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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 the Secretary-General to report 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/2020/951](#)) and covers the period from 16 September 2020 to 15 March 2021.

II. Major developments

A. Spread and implications of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic

2. While some countries in the Great Lakes region took prompt measures to curb the spread of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, the pandemic continued to have a negative impact on the region. As of 15 March, the 13 signatory countries of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework for the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Region reported a total of 1,894,326 confirmed cases and 58,520 fatalities, according to the World Health Organization. Following an increase in new infections between September and December 2020, the overall percentage of new cases decreased again from early January onwards. The number of reported fatalities rose at a slow yet steady pace.

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.



3. Measures to curb the spread of the pandemic significantly affected the socioeconomic situation in the region. Whereas, prior to the pandemic, the 2020 gross domestic product forecast for the 12 States members of the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region (ICGLR) stood at 3.2 per cent, recent statistics by the International Monetary Fund and the Economic Commission for Africa confirm a sharp downturn, with a regional average of -2 per cent gross domestic product growth for 2020. According to the International Monetary Fund, a debt crisis is looming, despite the support provided by international financial institutions and bilateral public creditors. In November, Zambia became the first African country to default on debt owed to private investors since the start of the pandemic.

4. The COVID-19 pandemic has had a particularly adverse impact on women, many of whom have lost their livelihoods and have been victims of gender-based violence linked to lockdown measures. The United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) has voiced concern over the negative impact on human rights across the region of some emergency measures taken to contain the virus.

B. Security situation

5. The Great Lakes region recorded a relative reduction in cross-border security incidents, with 3 incidents reported, compared with 10 during the previous reporting period. On 29 September, 19 combatants of the Burundian armed group, Résistance pour un État de Droit au Burundi-Tabara (RED-Tabara), were forced to surrender by the Rwanda Defence Force in Nyungwe forest, as they tried to cross into Rwanda, fleeing military pressure from the Forces de défense nationale du Burundi (FDNB). The arrest was reportedly facilitated by information-sharing between Burundi and Rwanda.

6. On 27 October, a clash occurred between soldiers of the Ugandan and South Sudanese armies. Whereas South Sudan accused Uganda of launching a cross-border attack against its border outpost in Eastern Equatoria State, Uganda claimed the cause of the clash was the establishment of an illegal roadblock by South Sudanese army elements on Ugandan territory. The two countries have undertaken to resolve the issue through diplomatic channels.

7. From 28 February to 1 March, the Rwanda Defence Force intercepted suspected armed elements of the Forces démocratiques de libération du Rwanda (FDLR) allegedly coming from Burundi. Following consultations between the two countries, FDNB launched an offensive against armed elements along the border with Rwanda, reportedly resulting in the death of at least 20 FDLR elements. On 14 March, FDNB and Rwanda Defence Force representatives met at the Bweyeye border post in Burundi to discuss ways to address cross-border security incidents.

8. In the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo, foreign and local armed groups remained active, with a surge in attacks by the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF) in North Kivu province, mainly in Rwenzori Sector, east of Beni town and near the border with Uganda. Between 16 September and 15 March, attacks carried out by alleged ADF elements resulted in the killing of over 400 civilians. Efforts to prosecute suspects in attacks against civilians were partly undermined by the escape of 1,335 inmates, including ADF members, during an attack on Kangwayi Prison in Beni by suspected ADF elements on 20 October. While military operations conducted by the Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (FARDC) in 2019 dispersed ADF fighters and dislodged them from their traditional stronghold in Mbau, Kamango and Eringeti, the group remains a significant threat.

9. FARDC continued its operations against Rwandan armed groups operating in Congolese territory. On 23 and 24 October, FARDC clashed with the Rwandan armed group Conseil national de la résistance pour la Démocratie and its Mai-Mai allies, killing 27 combatants and capturing arms and ammunition. Meanwhile, the Forces démocratiques de libération du Rwanda (FDLR) were reportedly able to consolidate their recruitment and training activities, with reports of military training for new recruits taking place in southern Lubero and Rutshuru territories. Illicit economic activities by various armed groups also remained a key driving factor of conflict.

10. In South Kivu, FARDC operations against the Burundian armed groups Forces nationales de libération (FNL) and RED-Tabara resulted in the killing of at least 27 FNL fighters in Homba, in the Fizi, and Uvira territories, between 23 and 26 October. From 22 to 24 November, FARDC reportedly seized the FNL headquarters in South Kivu. Several elements of the RED-Tabara were reported to have relocated from their original strongholds in Fizi and Uvira to Kalehe territory.

11. In response to the midterm report of the Group of Experts on the Democratic Republic of the Congo released on 23 December (S/2020/1283), which alleged incursions by Rwanda Defence Force into the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the Government of Rwanda issued a press release on 8 January, denying joint operations with FARDC and stating that military cooperation between the two countries was currently limited to the sharing of intelligence on armed groups.

12. During the reporting period attacks were also perpetrated by the Lord's Resistance Army in the Democratic Republic of the Congo on 19 October, 27 November and 20 December, which resulted in killings and abductions of civilians. Lord's Resistance Army combatants also abducted 13 civilians near Obo, Haut-Mbomou Prefecture, in the Central African Republic, on 28 September.

