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Seventy-sixth year

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Provisional

<i>President:</i>	Ms. Omamo	(Kenya)
<i>Members:</i>	China	Mr. Zhang Jun
	Estonia	Mr. Jürgenson
	France	Mr. De Rivière
	India	Mr. Tirumurti
	Ireland	Mr. Brophy
	Mexico	Mr. De la Fuente Ramírez
	Niger	Mr. Abarry
	Norway	Ms. Juul
	Russian Federation	Ms. Evstigneeva
	Saint Vincent and the Grenadines	Ms. King
	Tunisia	Mr. Ladeb
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Mr. Kariuki
	United States of America	Mrs. Thomas-Greenfield
	Viet Nam	Mr. Pham

Agenda

The situation in the Great Lakes region

Report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework for the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Region (S/2021/836)

Letter dated 13 October 2021 from the Permanent Representative of Kenya to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General (S/2021/874)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.10 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in the Great Lakes region

Report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework for the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Region (S/2021/836)

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The President: In accordance with rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representatives of Angola, Burundi, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Rwanda and Uganda to participate in this meeting.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the following briefers to participate in this meeting: Mr. Huang Xia, Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for the Great Lakes Region; His Excellency Mr. João Samuel Caholo, Executive Secretary of the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region; and Mrs. Martha Ama Akyaa Pobee, Assistant Secretary-General for Africa, Departments of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs and Peace Operations.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

I wish to draw the attention of Council members to document S/2021/836, which contains the report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework for the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Region; and document S/2021/874, which contains a letter dated 13 October 2021 from the Permanent Representative of Kenya to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General.

The Council has before it the text of a statement by the President on behalf of the Council on the subject of today's meeting. I thank Council members for their valuable contributions to this statement. In accordance with the understanding reached among the members

of the Council, I shall take it that the members of the Security Council agree to the statement, which will be issued as a document of the Security Council under the symbol S/PRST/2021/19.

I now give the floor to Mr. Huang Xia.

Mr. Huang Xia (*spoke in French*): First of all, Madam President, allow me to wish you a happy National Heroes' Day — Happy Mashujaa Day! I would then like, Madam President, to congratulate you on your country's assumption of the presidency of the Security Council for this month of October and to thank you for having convened this high-level meeting devoted to the Great Lakes region. This initiative, like others planned this month under the auspices of your country, is a testament — as if one were still necessary — of Kenya's commitment to the region and to the major issues of concern to the African continent.

Allow me also, just this once, to say a word about an important cultural event and to share the Council's celebration of the good news from Stockholm. Members will have noted that, on 7 October, the Nobel Committee awarded the 2021 Nobel Prize for Literature to the Tanzanian novelist Abdulrazak Gurnah. I extend my warm congratulations to the winner of that prestigious award, who, through his work, invites us to take a clear-eyed and compassionate look at the situation of thousands of refugees. While this literary news throws a harsh light on a painful question for the region, it is also an opportunity to celebrate the intellectual and artistic wealth of East Africa and the Great Lakes and of its writers, the privileged witnesses of our time.

The theme of our meeting today — "Supporting the renewed commitment of the Great Lakes countries in seeking sustainable solutions to the root causes and drivers of conflict" — is meaningful and timely. It is meaningful because it reminds us that the countries of the region remain committed to peace and development, and timely because it calls on the international community to support these efforts, taking into account both the progress made and the challenges that persist. That is the spirit that guides me in carrying out my mandate. It is also the common thread of the Secretary-General's latest report on the implementation, over the past six months, of the Framework for Peace, Security and Cooperation for the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Region (S/2021/836). I wish to highlight here some salient features.

First, I would like to highlight the ongoing political dialogue among the countries of the region. Ministerial consultations and the increase in State visits have given impetus to bilateral relations between the countries of the region, as evidenced by the revitalization of cooperation frameworks in areas as varied as security, trade, infrastructure, transport, natural resources and energy. We have thus witnessed an acceleration of efforts towards opening and rapprochement, together with a series of encouraging political and symbolic gestures. I am thinking of the bilateral meetings between the President of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and his counterparts from Burundi, Kenya, Rwanda and Uganda; the various tours undertaken in the region by the President of Burundi and the President of Tanzania; and of course, the tireless commitment of the President of Angola, current Chair of the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region (ICGLR), to support national reconciliation efforts in the Central African Republic, alongside his peers. Furthermore, I welcome the peaceful conduct of elections in Zambia and the smooth handover of power between the outgoing President and the incoming President.

I would also like to welcome the progress made in security cooperation in order to overcome the armed groups, the so-called negative forces, that are rampant in eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo. I take this opportunity to express, Madam President, my sincere gratitude to your country, Kenya, for the deployment of troops within the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO).

An important aspect of those efforts at the regional level is the launching of the Contact and Coordination Group, which is responsible for coordinating the implementation of non-military measures to complement military operations against negative forces. I would like to recall that that initiative, which my Office supports alongside the other guarantor institutions of the Framework agreement, involves Burundi, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Uganda, Rwanda and Tanzania. In concrete terms, those measures aim at the concerted implementation of incentives for the surrender and voluntary disarmament of negative forces operating in the eastern part of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Those measures will complement the efforts led by the Democratic Republic of the Congo through its Disarmament, Demobilization, Community Recovery and Stabilization Programme. That is why my

Office is working with MONUSCO and other entities to deploy an operational cell in Goma, which will be responsible for coordinating those promising initiatives on the ground.

Despite that progress, challenges remain. The ongoing activities of armed groups continue to be the main threat to peace and stability in the region. We see an upsurge in attacks by armed groups, whether it be by the Allied Democratic Forces in the eastern part of the Democratic Republic of the Congo or those launched by the Résistance pour un État de droit au Burundi against the airport in Bujumbura in September. That violence continues to have serious consequences on the already fragile humanitarian situation as well as on the socioeconomic stability of the affected areas.

Those negative forces also remain involved in the illicit exploitation of, and trade in, natural resources, the revenues of which finance their arms procurement and recruitment. How to put an end to that is obviously an old question that haunts anyone interested in the region. It is with a view to renewing our collective thinking on this difficult issue that, working with the ICGLR and the Government of the Sudan, my Office co-organized a workshop on natural resources in Khartoum from 31 August to 2 September.

The workshop resulted in 31 recommendations, both ambitious and realistic, aimed in particular at breaking the link between the smuggling of certain high-value minerals and the financing of armed groups. In addition to actions for greater national ownership over the ICGLR Regional Initiative against the Illegal Exploitation of Natural Resources, participants from across the region and beyond proposed that my Office and the Executive Secretariat of the ICGLR undertake political advocacy to make transit and destination countries aware of the issue of smuggled minerals in order to support the efforts of the region. I have no doubt that the members of the Security Council will also make important proposals as part of our discussion today that could inform the efforts of the region.

I cannot talk about the challenges affecting the region without saying a word about the persistence of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, which to some extent is contributing to the exacerbation of pre-existing socioeconomic vulnerabilities. According to the World Health Organization, only 36 million doses of vaccine have been administered to date in a region of nearly 450 million people. I therefore reiterate the

appeal launched by the Secretary-General for greater solidarity with developing countries to facilitate access to vaccines and strengthen existing health systems and structures.

Responding effectively to those challenges while supporting the positive efforts under way will require a concerted approach from the States of the region, civil society, regional organizations, international partners and the United Nations. That is the rationale behind the plan of action for the Strategy for Peace Consolidation, Conflict Prevention and Conflict Resolution in the Great Lakes Region, which my Office developed in July during broad consultations. That inclusive approach, which also gives pride of place to the involvement of women and young people, will be maintained throughout the implementation of the plan of action so as to foster alignment with the priorities of the States and the peoples of the region.

In that regard, I would like to reiterate my commitment to working closely with all the United Nations entities concerned in the region as well as with the Peacebuilding Fund to ensure the full implementation of the plan of action. I would also like to call on the Council, and the international community more broadly, to support us in order to enable us to contribute effectively to consolidating the positive momentum in the region through the initiatives set out in the plan of action.

When we look closely at recent developments in the region, we see that that positive momentum is the result of initiatives that fully meet the goals of the Framework agreement and the 2006 ICGLR pact. It is therefore essential that the countries of the region implement the bilateral agreements signed recently and also continue, at the regional level, to fulfil the commitments made under regional and international instruments.

It is in that spirit that I welcome the upcoming important summit meetings, and in particular the commitment of the Democratic Republic of the Congo to host the tenth summit of the Framework agreement Regional Monitoring Mechanism in Kinshasa in December. The summit will be an opportunity for the leaders of the region to evaluate together the progress made since the previous summit, held in Kampala in 2018, to see how to consolidate the recent achievements and to provide guidance on the measures to be taken for more stability and development in the region.

I would like to conclude by recalling that the Great Lakes region is at a crossroads. The COVID-19 pandemic, which has further exacerbated existing weaknesses, has nevertheless served to reveal the resilience of the region's societies. Bilateral and regional initiatives reflect the emergence of a community looking towards the future that is aware of the added value of dialogue and cooperation as a tool to foster good-neighbourliness. It is more necessary than ever to consolidate the region's achievements in a lasting way, all the while resolutely addressing the ongoing challenges. The success of such an approach entails drawing the lessons of the past and showing imagination to support the peoples of the Great Lakes region in building a better today and a better future.

