held accountable.

83. I remain concerned about continued human rights violations in the region. The protection of human rights and the promotion of inclusive, credible and peaceful political processes that give voice to all citizens under the rule of law remain paramount for stability and development. The Nairobi Declaration on Justice and Good Governance charts a concrete path forward and should be implemented as quickly as possible. I also urge all political stakeholders to refrain from hate speech and incitement to violence, and encourage relevant authorities to strengthen inclusive democratic processes.

84. I commend the leaders of the region for strengthening bilateral and multilateral economic cooperation, including through the signing of agreements on cross-border energy and infrastructure projects. These initiatives are vital for economic development and regional trade and can contribute to creating livelihoods, reducing inequalities among border communities and delivering prosperity and hope to people in the region.

85. The holding of the high-level workshop on natural resources in Khartoum, which provided an important opportunity for dialogue involving all stakeholders on ways to advance the transparent and sustainable management of natural resources, is a welcome development. I encourage the swift implementation of the priority actions identified during the workshop to curb the illegal exploitation and trade in natural resources, a long-standing driver of instability in the region.

86. I welcome the progress made in the region towards the equitable representation of women in political leadership positions. I urge all stakeholders to remove all barriers to the active and meaningful participation of women, girls and youth in peacebuilding and political processes.

87. The current environment in the region is propitious for closer collaboration between governments and partners in the search for durable solutions for refugees and internally displaced persons. Efforts to pursue a comprehensive approach that effectively translates the development-humanitarian-peace nexus into action are needed now more than ever. I remain concerned about the multiple incidents of refoulement that have been reported in the region, and I encourage all concerned Governments to respect and uphold the right to seek asylum, in line with international refugee law.

88. I welcome the launch of vaccination campaigns in several countries to help curb the COVID-19 pandemic, which has had an adverse impact on economic development and has exacerbated economic and social inequalities. In this regard, I reiterate my call for equitable, inclusive and transparent access to vaccines so as to enable societies to emerge from the crisis with greater resilience.

89. This is a pivotal moment in the history of the Great Lakes region. The leaders and the people of the region have demonstrated their readiness to work together and

have taken concrete steps to improve their relations and strengthen regional cooperation. Through the adoption of the action plan to implement the regional strategy, the United Nations has defined how it will support the region in its endeavours over the next three years. Now is the time for international partners to provide decisive support to existing and planned regional initiatives, in the context of the implementation of the action plan.

90. I wish to thank my Special Envoy for his steadfast commitment to supporting the signatory countries in the implementation of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework and for his leadership in the implementation of the regional strategy.