C. Political developments

13. Despite the restrictive measures put in place to curb the spread of COVID-19, the reporting period witnessed an intensification of regional diplomacy and efforts to improve bilateral and multilateral relations and cooperation. Intraregional diplomatic missions and démarches continued. Statutory and extraordinary meetings, including among the Heads of State of ICGLR and the Southern African Development Community, were held and culminated in decisions related to peace and security.

14. An encouraging development was the resumption of dialogue between Burundi and Rwanda, both of which committed to peacefully resolve contentious issues and work towards a gradual rapprochement. Following expert-level exchanges on cross-border security, a meeting between the Ministers for Foreign Affairs of Rwanda and Burundi was held on 19 October in Nemba, Rwanda. In a subsequent communiqué, the Ministers expressed the readiness of their respective Governments to reach an agreement for the normalization of bilateral relations.

15. On 24 November the President of Burundi, Évariste Ndayishimiye, issued a communiqué noting ongoing contacts with Rwanda as efforts towards the normalization of relations between the two neighbours. He reiterated a previous demand for the extradition, by Rwanda, of persons suspected of involvement in the 2015 failed coup attempt in Burundi, stressing that the suspects would be guaranteed a fair and equitable judicial process. During a speech on 24 January, he expressed confidence that Burundi and Rwanda would normalize their relations in the near future, emphasizing the readiness of the authorities of both countries to do so. In media interviews in December, the State Minister of Rwanda for East African Affairs, Manasseh Nshuti, reiterated his country's readiness to re-establish friendly relations with Burundi without preconditions. Regarding the demand by Burundi for the

extradition of suspected coup plotters, Mr. Nshuti noted that Rwanda would be guided by international refugee law. He further underscored that Burundian refugees living in Rwanda would not be permitted to engage in hostile actions against Burundi. On 21 December, during his state of the nation address, the President of Rwanda, Paul Kagame, noted that talks with Burundi were ongoing and aimed to find a “fitting solution” to tensions between the two countries.

16. Although no formal meeting was held recently in the context of the quadripartite process for the normalization of bilateral relations between Rwanda and Uganda, senior officials from both countries reiterated the commitment by their respective Governments to resolve any issues likely to undermine good neighbourly relations.

17. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, following tensions within the ruling Front commun pour le Congo-Cap pour le changement coalition, the President of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Félix Tshisekedi, decided to end the coalition and establish a new parliamentary majority known as Union sacrée de la Nation. On 14 February, Mr. Tshisekedi appointed Jean-Michel Sama Lukonde Kyenge as Prime Minister, replacing Sylvestre Ilunga Ilukamba, who had resigned on 29 January following a vote of no-confidence.

18. Congolese authorities continued to nurture good relations with their neighbours. During a visit by the Congolese Minister for Foreign Affairs, Marie Tumba Nzeza, to Bujumbura on 4 and 5 October, the two countries agreed, inter alia, to establish a permanent joint commission on political, defence and security matters, to set up joint mechanisms for the management of shared resources, such as the Ruzizi river and Lake Tanganyika, and to reactivate the tripartite commission for the management of the return of refugees. Moreover, Mr. Tshisekedi visited the Congo twice, on 27 October 2020 and 9 January 2021. He also travelled to Angola on 16 November and to South Africa on 19 December 2020, in a bid to strengthen bilateral relations and seek support for his domestic priorities. A visit to Kinshasa by the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Rwanda on 19 January 2021 also focused on strengthening cooperation between the two countries. The visit paved the way for a follow-up meeting between security officials of both countries, which was held in Kigali from 12 to 14 February.

19. On 6 February, Mr. Tshisekedi assumed the rotating chairpersonship of the African Union. Previously, on 7 October, he had convened a virtual mini-summit with the Heads of State of Angola, Rwanda and Uganda, which had resulted in an agreement to strengthen the capacity of the region to sever the sources of financing of armed groups, especially the illegal exploitation of natural resources, and to develop a cross-border plan to strengthen the region’s response to the COVID-19 pandemic and other health crises.

20. In Burundi, Mr. Ndayishimiye pursued the implementation of the six national priorities outlined in his inaugural speech delivered on 18 June 2020, placing the emphasis on improving governance and accelerating socioeconomic development. He also took steps to strengthen relations with countries in the region and beyond. In addition to efforts towards normalizing relations with Rwanda, he undertook his first official visit to the United Republic of Tanzania on 20 September. Mr. Ndayishimiye also continued to engage his counterparts from Angola, Kenya, the United Republic of Tanzania, Uganda, Equatorial Guinea and Ethiopia. While the European Union on 29 October extended its sanctions targeting Burundian officials accused of violence against civilians following the coup attempt of 2015, the Government of Burundi on 7 December resumed dialogue with the European Union, five years after the latter had suspended its budgetary support to the country. Burundi was also reinstated as a member of the International Organisation of la Francophonie on 4 November.

21. Elections in the United Republic of Tanzania and Uganda were held as scheduled, despite a temporary heightening of tensions. In the United Republic of Tanzania, on 30 October, the National Electoral Commission announced the victory of the incumbent President, John Magufuli of Chama Cha Mapinduzi, with 84.4 per cent of the votes. The main opposition parties, CHADEMA and ACT-Wazalendo, rejected the results and called for peaceful demonstrations. The East African Community, which deployed an election observation mission, and the Southern African Development Community expressed support for the electoral process. Mr. Magufuli, who was sworn in for a second term on 5 November 2020, died on 17 March. His Vice-President, Samia Suluhu Hassan, was sworn in on 19 March as the country's sixth President and the first woman Head of State of the United Republic of Tanzania.