The President: I thank Mr. Xia for his briefing.

I now give the floor to Mr. Caholo.

Mr. Caholo: I would like to start by congratulating the Government and the people of the Republic of Kenya on assuming the presidency of the Security Council. I have no doubt that the Republic of Kenya will once again rise to the challenges of the coveted and onerous responsibility of leading the Security Council. I am also honoured to participate in this high-level briefing on the Great Lakes region, under theme "Supporting the renewed commitment of the Great Lakes countries in seeking sustainable solutions to the root causes and drivers of conflict".

The Great Lakes region has made progress with regard to peace, stability and development despite the challenges related to heinous criminal activities, including the illegal exploitation and trade of natural resources and the increase in conflict-related sexual violence against women and children being committed by the armed groups and negative forces actively operating in the region, especially in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Central African Republic.

We have also witnessed the negative impact of the coronavirus disease and climate change on the livelihoods of our people in the region. In the past 10 months, we have had three mini-summits convened under the able leadership of the Chairperson of the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region (ICGLR), the President of the Republic of Angola, His Excellency Mr. João Manuel Gonçalves Lourenço, in order to address the security and political crisis in the Central African Republic.

As a result, we witnessed last weekend the unilateral political will demonstrated by the Government in the ceasefire declaration by His Excellency Mr. Faustin Archange Touadera, President of the Central African Republic and Head of State. As a region, we have witnessed the strengthening of mutual trust and the normalization of relations between and among Member States, notably between Burundi and Rwanda, thanks to the ICGLR, which has unequivocally become a regional platform to address inter-State tensions and suspicions.

In addition, the region has witnessed the organization of peaceful and credible elections in Burundi, Uganda, Tanzania, the Congo and Zambia. We note with delight the growth of the involvement of women in peacebuilding processes through negotiations and mediation. There is also an increase in the participation of women in political governance and involvement in decision-making bodies through nominative and elective positions.

Furthermore, we have witnessed the removal of Burundi from the agenda of the Security Council and the closure of the mission of the African Union human rights observers and military experts. That shows the serious commitment of the ICGLR to deepen and consolidate democracy in the region.

Allow me now to turn to the specific aspects of this briefing.

With regard to the specific roles that peacekeeping missions can play as a resource in those countries to prevent the illegal exploitation of natural resources and disrupt criminal networks, the ICGLR is of the view that missions have a fundamental role to play. We believe that peacekeeping missions have a broad-ranging mandate to keep the peace and help stabilize countries after conflict and to promote democracy and human rights.

The missions equally have a fundamental role to play in reducing the criminal exploitation of natural resources. Peacekeeping missions play a role in contributing to stability, stimulating employment for youth and women, and economic recovery for the countries concerned. We are of the strong view that peacekeeping missions play a role in supporting the enhancement of the technical capacities of national authorities and local security forces in their management of natural resources. Specifically, missions, through direct cooperation with national authorities and security forces, could monitor and inspect mineral consignment

at production sites, transportation and trading hubs, and the prevention of child labour and child trafficking.

We are aware that such an effort was unsustainable in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, largely owing to limited capacity and financial resources, as well as poor cooperation at the local level in enforcing national laws. However, that is an outcome that rebels and militias welcome because it allows them to continue to maintain control over mining sites in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo. That situation should not be allowed to continue where revenues to finance conflict are easily generated within the country using resources that would have otherwise benefited the peaceful local people.

Peacekeeping missions could conduct joint security operations with national security forces to extend State authority over mining sites by dislodging militia groups. However, we should ensure that mining sites are placed under the control of Government institutions, not national security forces. We should also learn from history. One lesson learned is that extending State control by national security forces over high-value resource areas can have unintended consequences in situations where there is a weak chain of command, poor discipline and limited Government oversight.

Nevertheless peacekeeping missions should avoid being involved in the mineral trade and benefiting in any way from mining activities. Several accusations against individual members of those peacekeeping missions being involved in and/or facilitating mineral smuggling and trafficking in the Great Lakes region have been recorded. Peacekeeping missions in the Great Lakes region should be aware of the regional and international mineral due diligence standards and principles that we are striving to put in place.

With regard to the role that the countries of the region and the international community can play in strengthening cross-border security and supporting the fight against transborder crime and terrorism, we underscore the need for cross-border cooperation among countries of the region, as a condition to strengthen security and fight crime and terrorism in the Great Lakes region.

With the support of the international community, as the ICGLR, we are working towards establishing and operationalizing an early-warning system for the region to share information in real time at all borders. The porosity of our borders has led us to conduct

joint verification missions and patrols of the borders. The ICGLR has advanced in that process through the expanded joint verification mechanism and the Great Lakes Judicial Cooperation Network. Those mechanisms need to be supported and strengthened by both member States and the international community. The sharing of best practices in addressing investigation and prosecution challenges is also fundamental.

On the question of how the region and the international community can ensure sustained means to ensure long-term, sustainable national and regional coordination for disarmament, demobilization, repatriation, reintegration and resettlement programmes, we believe that such initiatives should be nationally owned and an integral component of long-term national development plans and annual budgets. There should be a holistic and systematic approach taken to the management of such programmes. Intensive peace education and economic empowerment for ex-combatants is of paramount importance. However, the international community could provide funding and technical support since national capacities in the Great Lakes region are typically weak given the large numbers of ex-combatants. It should be noted that such programmes focus on the provision of alternative sources of livelihood to ex-combatants. Hence the initiatives depend on reliable funding streams to ensure funding that is both timely and adequate.

As the ICGLR, we emphasize that such programmes should be based on a careful assessment of the situation in a member State to identify combatants and types and numbers of weapons as well as areas of return. It also includes the identification of suitable livelihood opportunities, the determination of appropriate vocational training and extension services, and the provision of resettlement and reintegration opportunities and services.

That approach calls for high levels of transparency and coordination among stakeholders of the programmes involved. It also calls for comprehensive and effective monitoring and evaluation systems to ensure that targeted communities benefit from the programmes and equally prevent the recurrence of conflict. In addition, it calls for disarmament, demobilization, repatriation, reintegration and resettlement programmes to be linked to a wider and broader national reform to promote national socioeconomic involvement and strengthen the security sector and the promotion of transnational justice.

Allow me to mention that the disarmament, demobilization, repatriation, reintegration and resettlement programmes, costly as they are, have had positive effects in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the Sudan, Burundi and the Central African Republic in engaging ex-combatants in productive activities and building social cohesion. But more could have been achieved in the Great Lakes region had resources and coordination among stakeholders been enhanced.

We encourage the international community to support civil-society organizations involved in the implementation of the action plan of the Contact and Coordination Group on non-military measures to complement the military efforts by countries in the Great Lakes region. As the Council is aware, the mission of the Contact and Coordination Group is to provide a comprehensive and evidence-based approach to identifying and implementing non-military measures in complement to enhancing military action by the ICGLR member States. The Group focuses on the facilitation of disarmament and the process of repatriating negative forces through an approach involving local communities and civil society and the reinforcement of cross-border cooperation, with a view to generating economic opportunities, particularly for young people and women.

On the particular aspect of how the region and the international community can provide support in strengthening the capacity of key State institutions, particularly the national security and customs structure, to ensure the effective control and management of natural resources, I wish first to reiterate my call for the international community to support the implementation of the ICGLR Regional Initiative against the Illegal Exploitation of Natural Resources, an initiative that was adopted by the Heads of State and Government in Lusaka in 2010. The international community must support the enhancement capacities of that programme in implementing countries and those that are actually adhering to the programme.

In that framework, specifically the artisanal gold strategy, there are components that aim to enhance the capacities of member States' customs organizations to strengthen import and export mechanisms and also control the artisanal gold trade at all levels, including the transit and destination countries.

Regarding the question of how the region can increase the participation of international financial

institutions and the private sector in funding projects and programmes in the mining and extractive sector, we are of the view that the States and Governments of the region should design legal frameworks and policies that aim to create an environment that is conducive to investment. That should be accompanied by the development of regional infrastructure that promotes forward and backward linkages. The joint regional infrastructure initiatives in energy, transport corridors and telecommunication are possible areas for consideration. Furthermore, member States should provide knowledge linkages to foster innovation, creativity, skills and the capacity for citizens to benefit from the vast array of natural resources. There is a need to enhance the technical and vocational capacities of youth to provide a ready supply of skilled labour in the real sector.

As regards the role that all stakeholders can play to transform the productivity of natural resources in the Great Lakes region in directly contributing to post-conflict recovery, mutually shared socioeconomic development and global prosperity, allow me to propose the following.

First, all stakeholders should help to attract investment in the region by participating and supporting investment for the forthcoming Great Lakes Investment and Trade Conference scheduled for November in Kigali.

Secondly, programmes and projects should be designed aimed at creating youth employment. That could be done through the promotion of value addition. I am pleased to inform the Council that the ICGLR member States are resolved to promote mineral value addition through the creation of refineries and smelters within their boundaries. That is happening in Uganda and in Rwanda. We hope that we can introduce the same programme in the Democratic Republic of the Congo as well. That is possible given the enhancement of inter-State cooperation and mutual trust. There is a need for continual support to member States to strengthen governance institutions so as to monitor the adherence of member States to constitutionalism, the promotion of the rule of law and respect for human rights. The international community, especially mineral destination countries, should support the due-diligence efforts being implemented in the ICGLR.