22. In Uganda, elections were held on 14 January, following a tense electoral campaign. On 28 January, the Electoral Commission announced that the incumbent President, Yoweri Kaguta Museveni of the National Resistance Movement, had won with 58.4 per cent of the votes, while the opposition candidate, Robert Kyagulanyi Ssentamu of the National Unity Platform (also known as Bobi Wine), had come in second with 35 per cent. The election observation missions deployed by the Inter-Governmental Authority for Development and the East African Community, respectively, deemed the voting process orderly and peaceful. The electoral observation mission fielded by the African Union declined to comment on whether the elections had been free and fair, citing the mission's limited geographical coverage. On 1 February, Mr. Kyagulanyi's lawyers filed a petition before the Supreme Court calling for fresh polls, due to electoral irregularities and offences allegedly committed during the presidential election. On 22 February, Mr. Kyagulanyi announced the withdrawal of his petition, citing, inter alia, the absence of an independent judiciary in Uganda, and called for peaceful demonstrations. On 18 March, the Supreme Court confirmed the petition's withdrawal.

23. In Kenya, the final report of the Building Bridges Initiative task force, formed in 2018, was handed over to the President, Uhuru Kenyatta, on 21 October 2020. The report contains recommendations to improve governance, including by strengthening the role of the political opposition. An expansion of the executive branch through the introduction of the office of Prime Minister and two Deputy Prime Ministers has also been proposed. The recommendations will be put to a referendum later in 2021.

D. Humanitarian situation

24. Forced displacement and an overall dire humanitarian situation remained major concerns in the Great Lakes region. About 15.3 million individuals remain displaced in the region. At the end of 2020, over 940,000 Congolese refugees continued to be hosted in African countries, a slight increase from the previous reporting period. Uganda hosted the majority of Congolese refugees (421,563), followed by Burundi (79,406), the United Republic of Tanzania (78,075), Rwanda (74,491), South Africa (59,675) and 16 other African countries. At the same time, the Democratic Republic of the Congo hosted over 490,000 refugees, notably from Burundi, the Central African Republic, Rwanda and South Sudan. Available funding for humanitarian operations in the region continued to fall short of the rising needs. At the end of 2020, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) facilitated the voluntary repatriation of 7,895 Burundian refugees from the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Kenya, Rwanda, Uganda and the United Republic of Tanzania. In February 2021, a joint refugee return and reintegration plan was launched by the Government of Burundi, UNHCR, the United Nations Development Programme and other partners. It presents an integrated inter-agency response to immediate

humanitarian needs and to longer-term resilience and reintegration needs of Burundian returnees and their communities of return.

25. The Special Rapporteur on Refugees, Asylum-Seekers, Migrants and Internally Displaced Persons in Africa of the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights voiced concern about the situation of Burundian refugees in the United Republic of Tanzania. In that regard, on 15 December, she noted violations of their fundamental rights, such as access to asylum and the principle of non-refoulement. The Special Rapporteur called on the United Republic of Tanzania to fully collaborate with UNHCR with regard to Burundian refugees. In October and November 2020, Human Rights Watch and UNHCR made repeated calls to the Tanzanian and Burundian authorities to respect the principle of voluntary return and refrain from pressuring and intimidating Burundian refugees in the United Republic of Tanzania. Furthermore, UNHCR voiced concern over forced disappearances of Burundian refugees from camps in the United Republic of Tanzania. The Government of the United Republic of Tanzania confirmed that the issue was being investigated.

26. On 7 February, the Ministry of Health of the Democratic Republic of the Congo announced that a new case of the Ebola virus disease had been detected in Butembo, North Kivu. As of 14 March, 11 cases had been confirmed, including 6 fatalities. Vaccination campaigns are underway with 1,083 people vaccinated by early March.

27. Access and insecurity remain major constraints to the delivery of humanitarian assistance, notably in eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo. On 22 February, during a humanitarian field mission, a World Food Programme convoy was ambushed by armed elements on the road between Goma and Rutshuru, North Kivu, resulting in the death of the Ambassador of the Italy to the Democratic Republic of the Congo, his Italian close protection officer and one national World Food Programme staff member.

E. Human rights and rule of law

28. Human rights violations and violations of international humanitarian law continued in the region, especially in areas affected by conflict. Some violations resulted from the activities of armed groups, notably their continued use of sexual and gender-based violence as a weapon of war. Other violations were linked to restrictions on fundamental rights and freedoms in political and electoral processes and to restrictions put in place to curb the spread of COVID-19.

29. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the United Nations Joint Human Rights Office of the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) reported that, between September and December, 51 per cent of all documented violations were committed by armed groups and other non-State actors, with Nyatura, ADF, FDLR and Djugu-based armed assailants as the main perpetrators. State agents, including FARDC soldiers, were responsible for the remaining 49 per cent of the violations. Conflict-affected provinces, particularly North Kivu, were the most impacted.