In conclusion, I would like to restate that the ICGLR Pact in support of peace and stability in the region,

set up 15 years ago for the purpose of transforming the region into a conflict-free area enveloped by sustainable peace, security and stability, remains very relevant today. The experience of the last 15 years has demonstrated that the political, social and economic transformation of the Great Lakes region can be achieved only through enhanced ownership of practical programmes, the involvement of ICGLR member States and reliable diplomatic, financial and technical support by the international community. Sustainability of our efforts depends on the extent to which we have effectively responded to the regional challenges with regionally driven solutions.

The President: I thank Mr. Caholo for his briefing.

I now give the floor to Mrs. Pobee.

Mrs. Pobee: I wish to begin by expressing thanks to the Kenyan presidency of the Security Council for convening today's high-level debate on supporting the renewed commitment of the Great Lakes countries in seeking sustainable solutions to the root causes and drivers of conflict. Today's meeting takes place at a time when the United Nations has taken steps to reconfigure its presence in the region to best address remaining challenges to peace and security in eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo and the region.

My briefing today will focus on a few priority areas where the Council's support would be most needed. As Special Envoy Huang Xia has provided elements of the broader picture, I would like to devote particular attention to the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

First and foremost, persistent insecurity in eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo remains one of the main challenges facing the region today. National and foreign armed groups still operate in eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo and continue to perpetrate deadly attacks against civilians, further deteriorating the already dire humanitarian situation. Since the beginning of this year, at least 1,043 civilians have been killed, including 233 women and 52 children.

The insecurity in eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo shed light on underlying causes of the conflicts in the region, ranging from the presence of foreign armed groups, the illegal exploitation of natural resources, land and border disputes, intercommunal tensions, limited State presence in remote areas to persistent inequalities borne out of marginalization and exclusion, youth unemployment and poverty. The

central question of our debate today is how we can support the countries of the region in their efforts to harness the full potential of their human and natural resources to build sustainable peace and development.

Addressing the various challenges facing countries of the Great Lakes region requires a comprehensive approach rooted in an enhanced political engagement that encompasses military and non-military interventions, fosters economic cooperation across the borders and builds trust between neighbours and among communities. In this regard, we are encouraged by the improvement of bilateral relations between the neighbouring countries and the signing of agreements at the regional level in such various areas as security, trade and economic cooperation. This rapprochement creates a momentum for the evaluation and revitalization of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework, enabling us to refocus our efforts on supporting member States of the region.

As we move forward, we welcome the holding in the coming months of the tenth summit of the Regional Oversight Mechanism, which will be hosted by the Democratic Republic of the Congo, as an opportunity for countries in the region to reaffirm their commitments under the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework and take concrete actions to advance peace and security in the region.

Governments of the region continue to prioritize military operations as part of their efforts aimed at addressing the threat posed by armed groups in eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo. We therefore welcome President Tshisekedi Tshilombo's decision to establish an operational centre in Goma, with a view to further enhancing cooperation between the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) and the Forces armées de la République démocratique du Congo in the conduct of intelligence-driven operations against armed groups in Ituri and North Kivu provinces, where the state of siege remains in place. I would like to underscore in this regard that these military operations should be conducted in strict compliance with the human rights due-diligence policy and ensure civilian-harm mitigation, so as to avoid additional suffering for the population we aim to protect.

However, it is also important that the primacy of politics remains the umbrella under which all initiatives translate into actions. In that regard, I wish to welcome

the adoption of a three-year action plan of the Contact and Coordination Group aimed at neutralizing the "negative forces" through a non-military approach. MONUSCO and the Office of the Special Envoy for the Great Lakes Region have collaborated well in this approach and will continue to provide their support for the operationalization of this Contact and Coordination Group through the establishment of an operational cell hosted in Goma, in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

A comprehensive and coordinated regional approach to disarmament, demobilization and reintegration will also be also an important tool for creating incentives for former combatants not to rejoin the ranks of armed groups, while excluding the possibility for the latter to automatically join the armed forces, and for preventing the recruitment of youth in vulnerable communities and curbing the illicit flows of weapons in the region. In this context, I commend the Congolese authorities for their commitment to providing adequate resources for the functioning of the disarmament, demobilization, community recovery and stabilization programme that was recently established. Success of this national programme will contribute tremendously to sustainable peace and security in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. I call on international partners and donors to also support these efforts while ensuring that the participating member States remain committed to, and in charge of, this process.

While armed group activity is a symptom of insecurity in the region, the enabling conditions should be addressed upstream. Among the main root causes of conflict, as we all know, are the illegal exploitation and regional trafficking of natural resources, which not only contribute to financing armed group networks but also create parallel economies at the expense of States' budgets whose revenues continue to diminish. The recent workshop on natural resources hosted in Khartoum, co-hosted by the Office of the Special Envoy, is a testament to the commitment of countries of the region to addressing this issue through the strengthening of border controls, the extension of State authority and improvement of joint border-management cooperation in their common border areas.

The path towards sustainable peace and development in the region also requires the meaningful participation of women, youth and the private sector. From that perspective, the Action Plan for the United Nations Strategy for Peace Consolidation, Conflict

Prevention and Conflict Resolution in the Great Lakes Region provides an opportunity to make progress in that area. For their part, MONUSCO and the Office of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for the Great Lakes Region will continue to ensure the participation of women and young people in local political and peace processes and work with the United Nations country team to support peacebuilding and stabilization efforts within the framework of the peace-development-humanitarian nexus.

As I conclude, I wish to reaffirm the continued engagement of the United Nations with countries of the region to support efforts towards peace, security and development. The region counts on the Security Council's full support to put an end to the recurring cycle of violence and to provide the necessary resources to reach that goal.

The President: I thank Mrs. Pobe for her briefing.

I shall now make a statement in my capacity as the Cabinet Secretary for Foreign Affairs of Kenya.

May I begin, as I should, by thanking my colleagues Ministers from Ireland and Angola, who have kindly joined us at this important debate. I also express my gratitude to the Special Envoy the Secretary-General for the Great Lakes Region, the Executive Secretary of the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region and the Assistant Secretary-General for Africa for their insightful briefings.

Few parts of our world exemplify the notion of a paradox than Africa's Great Lakes region. Home to our world's second largest rainforest and a critical lung for our planet, the region is the catchment area for Africa's largest rivers and lakes and a habitat of impressive biodiversity. Importantly for our discussion today, the Great Lakes region is endowed with a vast and unmatched array of precious and rare minerals, as well as a rich pool of oil reserves and other hydrocarbons. The potential of the region to be Africa's breadbasket, its source of green and clean energy, its engine of industrialization and its pathway to economic growth and social transformation seem patent and obvious; yet the contrary is true.

A great disconnect exists between the region's riches and its promise and the reality of pervasive poverty, underdevelopment and instability that has plagued that area for centuries. That is in part due to an incessant cycle of brutal extraction, illicit exploitation, pillage

and trafficking of the region's natural resources, which has enabled the outbreak, escalation and continuation of armed conflict. The scramble for the region's natural resources has contributed to external interference in the region, fuelled inter-State rivalries, weakened State institutions, spawned political instability and compromised the management of intra-State diversity at a great cost in terms of human suffering, particularly of women and children.

The capacity of some States of the region, especially those in the throes of transition and reconstruction, to exercise full control over their territories, manage resources, provide basic public goods, including security and law and order, advance democracy and tackle the proliferation of armed groups is also severely stretched by the pressures posed by other threats, such as natural calamities, climate-change shocks, pandemics such as the Ebola virus and the coronavirus diseases, and other humanitarian crises, as well as the emergence of terrorist-affiliated groups in the region. It is our judgment and belief that the strengthening of State capacity and agility, coupled with the buttressing of regional institutions, is an essential tool for the delivery of the promise of the Great Lake region and what it offers for Africa and, indeed, the world. That promise must include the safety and prosperity of women and protect them against gender-based violence, particularly in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo.

We are here today to reinvigorate and renew the Security Council's commitment to supporting the Governments of the region in seeking solutions to sustainably address the root causes and drivers of rampant conflict in the region, with a special focus on positively harnessing the region's natural resources for social and economic transformation.

It is important to applaud progress, and progress has indeed been made. The region has remained resilient and determined to surmount its challenges and march forward. The power of regional solutions cannot be overemphasized. In that regard, the recent high-level regional diplomatic interventions to improve and bolster bilateral relations in order to end the pervasive cycles of hardship and conflict are commendable.

We also commend the work of the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region under the leadership of Angola in its efforts to promote

constructive dialogue and the resolution of conflicts through peaceful means and regional cooperation.

Furthermore, my delegation welcomes the recent establishment of the Contact and Coordination Group as a significant step in regional efforts to identify and implement non-military solutions to cross-border and conflict drivers. There is a need for sound African solutions to such uniquely African problems.

In addition, we register our full endorsement of the continued efforts to implement the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework for the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Region and the 2006 Pact on Security, Stability and Development in the Great Lakes region.