30. With regard to restrictions on fundamental rights and freedoms, the incidents reported included instances of harassment, arrest, attacks on and confinement of opposition candidates in electoral contexts, violent repression of peaceful protests and restrictions on media freedom. In the United Republic of Tanzania, the presidential candidate representing the opposition CHADEMA party, Tundu Lissu, and Seif Sharif Hamad of the ACT-Wazalendo party, were briefly arrested in connection with demonstrations against what they described as fraudulent management of the elections and the polling results. CHADEMA claimed that over 300 of its members had been arbitrarily arrested across the country during the electoral period. In Uganda,

protests on 18 and 19 November, in response to the arrest of a presidential candidate, Mr. Kyagulanyi, resulted in at least 50 fatalities during clashes between protesters and the police. Ugandan authorities justified the use of force as necessary to ensure compliance with guidelines established by the Electoral Commission to contain the COVID-19 pandemic.

31. With regard to accountability for grave human rights violations, some trials resulted in landmark judgments against perpetrators of serious crimes. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo on 23 November, the former leader of the armed group Nduma défense du Congo, Ntabo Ntaberi Sheka, was sentenced to life in prison for war crimes, including murder, rape, sexual slavery, and child recruitment, by a military court. Sheka was convicted together with the FDLR leader, Séraphin Nzitonda Habimana (alias Lionceau). On 4 December, leader of the Rassemblement congolais pour la Démocratie-National, Roger Lumbala, was arrested in Paris on charges of complicity in crimes against humanity related to his 2002 actions in Ituri province.

32. In Kenya, on 10 December, the High Court of Nairobi ruled in favour of four survivors of sexual violence during the 2007 post-election violence. The Court found the Government culpable for its failure to conduct independent and effective investigations and prosecutions into these cases.

33. On 23 December, the President of Burundi granted presidential pardon to four journalists of the online newspaper *Iwacu* who had been convicted in January 2020 and sentenced to two and a half years in prison for attempting to undermine State security. The four individuals had been arrested in October 2019 while covering clashes between the Force de défense nationale du Burundi and alleged rebels in Bubanza province.

34. On 29 January, the trial of the suspected commander of the ADF, Jamil Mukulu, and 37 others started in Kampala. Mukulu and his co-accused were formally charged with 20 counts, including terrorism and crimes against humanity.

III. Implementation of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework

A. Commitments of the Democratic Republic of the Congo

35. Following the finalization, in September 2020, of the terms of reference of a new disarmament, demobilization and community reintegration programme, Mr. Tshisekedi announced on 14 December that his Government was in the process of merging that programme with the national stabilization and reconstruction programme to develop an integrated stabilization programme for ex-combatants who voluntarily surrender.

36. With regard to decentralization, the seventh Conference of Governors of the Provinces, chaired by Mr. Tshisekedi on 28 and 29 December, reaffirmed the importance of preserving the stability of State institutions, strengthening democracy, reinforcing the justice and penitentiary systems, consolidating the rule of law and good governance and relaunching the construction of public infrastructure, while fighting corruption and embezzlement of public funds, through monitoring and verification of the implementation of central and provincial government programmes. In addition, on 9 December the Presidency's Agence de prévention et de lutte contre la corruption presented its national strategy against corruption covering the period from 2020 to 2030, which is designed, inter alia, to improve the business climate.

37. A workshop organized by the National Oversight Mechanism on 26 and 27 February, to mark the eighth anniversary of the signing of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework, identified priorities for the new Government to advance peace and stabilization in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo.

B. Commitments of the region

38. On the political front, several signatories of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework strove to resolve their differences peacefully and to make progress towards normalizing their relations with neighbours. Regional and subregional organizations and mechanisms also maintained their support for peaceful elections.

39. In the area of security cooperation, senior security officials of the Democratic Republic of the Congo met their Rwandan counterparts from 12 to 14 February in Kigali and from 15 to 19 March in Kinshasa and their Ugandan counterparts on 18 February in Kinshasa, in a bid to strengthen security cooperation with the two eastern neighbours.

40. The Committee of Chiefs of Defence Forces and Chiefs of Staff of ICGLR met on 13 October to take stock of the security situation in the region. Its recommendations were endorsed by the Ministers of Defence of ICGLR on 14 October. The recommendations included a call for the development of a common strategy to manage members of armed groups captured along national borders; the adoption of a comprehensive approach to fighting negative forces; and the operationalization of the contact and coordination group expected to oversee the implementation of non-military measures to assist in the neutralization of armed groups.

41. The eighth Summit of Heads of State and Government of the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region, which was held on 20 November, endorsed the recommendations of the Ministers of Defence. During the Summit, the President of Angola, João Lourenço, and João Samuel Caholo of Angola took over as the new Chairperson and Executive Secretary, respectively, of ICGLR.

42. During the Extraordinary Summit of the Organ on Politics, Defence and Security Cooperation of the Southern African Development Community (SADC), held in Gaborone on 27 November, SADC member States contributing troops to the MONUSCO Intervention Brigade agreed to measures proposed by the United Nations Secretariat to reconfigure the Brigade. The Summit further called for a comprehensive regional response to acts of terrorism, specifically in Mozambique.