My delegation also appreciates the support of the United Nations through the Peacebuilding Commission in fostering regional and socioeconomic cooperation as a key component of building and sustaining peace and fostering sustainable development.

It is instructive that the sustainable development of natural resources is one of the priorities of the three-year action plan to operationalize the implementation of the United Nations Strategy for Peace Consolidation, Conflict Prevention and Conflict Resolution in the Great Lakes Region, on which the Special Envoy elaborated for us today.

We strongly believe that the region must proceed with courage and alacrity to harness its natural resources for the benefit of its people, especially its youth, so as to guarantee its peace and prosperity. There must be a shift away from the pattern of unregulated extraction and exploitation to a model that favours investment in people, capacity-building, value addition, job creation and infrastructure development.

Natural resources must be extracted and traded in a transparent, accountable and sustainable manner and utilized to drive positive change for our people. Accordingly, we propose five action points.

First, assistance, including capacity-building, ought to be provided to resource-endowed countries in the Great Lakes region so as to enable the development and implementation of appropriate policies, strategies and mechanisms for the management of the extraction of natural resources.

Secondly, enhanced support should be provided to national security and law enforcement agencies for

improved security, especially around mining regions, transit routes and border points.

Thirdly, it is critical to create platforms for inclusive dialogue in order to rebuild trust and confidence among mining communities, local authorities, security agencies, extraction entities and merchants in natural resources. There must be real investment in those communities, including job creation, training and the provision of alternative livelihoods.

Fourthly, countries of the region should cooperate to deploy, in a coordinated manner, a range of military and non-military options to comprehensively address the challenge posed by armed groups. Non-military measures may include disarmament, demobilization and reintegration programmes for ex-combatants. Kenya is pleased to have provided its forces in the furtherance of peace in the eastern part of the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Fifthly, there is a need to strengthen regional cooperation that deepens the economic integration of the affected countries, with special focus given to the productive utilization of national resources. Regional cooperation is also critical for the implementation of the Addis Ababa Framework agreement and other regional tools to fight illegal exploitation and trade in natural resources.

We conclude by reaffirming Kenya's commitment, as a Great Lakes region country, to supporting the transformation of our region through the better management of our natural resources for our shared prosperity. Let us move forward with tenacity; let us move forward with courage and hope.

I now resume my functions as President of the Council.

I call on the Minister of State for Overseas Development Aid and Diaspora of Ireland.

Mr. Brophy (Ireland): I would like to thank Kenya for hosting this important debate. I also wish to thank our briefers: Special Envoy Xia, Ambassador Caholo and Assistant Secretary-General Pobe. I would also like to recognize our colleagues from Angola and the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

I am very pleased that the Security Council today adopted presidential statement S/PRST/2021/19 on this important issue. It is only by addressing the root causes of conflict and drivers of instability that it is truly

possible to build sustainable and lasting peace. I wish to make three points in our debate today.

First, regional cooperation is essential in addressing the root causes of conflict and drivers of instability in the Great Lakes region. Ireland recognizes the progress achieved by countries of the region in improving and enhancing regional cooperation across political, security and economic sectors. Sustainable peace can be achieved only through close cooperation with regional and subregional organizations and international partners.

The Peace, Security and Cooperation (PSC) Framework for the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Region remains crucial. It provides the foundation for building a shared vision of regional peace, security and socioeconomic development. Ireland looks forward to the tenth high-level meeting of the PSC Regional Oversight Mechanism, to take place by the end of the year. We hope that meeting will maintain momentum and help translate recent progress into shared prosperity for the people of the Great Lakes region.

The establishment of the Contact Coordination Group between key stakeholders in the eastern part of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the region in order to focus on the use of non-military measures to address conflict and instability is an important and very welcome development. The United Nations will continue to play an important role in supporting the region, and Ireland welcomes the Strategy for Peace Consolidation, Conflict Prevention and Conflict Resolution in the Great Lakes Region. Its implementation will require the continued concerted efforts of national, regional and international partners.

Secondly, the illegal exploitation of, and trade in, minerals and natural resources is a significant driver of conflict in Africa, and in particular in the Great Lakes region, where competition for control of resource-rich areas fuels hostilities and violence. Such activities have a multiplier effect on other drivers of instability. Climate change, population displacement, extreme poverty, hunger, socioeconomic inequality and the lack of opportunities for young people exacerbate the challenges across the entire region.

Ireland supports national, regional and international efforts to ensure that lawful, transparent and effective controls are available to support the management of natural resources and prevent their illegal exploitation.

Good governance is essential to ensuring that the region's abundant natural resources become the basis of inclusive and sustainable economic growth and development.

The Secretary-General's latest report on the implementation of the Framework for Peace, Security and Cooperation for the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Region (S/2021/836) notes progress in that regard, and we commend ongoing efforts by countries of the Great Lakes, regional organizations and partners to develop a holistic approach to natural-resource management. We look forward to seeing progress in implementing the recommendations from the recent high-level workshop in Khartoum aimed at curbing illicit exploitation and the trade in natural resources.

Ireland will continue to play its part through ongoing participation in, and advocacy for, the Kimberley Process Certification Scheme and the implementation of the European Union Conflict Minerals Regulation. Through our membership in the Intergovernmental Forum on Mining, Minerals, Metals and Sustainable Development, Ireland will continue to engage with partners to share best practices and to work together to limit the negative impacts of mining and ensure that it contributes to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals.

Thirdly, the development of long-lasting and sustainable solutions requires the promotion and protection of human rights and the rule of law, coupled with a coherent, coordinated response to the humanitarian crises facing the region. With 15 million displaced people and rising levels of food insecurity and acute malnutrition — particularly in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, where the cycle of conflict and hunger has been compounded by drivers of instability such as climate change — the region is contending with one of the most severe humanitarian crises in the world. Action to address that crisis and protect the most vulnerable requires a collective response, and we urge all parties to ensure the safety and security of humanitarian personnel and unhindered access to humanitarian assistance. All parties must adhere to international humanitarian law and international human rights law.

For too long, women and youth have borne the worst of the hardships resulting from conflict and insecurity. For Ireland, it is clear that the full, equal and meaningful participation of women in national,

regional and international efforts is essential for developing sustainable solutions to the root causes of conflict and the drivers of instability. Those solutions include effective natural-resource management and disarmament, demobilization and reintegration processes across the region. Advancing gender equality and ensuring meaningful youth engagement drives transformation and accelerates progress on peace, security and development.

The root causes of conflict and drivers of instability are shared challenges and require shared solutions. Those solutions need to be delivered through the active role of the nations of the region. Those efforts must be supported at the regional level through strengthened collaboration between neighbours and regional organizations. Clearly, at the international level, we have a shared interest in the development of a peaceful and prosperous Great Lakes region that serves the needs of its people.

To address these issues, we must renew our support for the implementation of the PSC Framework and regional initiatives to enhance coordination and cooperation. We must ensure that effective governance and controls are in place to enable the lawful and transparent management of natural resources. We must work collectively to respond to urgent humanitarian needs, and we must uphold our commitment to the promotion and protection of human rights and the rule of law. At the same time, we must also keep the women and peace and security agenda and the youth, peace and security agenda at the fore in our efforts to develop and implement long-lasting and sustainable solutions for the region.

Mr. De Rivière (France) (*spoke in French*): I thank the briefers for their briefings. I welcome you, Madam President, to today's meeting. I also welcome today's important debate, convened by Kenya.

I will focus on three points.

First, enhanced regional cooperation must be translated into specific benefits for people. *Rapprochement* must ensure the protection of civilians, including humanitarian workers who are still the victims of armed groups in eastern Democratic Republic of Congo.

France welcomes the establishment of the Contact and Coordination Group for the implementation of non-military measures. It should build trust

and accelerate the disarmament, demobilization, repatriation and reintegration process. It is also important to monitor coordination among security actors themselves on the ground, and between them and the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO).

The new regional dynamics must support sustainable development that benefits people. To that end, the finalization of several bilateral agreements on trade, investment and infrastructure and the development of regional frameworks to respond to the coronavirus disease pandemic are all positive developments. The Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework for the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Region must continue guiding the States of the region. Ensuring the holding of the tenth high-level meeting of the Regional Oversight Mechanism of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework is a matter of urgency, as it will be an important marker in verifying its implementation.

Secondly, it is imperative to curb one of the main causes of instability — the illegal exploitation of natural resources. It helps fund armed groups and criminal networks, fuels conflicts and heightens tensions among States. Trade in some minerals, such as tantalum, tin and tungsten, is subject to more regulation. However, gold mining is still not sufficiently monitored and should be subject to stricter regulation. The recommendations that emerged from the workshop on natural resources, held in Khartoum, must be followed up with action. We must redouble our efforts to implement the Regional Certification Mechanism of the International Conference of the Great Lakes Region. Harmonizing fiscal regimes, strengthening the judicial cooperation networks of the Great Lakes region and developing regional databases on the flow of minerals are areas that can help support transparency and combat impunity.

Beyond the region, all States, in particular transit and destination countries, must build a responsible value chain. In January, the European Union developed new rules and regulations on combating trafficking in minerals. It will also help the Democratic Republic of the Congo restore its sovereignty over its own resources. The Security Council must also act by sanctioning individuals and entities involved in the illegal exploitation of resources.