43. Countries in the region also strengthened regional and bilateral economic cooperation, including in the management of natural resources. Uganda and the United Republic of Tanzania signed an agreement on 13 September for the construction of an oil pipeline connecting the Ugandan oil fields near Lake Albert with the port of Dar es Salaam, United Republic of Tanzania. On 29 September, the Government of Uganda approved a programme to finance 20 per cent of the cost of the surfacing of a road network in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo, as part of efforts to boost bilateral trade. The first official visit by the President of Burundi to the United Republic of Tanzania also focused on ways to strengthen bilateral relations between the two countries, through joint infrastructure and mining projects, among others.

44. During his address to the nation on 16 January, the President of Uganda identified regional economic integration as a key priority for his next term in office. On 19 January, the President of the Democratic Republic of the Congo received the Minister of Trade and Industry of Rwanda, Soraya Hakuziyaremye, and discussed

ways to boost bilateral trade and economic relations, against the backdrop of the African Continental Free Trade Area.

45. As the COVID-19 pandemic continued to prevent the holding of in-person meetings under the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework, the signatories undertook consultations through virtual means. The 27th and 28th meetings of the Technical Support Committee, held on 21 September 2020 and 18 March 2021, respectively, offered representatives of signatory countries opportunities to exchange information on recent political and security developments, assess the impact of the pandemic on the implementation of the Framework and discuss the preliminary recommendations in the United Nations Strategy for Peace Consolidation, Conflict Prevention and Conflict Resolution in the Great Lakes Region. The 10th high-level meeting of the Regional Oversight Mechanism, to be hosted by the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Great Lakes Investment and Trade Conference, to be hosted by Rwanda, was, however, postponed once again.

C. International commitments

46. In recognition of improvements in the security and political situation in Burundi, some international partners have initiated discussions with the Government of Burundi on conditions for the resumption of their technical and financial assistance to the country (see section II.C).

47. International partners also remained engaged in support of peaceful and credible elections across the region throughout the period under review.

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

48. On 22 October, the Secretary-General approved the United Nations Strategy for Peace Consolidation, Conflict Prevention and Conflict Resolution in the Great Lakes Region, which was shared with the Security Council on 3 December (see [S/2020/1168](#)). The Strategy is aimed at harnessing the positive momentum towards peace, security and development in the region, while offering a political framework for United Nations action to support the implementation of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework. It is structured in three pillars: peace, security and justice; sustainable development and shared prosperity; and resilience to longstanding and emerging challenges. The Strategy provides an outline of 10 priority areas informed by extensive internal and external consultations. While a 10-year time frame for its implementation is proposed in the Strategy, a timeline aligned with the 2030 Agenda, in order to allow sufficient time to address systemic issues, United Nations entities in the region will focus on the implementation of prioritized political and programmatic interventions over the next three years.

49. On 23 February, a senior policy group was established to provide strategic guidance to implement the Strategy. The group is placed under the leadership of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for the Great Lakes Region and composed of the Special Representative for Central Africa and Head of the United Nations Regional Office for Central Africa, the Special Representative for the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Head of MONUSCO, the Special Representative for the Central African Republic and Head of the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic, the Executive Secretary of the Economic Commission for Africa, the Assistant Secretary-General

for Africa of the Departments of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs and of Peace Operations, the Assistant Secretary-General and Director of the United Nations Development Programme Africa Bureau, and the resident coordinators in Burundi, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Rwanda and Uganda. The senior policy group is overseeing the formulation of an action plan to guide the implementation of the Strategy.

A. Good offices of the Secretary-General

50. My Special Envoy for the Great Lakes Region continued to actively engage key stakeholders, the co-guarantors of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework and international partners through periodic virtual and in-person consultations. Under his good offices mandate, the Special Envoy consulted senior government representatives of Angola, Burundi, the Congo, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Kenya, Rwanda and Uganda to, inter alia, facilitate dialogue, build confidence and identify options for jointly translating the positive momentum towards peace, dialogue and cooperation into measurable progress. In the light of the assumption by Angola of the chairpersonship of ICGLR, the Special Envoy stepped up his engagement with the Government of Angola, with a focus on regional and bilateral cooperation, security and the management of natural resources.

51. On 3 March, the Special Envoy convened the eighth meeting of the guarantors of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework, which focused on recent political and security developments, common priorities for 2021 and options to enhance their support for the implementation of the Framework.

52. The Special Envoy continued to support the ongoing process to normalize relations between Rwanda and Uganda. In separate consultations with the Ministers for Foreign Affairs of Rwanda and Uganda, he discussed recent progress, such as the release and return to Rwanda of Rwandan nationals previously incarcerated in Uganda, along with other challenges, such as the COVID-19 pandemic. Both Governments assured the Special Envoy of their commitment to the process and expressed confidence in the two facilitators of the quadripartite process, the President of Angola and the President of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Furthermore, the Special Envoy continued his discreet shuttle diplomacy to help improve relations between Burundi and Rwanda.

53. The Special Envoy continued to advocate and support peaceful electoral processes in the region, where possible, notably by promoting a shared assessment of election-related developments among United Nations political presences in the region and by helping coordinate the United Nations support for these processes. He closely collaborated with regional organizations and mechanisms and international partners to foster common responses to challenges and consistently stressed the importance of peaceful democratic processes for regional stability.

54. The Special Envoy continued to advocate a coordinated regional response to the COVID-19 pandemic, along with adequate international support for the region. He also called attention to the disproportionate impact of the pandemic on women and youth and on human rights and continued to mobilize support for the Secretary-General's call for a global ceasefire and for the implementation of Security Council resolution [2532 \(2020\)](#).

B. Support to the neutralization of negative forces

55. Progress towards the implementation of non-military measures to assist in the neutralization of foreign armed groups was slowed down by restrictions linked to the COVID-19 pandemic and by the continuing postponement of the 10th high-level meeting of the Regional Oversight Mechanism. These challenges notwithstanding, the Special Envoy, in coordination with the co-guarantors of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework, facilitated consultations among the signatories with a view to expediting the operationalization of the contact and coordination group. The group is expected to bring together experts from Burundi, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Rwanda, Uganda and the United Republic of Tanzania, with the support of the co-guarantors of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework, to coordinate the implementation of measures aiming to promote voluntary disarmament and disrupt the recruitment and supply lines of armed groups in the region. As an initial step, the Office of the Special Envoy met with the Commander of the Expanded Joint Verification Mechanism of ICGLR and experts in Goma, Democratic Republic of the Congo, from 12 to 14 January to take stock of ongoing and planned initiatives to strengthen regional security cooperation and to identify next steps towards the operationalization of the contact and coordination group.

C. Advancing women and peace and security

56. The empowerment of women as agents of change for peace, security and development in the region remained a priority for the Special Envoy. As a result of advocacy by the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women) and the Office of the Special Envoy, on 2 November the United Republic of Tanzania became the 11th signatory country to adopt a national action plan on women and peace and security.

57. On 4 November, the Peacebuilding Commission, in coordination with the Office of the Special Envoy, convened a meeting intended to reinforce the central role of women in peacebuilding and development in the region. This meeting followed three round-table discussions held in the region earlier in 2020. It provided an opportunity for women civil society representatives to advocate support for judicial reforms aiming to protect women's rights and intensify the fight against impunity for sexual and gender-based violence. An action plan is being developed, for consideration by the Advisory Board for Women, Peace and Security in the Great Lakes Region.

58. To further strengthen women's networks in the region, including women with disabilities, the Special Envoy joined forces with the United Nations Population Fund, ICGLR and the Advisory Board for Women, Peace and Security in the Great Lakes Region on 13 November to support the revitalization of the ICGLR Regional Women Forum. The importance of this initiative was underscored at the eighth Summit of Heads of State and Government of the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region, during which member States committed to supporting the forum to enhance the participation and qualitative contribution of women in mediation, peacebuilding and conflict prevention and to support women's economic empowerment.

59. On 22 February, the Office of the Special Envoy, together with the African Union, ICGLR and the Congolese National Oversight Mechanism of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework, held an informal consultative session to review women's participation in the implementation of the Framework. Among other matters, participants emphasized the need to intensify the involvement of women's organizations in conflict prevention, community mediation and cross-border trade.

60. The Office of the Special Envoy continued to collaborate with the Concertation des collectifs des associations des organisations féminines de la région des Grands Lacs, including in efforts to map and analyse the impact of COVID-19 on women in Burundi, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Rwanda. Furthermore, to celebrate International Women's Day on 8 March, the office of the Special Envoy, in collaboration with the Concertation des collectifs et associations des organisations féminines dans la région des Grands Lacs, organized a meeting to discuss ways to support signatory States in implementing international and regional instruments related to the fight against sexual and gender-based violence.

D. Youth and peace and security

61. On 14 December, on the occasion of the fifth anniversary of the adoption of Security Council resolution [2250 \(2015\)](#) on youth and peace and security, the Office of the Special Envoy brought together, in a virtual meeting, approximately 100 youth representatives and officials from countries of the region to discuss ways to mobilize youth in support of peace, security and development. The meeting contributed to a greater understanding of the vision, needs and concerns of youth in the region. It helped identify priority activities through which the United Nations, regional organizations and mechanisms and member States could support young people, including in the context of conflict prevention, peace processes and post-conflict reintegration of former combatants.

E. Judicial cooperation and the rule of law

62. In line with the Secretary-General's call to action for human rights, the Special Envoy advocated the protection of fundamental freedoms and rights, notably in the context of political and electoral processes. He underscored the importance of placing human rights at the heart of COVID-19 recovery efforts and highlighted the role of human rights defenders and civil society organizations in furthering peace and development.

63. The Special Envoy also continued to promote the rule of law and regional judicial cooperation, as part of efforts to advance the implementation of the 2019 Nairobi Declaration on Justice and Good Governance. In this context, the Office of the Special Envoy, together with ICGLR, OHCHR, and the Network of African National Human Rights Institutions, launched, on 5 and 6 October, the second phase of regional workshops initiated in July 2020. At these events, national human rights institutions from the Congo, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Rwanda reviewed country-specific road maps developed during the first phase to strengthen them and ensure that they meet international standards.

64. On 10 December, a meeting of civil society organizations, representatives of national human rights institutions and national focal points of the Great Lakes Judicial Cooperation Network, facilitated virtually by the Office of the Special Envoy, ICGLR, and OHCHR, produced a declaration on priority actions to enhance the participation of civil society in peace and security efforts in the region.