Lastly, the United Nations Strategy for Peace Consolidation, Conflict Prevention and Conflict

Resolution in the Great Lakes Region must be fully supported by the region and its partners. The action plan for implementing the Strategy outlines a series of targeted steps, which will require, first and foremost, very strong mobilization by the States of the region. In the months ahead, the implementation process must, in particular, promote transitional justice and national human rights institutions. So long as violations of international humanitarian law and human rights law continue, the region will not see lasting peace.

Humanitarian needs are increasing, food insecurity is growing and the Ebola virus is re-emerging. The Democratic Republic of the Congo is the State with the highest number of displaced persons in Africa. Under the action plan, lasting solutions are urgently needed for safe and dignified voluntary resettlement and repatriation.

Investment in the region must support local development, the participation of young people and women and respect for the environment. Those priorities should be at the centre of discussions at the conference on investment and trade, currently being organized.

As MONUSCO's transition is under way, United Nations agencies should enhance their presence in the Great Lakes region. Donors should mobilize to support the implementation of the regional strategy and meet humanitarian needs. Full support from the Peacebuilding Fund will be required.

Ms. Juul (Norway): I thank Special Envoy Huang Xia, Executive Secretary Caholo and Assistant Secretary-General Martha Pobee for their briefings.

I will also focus on three points today.

First, we recognize the positive advances in cooperation in the Great Lakes region. The bilateral diplomatic outreach and high-level visits within the region are a testament to that. We also see stronger security cooperation and coordination of military and non-military actions against armed groups in eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo. That is encouraging, especially given the violence, human rights violations and abuses and dire humanitarian crisis in eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo. It is vital that the United Nations system and the international community support efforts to address the situation, including through regional cooperation and coordination.

Secondly, the adoption of the United Nations Strategy for Peace Consolidation, Conflict Prevention

and Conflict Resolution in the Great Lakes Region and its accompanying action plan is a good starting point for fostering closer regional cooperation. The action plan's focus on involving key financial partners, such as the World Bank, the African Development Bank and the European Union, will be helpful in delivering on promises. We also welcome the intensified activity of the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region and planned actions on disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR) within the Peacebuilding Fund. We commend the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo for applying a gender-sensitive approach to DDR in the recent transition plan. We look forward to working with the Special Envoy and all relevant actors, including civil society and women, to ensure the implementation of those important initiatives.

Thirdly, the illicit trade in national resources generates hundreds of millions of dollars per year. It is the root cause of conflict and must be addressed. It fuels intercommunal violence in eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo, contributes to the proliferation of small arms and light weapons and hampers the consolidation of peace and security. Furthermore, it strengthens armed groups, leading to the additional suffering of the civilian population. The illicit trade in gold, timber and other natural resources also leads to a loss of public revenue for the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the region. That, in turn, has serious consequences for States' ability to protect their populations and provide essential services.

The cross-border dimension of the illicit trade cannot be overlooked. In that respect, it was encouraging to see the recommendation from the high-level workshop on natural resources, held in Khartoum, in August. We must enhance ownership of such regional initiatives. The endorsement of the recommendation by Heads of State and Government at the upcoming Extraordinary Summit of the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region (ICGLR), together with the existing mechanism under the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework for the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Region and the ICGLR, may further contribute to curbing the revenue of armed groups and advance the transparent and sustainable management of natural resources in the region. Norway encourages all stakeholders to work together to ensure implementation.

In conclusion, we welcome the adoption of presidential statement S/PRST/2021/19 today. Norway reiterates its support for the work of the Special Envoy and the ICGLR. Their efforts are crucial to ensuring peace and stability in the Great Lakes region.

Ms. King (Saint Vincent and the Grenadines): We thank Kenya for convening today's timely debate. We also thank you, Madam President, for the vivid description of the Great Lakes region and for reminding us of what is possible for the region and the entire continent.

We welcome the comprehensive briefings provided by our briefers this morning.

Over the past few years and despite ongoing challenges, the countries of the Great Lakes region have made commendable progress, including concrete steps towards peaceful transfers of power, the normalizing of bilateral relations and the continued implementation of commitments under the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework. To that end, we recognize the role played by regional and subregional organizations, namely the African Union, the Economic Community of Central African States and the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region, in fostering coordination and cooperation among the States of the region in their efforts to combat ongoing conflicts.

We also take this moment to laud the efforts made towards improving the visibility, representation and empowerment of women in the region within the framework of the women and peace and security agenda. We urge continued strides to ensure women's full, equal, and meaningful participation in all stages of political processes, peacebuilding and development.

That notwithstanding, we remain concerned over the volatile security situation in areas of the region, including the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo, where armed groups continue to carry out attacks that impact the civilian population and have wide-reaching destabilizing consequences for the region. While the situation in the country remains tenuous, we welcome President Touadera's unilateral declaration of a ceasefire as a fundamental step towards the implementation of the Political Agreement for Peace and Reconciliation in the Central African Republic and call on all parties to follow and respect those efforts.

The humanitarian situation across the region is also of great concern. In the Central African Republic,

violence continues to contribute to the internal displacement of a significant number of people, with many experiencing food insecurity. Against the backdrop of ongoing political and diplomatic efforts to address the situation in the region, it is crucial for the international community to sustain its support for the people of the region, including through contributions to the relevant humanitarian response plans.

Sustained support by the international community for the efforts of the countries in the region towards peace is key. That includes support for State institutions and the implementation of relevant frameworks, as well as regional efforts towards combating illegal trade and the exploitation of natural resources, in order to transform them into catalysts for economic growth and development.

We are hopeful that the United Nations Strategy for Peace Consolidation, Conflict Prevention and Conflict Resolution in the Great Lakes Region will be successful in supporting the implementation of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework and the nexus between peace and security, justice and development in the region. That whole-of-system approach, which outlines the priorities of the United Nations in the region over the next few years, demonstrates the Special Envoy's commitment to long-term regional peace. We urge the international community to support its implementation.

In order to achieve sustainable peace and development, we must address the complex web of root causes and drivers of endemic violence, particularly the illegal exploitation and trade of natural resources. We underscore that that approach must be allied with the efforts of key partners to build the capacity of countries in the region to anticipate, manage, mitigate and resolve emerging conflicts.

In conclusion, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines affirms its support for the countries and peoples of the region and avails itself of every opportunity to support the work of regional and subregional organizations, reiterating the importance of African solutions to African challenges. We welcome the ongoing work of the United Nations, including that of the Special Envoy, and all efforts undertaken to guarantee peace, security, and socioeconomic development of the region.

Finally, we join in welcoming the presidential statement on the Great Lakes region to be issued later (S/PRST/2021/19).

Mr. De la Fuente Ramírez (Mexico) (*spoke in Spanish*): My delegation thanks Kenya for convening this debate and we welcome you once again, Madam President, to the Council. We also thank Special Envoy Huang Xia, Mr. João Samuel Caholo and Mrs. Martha Pobee for their briefings and express our greetings to the representatives of Angola, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Uganda, Burundi and Rwanda.

Mexico welcomes the positive results of regional diplomacy, including, inter alia, the normalization of relations between Burundi and Rwanda and the strengthening of ties between the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Rwanda. We highlight the positive effect that those regional dynamics have on peace and security, for example, the revitalization of the Political Agreement for Peace and Reconciliation in the Central African Republic.

The 2021-2023 action plan for the implementation of the United Nations Strategy for Peace Consolidation, Conflict Prevention and Conflict Resolution in the Great Lakes Region is most welcome. We recognize the value of that instrument not only in identifying priority areas for the region, but also as a programming and evaluation mechanism.

Alongside the progress made, we note that significant challenges remain, primarily arising from the activities of armed groups, which translate into security and humanitarian assistance access issues. Addressing the root causes of violence must be made a priority, as that is the only rational and effective way to contain it.

In that regard, I would like to briefly highlight four points.

First, the exploitation and trafficking of natural resources continue to be a major challenge in the region. Firm measures are needed to curb that criminal cycle. The harmonization of legislation in that area and the strengthening of judicial and fiscal systems exemplify some timely and tangible measures.

Secondly, insecurity and violence are multiplied by the illicit transfer of small arms and light weapons. There is a link between the financing obtained from the illegal exploitation of natural resources and the acquisition of those types of weapons. It is therefore essential to implement more specific measures to combat that scourge. The objective in that regard is to

reduce the activities of armed groups, as identified in cluster 2 of the action plan.

We consider it extremely important to develop weapons and ammunition management policies and programmes that complement the broader disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR) strategy. That would also certainly go a long way towards achieving Sustainable Development Goal 16.4. However, the success of DDR programmes depends, to a large extent, on opportunities and alternatives for ex-combatants, hence why the socioeconomic development of the region is essential.

Thirdly, as was mentioned earlier, the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic and the extremely inequitable distribution of vaccines continue to have adverse effects in the region and other parts of the world, both in terms of public health and socioeconomic development. We reiterate that we must now unconditionally accept the fact that COVID-19 vaccines must be considered as a global public good so as to guarantee their universal access.

Lastly, it must be said that the impetus given to the women and peace and security agenda in the context of the region has been valuable, and it is important. We welcome the increasing participation of women in the political arena as well as their inclusion in mediation and peacebuilding processes.

In conclusion, I underscore that it is imperative that the Council continue to accord the attention due to the situation in the Great Lakes region, as achieving sustainable peace in a significant part of the African continent depends on it. We therefore commend the adoption of presidential statement S/PRST/2021/19 at this meeting.

Mr. Ladeb (Tunisia) (*spoke in Arabic*): I thank Mr. Howang Shia, Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for the Great Lakes Region; Mr. João Samuel Caholo, Executive Secretary of the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region; and Mrs. Martha Ama Akyaa Pobee, Assistant Secretary-General for Africa, for their valuable briefings. I also thank you, Madam President, for presiding over this meeting in which Ministers are participating, and I thank Kenya for choosing today's theme.

The Great Lakes region is faced with many political, security and economic challenges with direct effects on security, peace, stability and development

for the countries concerned. The coronavirus disease pandemic deepened those situations and exacerbated the difficulties of those challenges and their implications, particularly on the humanitarian situation.

As far as the security dimension is concerned, the countries of the region are still under the threat of armed groups that continue to target security and stability, as well as of their activities in the field of the illegal exploitation of, and trafficking in, natural wealth, while trading in weapons to finance their operations. That has led to exacerbating the suffering of the local population, worsening the phenomenon of forced displacement and refugee flows at home and abroad, as well as continued violations of human rights and sexual and gender-based violence.

In the face of those threats, it is necessary to adopt a common regional approach to put an end to them and their direct influence on security and stability in the region, making the wealth of the Great Lakes Region an incentive for development and a factor for strengthening security and stability for the various peoples of the region, rather than remaining a source of funding for armed groups and fuelling conflicts and violence.

The full and effective implementation of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework by all signatories is of great importance to achieving peace, stability and development in the Great Lakes region. In that context, we value the efforts of the signatory States to fulfil their commitments, just as we value the support of regional and subregional organizations along that path.

We also welcome the results of the third mini-summit of Heads of State of the International Conference of the Great Lakes Region, held in Luanda on 16 September, in particular with regard to ways of promoting peace, security and stability in the region and addressing the humanitarian challenges faced by their countries.

Despite the difficulties ahead, the Great Lakes region has an important opportunity to achieve peace, security, stability and sustainable development, through the concerted efforts of their countries, to be supported by the international community, which will facilitate the implementation of the political and security aspects of the Framework in parallel with the development and economic aspects that are a key element of lasting peace and stability. Improving living conditions, especially in border areas, as well as trade cooperation relations, fighting corruption and

managing natural resources and wealth will strengthen confidence-building and positively affect the situation of the peoples of the region.

I cannot but commend the efforts of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for the Great Lakes Region and his team in promoting peace and security in the region through their good offices, mediation and preventive diplomacy, as well as strengthening the capacities from which the countries of the region can mutually benefit. We also welcome the efforts of the Special Envoy in addressing the long-term challenges related to the illegal exploitation of, and trade in, natural resources, while also underscoring the role of the United Nations Strategy for Peace Consolidation, Conflict Prevention and Conflict Resolution in the Great Lakes Region and the relevant action plan that has been launched.

In conclusion, we commend the important role of the Peacebuilding Commission and its main partners, such as the World Bank and other international financial institutions, as well as the Peacebuilding Fund in supporting cross-border cooperation in the region through efforts to strengthen security cooperation, reconciliation, social cohesion, good governance and the reintegration of former combatants, while finding lasting solutions for the issue of displaced persons.

Tunisia reaffirms its support for the efforts of regional and subregional organizations, chief among them the African Union, the Southern African Development Community, the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region and the East African Community, and all other partners to further the gains made in implementing the Agreement and promote regional cooperation, which will inevitably lead to long-term peace and sustainable development in the region. We also endorse the adoption of presidential statement S/PRST/2021/19 at today's meeting.

Mr. Jürgenson (Estonia): I thank Kenya for hosting today's debate, and I appreciate the Kenyan commitment to deal with this topic as a high priority. I also thank the briefers for their presentations, and I welcome the representatives of countries of the region for joining us today.

We are well aware that the root causes and endemic conflicts in the Great Lakes region are multiple and complex. For more than two decades, the insecurity, most notably in the eastern part of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, has been one of the destabilizing

factors in the region that has been characterized by day-to-day attacks and killings of civilians by various negative forces.

We regret to note that another prominent feature of the conflict — behaviour unworthy of human beings — is the conflict-related sexual violence, accompanied by grave violations against women and children. The ongoing conflict in turn has left the population of the region at a critical level of food insecurity and in a dire humanitarian situation. It is inconceivable that approximately 15 million people in the region are subjected to forced displacement. That should not happen to populations in our time.

The illegal exploitation of natural resources, which is the focus of today's debate, is a longstanding driver of insecurity and conflict in the region. We need to ensure that those resources serve the well-being of the population of the region.

In that respect, I would like to highlight three principal areas that are fundamental to address this driver of conflict.

First, we are confident that successful regional cooperation is an essential tool to consolidate greater control over conflict minerals and mining sites. We welcome the efforts by the countries of the region to strengthen their common dialogue and regional cooperation in the fight against illegal exploitation and illicit trade in natural resources. In that regard, we encourage the countries of the region to facilitate the implementation of the common regional initiatives in that area, most notably with regard to the implementation of the regional database on mineral flows, the Regional Certification Mechanism and the harmonization of regional regulations. We also believe that there are great opportunities for women and youth to be involved in the mining sector that would offer them an alternative to being involved in the armed conflict.

Secondly, we are of the view that strengthening the national disarmament, demobilization and stabilization programme would provide prospects for disrupting the weapons supply to armed groups. It is particularly important to ensure the sustainable and transparent management of national stocks of weapons and ammunition to prevent them from falling into the hands of negative forces. In that connection, we commend the efforts of signatory countries in establishing the Contact and Coordination Group and the commitments to implement its action plan that would allow for the

reduction of threats posed by negative forces. We likewise appreciate the important role of the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo in providing its good offices and strategic and technical advice.

Thirdly, we underline the important role of investigative authorities and courts in the region in addressing the issue of accountability for the illegal exploitation of natural resources. Accordingly, we encourage the countries of the region to fight impunity for serious crimes under international law and other serious human rights violations and abuses. We are confident that the implementation of the Nairobi Declaration on Justice and Good Governance will chart the right course and increase the confidence of the population in the justice system and the rule of law.

Finally, I thank the Special Envoy for his tireless efforts in contributing to the implementation of the regional strategy and his unwavering support for the signatory countries in addressing the root causes of the conflict.

Ms. Evstigneeva (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): We welcome your participation, Madam President, in this meeting in your capacity as President of the Security Council. We are grateful to the Special Envoy for the Great Lakes Region, Mr. Huang Xia; to the Assistant Secretary-General, Martha Pobe; and to the Executive Secretary of the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region (ICGLR), Mr. João Samuel Caholo. We thank them for the views they expressed.

We also welcome the representatives of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Angola, Burundi, Rwanda and Uganda. We appreciate the fact that the Kenyan presidency convened this debate on the issue of the Great Lakes region. Our view is that the discussion today will enable us to exchange views and find common denominators and guidelines for our future efforts aimed at stabilizing the situation in that important region.

A determining influence on the region continues to be exerted by the situation in the east of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, which remains quite challenging. We have witnessed some stabilization in Tanganyika and Kasai, but a strong threat to security remains in the provinces of Ituri and North Kivu, where the Allied Democratic Forces continue to be active, along with other armed groups. The goal remains of making mineral extraction more orderly in order to

prevent mineral smuggling from benefiting illegal armed groups.

We are convinced that the exclusive use of military means would preclude a lasting normalization in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. We followed very closely the efforts made by the authorities to restore control over the security sphere, improve the humanitarian situation, promote socioeconomic development, resolve border disputes with neighbours, resolve intercommunal conflicts, and implement the programme for the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration of former combatants.

Against the background of all those issues in the area of security and the difficult humanitarian situation, and taking account of the coronavirus disease factor, we note the heightened diplomacy conducted by the States of the region so as to build good-neighbourly relations. We welcome that determination to develop cooperation in order to overcome existing challenges, including doing so through collective formats. That applies to the pooling of efforts to combat armed groups, strengthen borders and develop trade relations.

We note the numerous contacts at various levels between the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Burundi, Rwanda, Uganda and Tanzania, and we think that the fact that the President of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Mr. Tshisekedi, will chair the African Union this year will attract additional attention to the issue of the Great Lakes region. We also appreciate the role played by the ICGLR under the Angolan presidency.

Finally, the list of positive initiatives includes an agreement on steps to implement the road maps on stabilizing the Central African Republic, which was at the basis of the decision made by President Touadera to declare a ceasefire.

All the achievements that I have just listed have one factor in common. All initiatives that help stabilize the situation will be viable only when they are developed and agreed by the direct participants and supported at the regional level. That is also in line with the principle that we all agree on: that African solutions are required to African problems. We are firmly convinced that this is a necessary precondition for success and shows once again how nefarious it can be when ready-made formulas are imposed, when national initiatives and sovereignty are suppressed and when open attempts to interfere are made from outside.