F. Management of natural resources

65. The Special Envoy continued to support regional efforts to address longstanding challenges posed by the illegal exploitation and trade of natural resources in the region. To that end, he commissioned a study intended to contribute to a common and

up-to-date understanding of mineral exploitation, smuggling and related illicit financial transactions, with an emphasis on gold, tantalum, tin and tungsten.

66. The study served to inform the development of a draft road map, in close consultation with MONUSCO, ICGLR and development partners, to track progress in that area in the next three years. The road map is expected to be validated during a high-level workshop on the transparent and sustainable management of natural resources, to be convened by the Office of the Special Envoy and ICGLR during the first half of 2021 in Khartoum. The study and the Khartoum workshop are meant to complement regional mechanisms that aim to strengthen cooperation in the management of natural resources and remove incentives for the trafficking and illicit trade in minerals.

67. On the basis of the recommendations formulated in the study, the Special Envoy continued to engage stakeholders across the value chain, including development partners and resource-importing and transit countries, to promote a holistic approach to strengthening transparency and formal cooperation mechanisms on natural resources. On 29 September, as part of his high-level consultations on the United Nations Strategy for Peace Consolidation, Conflict Prevention and Conflict Resolution in the Great Lakes Region, the Special Envoy discussed the issue of natural resources with the Minister for Regional Integration of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, who underscored the importance of investing in infrastructure and capacities to transform natural resources within the region, thereby increasing their value before exportation. That concern was echoed on 7 October by the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Uganda, who also stressed the importance for the signatories of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework to harmonize their national taxation frameworks.

68. From 16 to 20 November, during the Africa Mining Forum held in Kigali, the Office of the Special Envoy co-organized, with ICGLR and the European Union, a panel discussion on attracting mining and natural resources investment in the Great Lakes region in a pandemic environment. During the discussion, the Special Envoy advocated reforms to enable the local transformation of natural resources and to disincentivize smuggling of strategic minerals, including through the harmonization of national export tax systems and the strengthening of anti-smuggling laws in the region.

G. Economic cooperation

69. My Special Envoy stepped up support to initiatives to strengthen regional economic cooperation. In this regard, he continued to advocate increased regional coordination and deeper regional economic integration to strengthen resilience, build shared prosperity and contribute to the consolidation of peace and security. On 24 September, the Office of the Special Envoy co-organized with the ICGLR Private Sector Forum a webinar on the role of the private sector in promoting peace in the region, against the backdrop of the economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. The meeting made recommendations for enhancing intra-regional trade and attracting private investment and called for the development of an inclusive economic recovery plan.

70. The Special Envoy also continued to support ICGLR and the Economic Community of the Great Lakes Countries in their efforts to promote the bankability of projects that have the potential to enhance regional integration and contribute to stability in border areas. On 2 and 3 December, the Office of the Special Envoy participated in a virtual conference on renewable energy, off-grid and power infrastructure in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, which reviewed, among other things, the long-term financing of renewable energy projects. Most projects presented

at the conference will be featured at the Great Lakes Investment and Trade Conference to be held in Kigali in the last quarter of 2021.

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

A. Regional organizations and mechanisms

71. The Special Envoy continued to engage regional partners to promote a shared understanding of key regional developments and encouraged collaboration on issues of common interest. He held regular consultations with the African Union Special Representative for the Great Lakes Region and the Executive Secretaries of ICGLR and SADC. These consultations brought to light the importance of increased coordination and consistent support by the co-guarantors to the signatories of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework.

72. From 30 November to 4 December, the Office of the Special Envoy participated in an ICGLR virtual planning workshop convened to appraise projects in peace and security, natural resource governance and the protection of human rights and gender, which provided an opportunity to take stock of progress and identify priorities for 2021 and 2022 in these areas. During their first meeting, held on 15 January, the Special Envoy and the new Executive Secretary of ICGLR, João Samuel Caholo, discussed ways to reinforce their strategic partnership. They agreed to institute joint annual planning meetings and to enhance their coordination of joint initiatives and resource mobilization efforts. The Office of the Special Envoy also continued its close cooperation with ICGLR in the areas of security cooperation, confidence-building and capacity-building, notably with regard to the Expanded Joint Verification Mechanism.

B. International partners

73. The Special Envoy continued to engage the international community, development partners and multilateral financial institutions to help streamline international support for the region, notably in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. His interlocutors shared his assessment of a momentum towards dialogue and cooperation in the region and echoed his call for concerted efforts to capitalize on this opportunity. The Special Envoy and his interlocutors also touched upon the United Nations Strategy for Peace Consolidation, Conflict Prevention and Conflict Resolution in the Great Lakes Region and its action plan.

C. Other United Nations entities

74. The Special Envoy maintained close cooperation with other United Nations entities in the region throughout the reporting period. In that context, he convened a virtual consultative meeting on 8 December to discuss the implementation of the United Nations Strategy for Peace Consolidation, Conflict Prevention and Conflict Resolution in the Great Lakes Region. During this meeting, a recommendation was made that the action plan to implement the strategy be aligned with deliverables already agreed under the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Frameworks. Participants also stressed the importance of ownership of the action plan by the countries in the region and noted that international partners should be closely associated with its design and implementation. At the invitation of the United Nations Regional Office for Central Africa, the Office of the Special Envoy participated in the

fiftieth ministerial meeting of the United Nations Standing Advisory Committee on Security Questions in Central Africa, which was hosted virtually by the Government of Equatorial Guinea on 4 December.