It is our view that the role of the international community and the Security Council consists of supporting regional actors' initiatives. In that regard, we welcome the work conducted by the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General. We deem necessary that all countries implement the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework for the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Region.

We are convinced that the United Nations United Nations Strategy for Peace Consolidation, Conflict Prevention and Conflict Resolution in the Great Lakes Region will give fresh impetus to the collective efforts deployed by regional actors. We also note that the action plan under that strategy has now begun to be implemented. We support the good offices of Mr. Huang Xia in his efforts to promote dialogue, strengthen trust and normalize relations among the countries in the region, and his in-depth, comprehensive approach to the root causes of crisis situations.

In conclusion, we would like to reiterate that Russia, also in its capacity as a member of the Group of Friends of the Great Lakes Region, intends to continue to extend its support for the peace process in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the stabilization of the region as a whole.

Mr. Abarry (Niger) (*spoke in French*): Allow me at the outset to congratulate you, Madam President, and your country, Kenya, for having convened this important debate on the Great Lakes region. I wish to commend all briefers for the perspectives they have provided. I also wish to commend the presence of the Irish and Angolan ministers and of the countries of the region at this debate.

The search for lasting solutions to the root causes and drivers of conflict in the Great Lakes region, the theme of our debate today, is indeed a relevant choice because it raises the timely question of the stability of peace and prosperity of the countries of the region in particular and of the African continent as a whole. In this regard, Niger welcomes the intensification in recent years of diplomatic efforts by the region's leaders to revive cooperation in the areas of security, exploitation of natural resources, refugee flows and judicial assistance.

The diplomatic thaw between Rwanda and Burundi, which materialized through visits by senior officials from both countries, the high-level contacts of President Félix-Antoine Tshisekedi Tshilombo of the Democratic

Republic of Congo with his neighbours aimed at reducing armed-group activity, and the management of the consequences of the Ebola and coronavirus disease crises and the eruption of the Nyiragongo volcano, are all encouraging signs that are undoubtedly contributing to the normalization of relations among the countries of the region.

The Niger encourages the implementation of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework for the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the region adopted in Addis Ababa on 24 February 2013, which constitutes the main road map in the search for stability, strengthening of governance and democratic institutions and the reinforcement of cooperation among the countries of the Great Lakes region.

On the political front, the Niger welcomes the holding of elections in several member countries of the Framework, such as the Central African Republic, the Republic of the Congo, Uganda and Zambia. The political progress made in the Democratic Republic of Congo since the last elections, which marked the country's first-ever peaceful political changeover, the various economic measures taken and the ongoing reorganization of the Independent National Electoral Commission are all salutary steps towards the consolidation of good governance and democratic institutions, which should be encouraged. We commend the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo for the steps it has also taken to meet the objectives set forth in the benchmarks of the transition plan of the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, including those related to the disarmament, demobilization and community rehabilitation programme.

In the same vein, we encourage the Government of the Central African Republic to continue its efforts to strengthen the inclusiveness and transparency of the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration process under way in the country. The recent ceasefire decided by President Touadera is an act of political courage that should be commended.

While we welcome the progress made in terms of rapprochement and the revival of cooperation between the countries of the Great Lakes region, the security situation in the region remains worrying, particularly in the east of the Democratic Republic of Congo and in the Central African Republic. The resurgence of attacks by allied armed forces, which led to the abduction

and death of several dozen civilians, human rights violations, violence, sexual violations against women and young girls, the targeting of minority group leaders by the Allied Democratic Forces and other armed groups, including the recent assassination of an imam in Beni in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the targeted attacks against Muslims and the Fulani in the Central African Republic, are sad illustrations of this.

All these attacks and acts of violence against civilians, which we strongly condemn and deplore, must stop. We therefore welcome the efforts of the States in the region to put an end to the activities of armed groups. The cessation of violence is crucial to enabling countries in the region to effectively address the issue of forced displacement and facilitate the delivery of humanitarian assistance.

While military action cannot be ruled out to address the region's insecurity, we believe that the implementation of non-military measures to address the root causes and drivers of conflict will create an environment conducive to peacebuilding. These measures include the promotion of transparency in the exploitation and trade of natural resources. The implementation of the Kimberley Process regional initiative on natural resources and the policy recommendations agreed at the high-level workshop in Khartoum at the beginning of last month will go a long way to ensuring that these resources can be used for the development of the countries of origin of these minerals and thus the well-being of their people.

My delegation commends the continued good offices and preventive diplomacy of Special Envoy Huang Xia and all United Nations officials in the region, in particular the holistic approach promoted by the Special Envoy involving all stakeholders, including recipient countries, to curbing the illicit trade and smuggling of precious and strategic minerals in the region. The issue of the illicit circulation of small arms, which fuels the mineral trade and exacerbates crises, must be resolutely addressed. We also appreciate the support of the Office of the Special Envoy for the empowerment of women and youth as agents of peace and the promotion of their participation in the political and economic life of their countries.

The search for peace and the fight against the root causes of instability in a region as vast and rich in diverse natural resources as the Great Lakes region require not

only the re-establishment and strengthening of bilateral relations between countries, but also coherence and synergy of action among the many subregional organizations to which they belong. In this respect, the positive role played by the Economic Community of Central African States and the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region in supporting peace efforts in member countries is to be commended.

The unilateral ceasefire announced last Friday by President Touadera in the Central African Republic is the result of the collective efforts of successive mini-summits convened under the leadership of Angola to revitalize the political and peace agreement in the country. For their part, the United Nations, its regional representatives and specialized agents must continue to work together to provide the necessary support for the full implementation of the Great Lakes region strategy and its action plan. In this regard, we encourage the implementation of the United Nations Strategy for Peace Consolidation, Conflict Prevention and Conflict Resolution in the Great Lakes Region, as well as its action plan, which provide for the launch of the Contact and Coordination Group to oversee the implementation of the non-military strategy.

In conclusion, and in support of the presidential statement just adopted (S/PRST/2021/19), Niger encourages all countries of the region, in particular the signatories of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework for the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Region, to redouble their efforts to sustain the dividends of the current positive dynamic by showing more openness and commitment at the bilateral and subregional level so that peace and stability reign in the Great Lakes region.

Mr. Pham (Viet Nam): I thank Special Envoy Huang Xia, Ambassador João Samuel Caholo and Mrs. Martha Pobee for their informative briefings.

I welcome the participation of the representatives of Angola, Burundi, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Rwanda and Uganda in today's meeting.

First of all, let me begin by emphasizing the vitally important role that regional cooperation plays in conflict prevention and resolution. My delegation therefore fully supports the presidential statement just adopted under the leadership of the Kenya presidency (S/PRST/2021/19), to renew our efforts aimed at addressing the root causes and drivers of conflict in the region.

We are pleased to note the continued commitment of signatory States in implementing the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework for the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Region. Regional cooperation undoubtedly plays a central role in addressing common challenges, including illegal activities of armed groups, illicit exploitation of and trade in natural resources, adverse impacts of natural disasters and the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic. The efforts and role played by regional and subregional organizations, including the African Union, the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region and Southern African Development Community are therefore irreplaceable.

We welcome the high-level engagement among countries of the region to reinvigorate and deepen relations at bilateral and multilateral levels, particularly the steps taken by the President of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The recent adoption of the Luanda joint road map, which has led to critical steps towards revitalizing the peace process in the Central African Republic, is highly commendable. We encourage sustained efforts within the framework of the Regional Oversight Mechanism, as well as the Contact and Coordination Group, to enhance coordinated measures against negative forces in the region.

In the meantime, the humanitarian situation in the region remains worrisome, especially in the eastern part of the Democratic Republic of the Congo due to the deteriorated security situation. While welcoming the gradual return of refugees to Burundi, my delegation continues to be troubled by the plight of millions of displaced people and refugees in the region. We are also concerned over the world's highest number of food-insecure people in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, with more than 27 million facing crisis level — Integrated Food Security Phase Classification phase 3 — or worse.

The compounding COVID-19 pandemic is further exacerbating socioeconomic difficulties and the hardship of the vulnerable population. The precarious situation of the people in the region requires comprehensive and pragmatic measures to address the root causes of instability.

In that regard, we encourage the continued intensification of cooperation to implement the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework for the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Region,

strengthen the management of natural resources, tackle threats posed by armed groups, create equal development opportunities for regional countries, et cetera.

To that end, continued international assistance is key. Resource mobilization to support countries of the region remains pivotal, with a view to preserving the hard-won achievements and further promoting stability in the Great Lakes region. My delegation highly appreciates the contribution of regional and international partners and the active engagement of the Special Envoy and the Peacebuilding Commission in assisting the region.

It is our strong belief that the United Nations Strategy for Peace Consolidation, Conflict Prevention and Conflict Resolution in the Great Lakes Region, with its action plan for the period of 2021 to 2023, will be an excellent platform to channel efforts to assist the implementation of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework.

Let me conclude by stressing the need to ensure the synergy and complementarity of the support of the international community and regionally and nationally owned and led efforts, with the full and active participation of women and young people, for sustainable peace and development for the people in the region.