75. The Office of the Special Envoy continued its close collaboration with MONUSCO, through regular sharing of information, coordination of activities and joint analyses, notably with regard to the neutralization of foreign armed groups and the management of natural resources. They also closely collaborated to ensure alignment between the implementation of the Strategy for Peace Consolidation, Conflict Prevention and Conflict Resolution in the Great Lakes Region and the Joint Strategy on the progressive and phased drawdown of MONUSCO (S/2020/1041) agreed by MONUSCO and the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. In addition, the Office of the Special Envoy continued to work closely with the offices of the Resident Coordinators in the signatory countries of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework.

VI. Observations and recommendations

76. I welcome and encourage the commitment demonstrated by the signatory States of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework to engage in dialogue, improve their relations and strengthen regional cooperation. The United Nations Strategy for Peace Consolidation, Conflict Prevention and Conflict Resolution in the Great Lakes Region is a key vehicle in this regard. The United Nations remains committed to the objective of a peaceful, stable, prosperous and resilient region, and my Special Envoy will continue to provide good offices to support the ongoing efforts in the region.

77. I am concerned about reports of election-related violence and human rights violations in some countries in the region. The consolidation of democracy, through inclusive, credible and peaceful political processes, must be a paramount objective across the region, as it is a precondition for sustainable peace and development. I call upon all leaders of the region to ensure that political and electoral processes are conducted in a peaceful, inclusive and transparent manner that gives voice to all citizens and contributes to creating a political and security environment conducive to democratic governance.

78. I welcome the vision and the steps taken by the leaders of the region to strengthen regional security cooperation to better tackle the persistent threat posed by armed groups. The relevant countries are encouraged to promptly mobilize the resources needed to operationalize the contact and coordination group, strengthen existing regional security mechanisms, including the Expanded Joint Verification Mechanism, and take decisive action to accelerate the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration of former combatants, in line with international standards. I also call on bilateral and multilateral partners to support these efforts.

79. Progress in several areas of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework is contingent on progress in the neutralization of armed groups. In this regard, it is imperative to curb the illicit exploitation and trade of natural resources in order to deny armed groups this critical source of funding. While the region has taken important steps in that direction, significant challenges remain. A comprehensive approach is thus needed and will require sustained political and financial commitment from all stakeholders in the exploitation, trade and utilization of natural resources, in the region and beyond.

80. A similar collaboration within the region is required to advance regional economic cooperation and overcome the persistent challenges of underdevelopment and economic inequality, which contribute to instability. I welcome ongoing efforts

to strengthen bilateral and regional economic cooperation and call upon all stakeholders to intensify and sustain these efforts in pursuit of inclusive and sustainable development. The African Continental Free Trade Area provides a timely opportunity in this regard.

81. In the Great Lakes region, the COVID-19 pandemic has exposed and exacerbated systemic inequalities, which must be rectified during the post-pandemic recovery phase, through economic plans that focus on shared prosperity, equity and sustainability. Now more than ever, strong political will, solidarity and joint actions by the countries in the region are critical to overcome the adverse impacts of the pandemic and to strengthen the region's resilience to crises. My Special Envoy will continue to support these efforts, in line with the United Nations strategy for the region.

82. I remain deeply concerned about continued human rights violations, some of which are linked to measures adopted as part of the response to COVID-19. I reiterate my call upon the leaders of the region to ensure the protection of human rights for all and to fight impunity, in close collaboration with civil society organizations and other stakeholders, and in line with the 2019 Nairobi Declaration on Justice and Good Governance.

83. Noting the increasing number of Burundian refugees returning to their country, I encourage sustained cooperation between the authorities of Burundi and those of relevant neighbouring countries with UNHCR to consolidate this trend, which will benefit regional stability. I also call upon international bilateral and multilateral donors to scale up support to the 2021 Burundi Return and Reintegration Plan which remains one of the least funded such plans globally. In line with the calls made by UNHCR, I encourage all concerned Governments to respect and uphold the voluntary nature of refugee returns, in line with international refugee law.

84. Noting the efforts under way to promote the women and peace and security agenda and the youth and peace and security agenda in the region, there is a need to further build capacities and strengthen the role of women and youth in mediation, peacebuilding and conflict prevention. The Advisory Board for Women, Peace and Security in the Great Lakes Region is well placed to play a more prominent role in engaging continental and regional organizations and mechanisms to ensure that advocacy delivers tangible results.

85. In response to the pandemic, all relevant stakeholders were able to adjust and found innovative ways to help implement the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework during these challenging times. I hope that the tenth high-level meeting of the Regional Oversight Mechanism and the planned Great Lakes Investment and Trade Conference will be held as soon as possible and that ongoing efforts to advance regional security cooperation will be expedited.

86. Finally, I would like to express my appreciation to my Special Envoy and his team for their dedication to supporting the signatory countries in the implementation of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework for the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the region.