Mrs. Thomas-Greenfield (United States of America): I too want to thank you, Madam President, for Kenya's initiative to highlight the conflict in the Great Lakes region as part of its presidency of the Security Council this month. We share Kenya's concern regarding armed groups and violence in the eastern part of the Democratic Republic of Congo, as well as its optimism regarding the prospects for peace, reconciliation and development, which could serve as an economic motor to transform the entire subregion. I also thank Special Envoy Huang Xia for presenting the report of the Secretary-General (S/2021/836) and for his briefing. I also want to thank the Executive Secretary of the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region (ICGLR), Mr. Caholo, for his efforts at the ICGLR and Assistant Secretary-General Pobe for her briefing. We enthusiastically welcome the regional partners here with us today. Their role is key to the success of the region.

The United States supports the principles set out in the United Nations Strategy for Peace Consolidation,

Conflict Prevention and Conflict Resolution in the Great Lakes Region, adopted a year ago, the road map announced this summer and the September recommendations of the Khartoum workshop on natural resources, particularly regarding the gold trade. We are confident that the Special Envoy will act swiftly on the regional strategy through high-level shuttle diplomacy with the region's leaders to support the full implementation of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework for the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Region. We welcome the work towards holding the next meeting of the Regional Oversight Mechanism. It is time to push such commitments forward.

Today we particularly welcome Kenya's focus on the illegal exploitation of natural resources, such as minerals, wildlife and timber, by armed groups, corrupt State actors and criminal commercial networks. We concur with the ICGLR Executive Secretary's comments on that issue today. Such actions clearly fuel conflict in the eastern part of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. They help terrorist groups, and they pose a danger to the entire region. We must do something about that, and we need to do it now.

To start, we urge regional Governments to uphold their commitments as ICGLR member States. The Executive Secretary's presence again highlights his commitment to that. That means treating the responsible management of natural resources as vital to the economic, social and governance development of the region. In addition, the private-sector supply chain must demand due diligence from private-sector operators in the extractive sectors, consistent with the guidelines of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development. The due diligence should adhere to the highest standards possible to ensure the sustainable use of such resources, and the parties should work closely with international financial institutions to develop national frameworks that reinforce such commitments.

While armed groups and others continue to profit from minerals, especially gold, smuggled illegally from the Democratic Republic of the Congo, we must pursue greater cooperation across borders on supply-chain standards, traceability, tariff standardization and tax harmonization. The Islamic State in Iraq and the Sham (ISIS) in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, often referred to as the Allied Democratic Forces, has previously funded its activities through illegal taxes on gold producers in Beni. That is why due diligence is so important.

To those ends, the United States welcomes the recent meetings among regional Governments on military and non-military measures. Those meetings should pay extra attention to how the smuggling of Congolese gold affects the national security of neighbours of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The recent planned ISIS-Democratic Republic of the Congo attacks in Rwanda and Uganda highlight the heightened risk of that illegal gold trade for all countries in the Great Lakes region.

In addition, strategies for the reintegration of former fighters must be coordinated, developed and fully implemented to counter the threat of violent extremism over the long term. The Great Lakes region has wealth in natural resources, and it has talented personnel, to fund such efforts on its own, if State actors work together to ensure a legal, productive trade that benefits all the people of the region. The difference would be extraordinary. It is entirely possible to put an end to the smuggling and bring greater peace and prosperity to the region.

With that in mind, I again thank Kenya for hosting today's important debate, and I urge countries of the region to uphold their commitments to addressing the smuggling that is driving so much of this terrible conflict.

Mr. Tirumurti (India): Allow me to welcome you, Madam President, as you preside over today's meeting. Let me thank Kenya for organizing this important debate on the Great Lakes region, which has the potential to become an engine of growth for the African continent and beyond. Today's initiative and deliberations will contribute positively to the ongoing efforts to implement the commitments under the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework for the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the region. In that regard, we welcome the adoption of presidential statement S/PRST/2021/19 under Kenya's leadership.

I thank Special Envoy Huang Xia for his briefing on the developments in the Great Lakes region. I also thank Ambassador João Caholo, Executive Secretary of the International Conference of the Great Lakes Region (ICGLR), and the Assistant Secretary-General for Africa, Mrs. Martha Pobe, for their insights. I also welcome the participation of the Foreign Minister of Angola, the High Representative of the President of the Democratic Republic of the Congo

and the representatives of Uganda and Rwanda in today's meeting.

The political developments in the region during the past six months have remained on track, thus aiding the implementation of the Framework. The region was witness to peaceful elections in the Republic of the Congo, the Central African Republic and Zambia. Those events reflect the peoples' faith in democratic institutions and elections. The leaders have pursued the path of dialogue and have been instrumental in strengthening bilateral relations. That is evident in the purposeful engagements among the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Burundi and Rwanda. The African Union Peace and Security Council has also decided to remove Burundi from its agenda, reflecting the improved situation. The regional and subregional organizations have also held several important meetings, including the ICGLR summit and the Southern African Development Community summit. We welcome these developments.

While political stability is a necessary condition to address common challenges, the interlinkages of security and socioeconomic factors cutting across the region need a sustained and well-coordinated approach. In that regard, let me make some observations.

First, threats from armed groups remains the main cause of insecurity in many countries of the region, particularly in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo. Terrorist groups have also begun exploiting the vulnerability of armed groups. This issue requires the serious consideration of the international community. We believe that it can be addressed only through the extension of effective State authority and institutions promoting the rule of law. Towards that end, the strengthening of security and police forces remains critical. The onus lies predominantly with the concerned Member State that bears the fundamental responsibility to protect its citizens. The international community and the United Nations should continue assisting the efforts of these countries to address the security challenges.

The porous international border in the region remains a major impediment in combating the armed groups. It is well known that illegally exploited natural resources are traded across borders, and weapons are brought in exchange. Given the nature of the problem, security cooperation between countries is important. In that regard, we welcome high-level regional diplomacy and the reinvigoration of bilateral mechanisms to

strengthen border control, as well as the sharing of information and intelligence and the development of border infrastructure. We also note the progress in the ICGLR's Expanded Joint Verification Mechanism and look forward to the convening of the tenth Regional Oversight Mechanism of the Peace, Security and Cooperation (PSC) Framework for the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Region.

The disarmament, demobilization, reintegration, repatriation and resettlement (DDRRR) of former combatants have delivered mixed results so far. Slow movement on that front can demoralize and disincentivize prospective combatants. Therefore, the implementation of DDRRR programmes need to be expedited. In that context, we welcome the efforts of the Contact and Coordination Group, under the PSC Framework, to identify and implement non-military measures in order to address the problem of armed groups.

The DDRRR process presupposes a political understanding or agreement between State authorities and armed groups, which in turn depends on the level of trust and confidence. The door for inclusive dialogue in a spirit of reconciliation must always be kept open. We welcome the announcement of a ceasefire by the Government of the Central African Republic and look forward to an inclusive process. We particularly commend the persistent role played by the ICGLR, under the chairmanship of President of Angola, in shaping a positive outlook in the Central African Republic through its mini-summits — which serves as a useful model for regional mediation efforts.

The illicit exploitation, trafficking and trade of natural resources have contributed to armed conflict in many parts of the resource-rich Great Lakes region. We believe that existing systems and efforts at the regional level need be strengthened further in order to address the issue. The effective implementation of the ICGLR Regional Initiative against the Illegal Exploitation of Natural Resources, which includes a regional certification mechanism for minerals, must be supported and expanded. In that regard, we welcome the high-level regional workshop on natural resources, held recently in Khartoum. Institution-building and regulatory compliance need to be emphasized and pursued at the local and regional levels. That is how international partners and the United Nations can support ICGLR efforts. It may be difficult to discuss investment and participation of the private sector

and international financial institutions in the mining and extraction sector without addressing these fundamental issues.

Lastly, an overarching element related to this discussion is livelihood. The abundance of natural resources in the region should provide an immediate solution. Unfortunately much more remains to be done in that regard.

The Great Lakes region is at the cusp of a potential transformation. The countries of the region are making sustained and determined efforts to overcome these challenges and need steady support from the international community. The international community and the United Nations need to work with them in line with their national priorities.

India has close bilateral relationships with all countries in the Great Lakes region. A key driver of those relationships is the people-to-people contact that has existed for many years, with a large Indian diaspora in the region. We have collaborated through expert exchanges and training and capacity-building programmes, and have enhanced support for post-conflict reconstruction in the region. India is cognizant of the importance of peace and security in the region's development, and we remain steadfast in our commitment to the region.

Mr. Kariuki (United Kingdom): I would like to thank Kenya for using its presidency to shine a spotlight on the Great Lakes region and for encouraging renewed commitments from the Security Council to seek sustainable solutions to the drivers of conflict in the region. Let me also thank Special Envoy Xia, Ambassador Caholo and Mrs. Pobebe for their briefings today.

I will focus my intervention on three issues: regional relations, the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo and natural resources.

First, the United Kingdom remains deeply committed to promoting long-term peace and stability in the Great Lakes. All parties should prioritize promoting dialogue and strengthening trust in order to reduce the threat of armed groups in Great Lakes. We strongly welcome improved bilateral relations between the States of the region and encourage the continuation of regular bilateral communication, including at the level of Heads of State and with the United Nations, particularly around insecurity in the

eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo. The United Kingdom thanks Special Envoy Xia for his work and stands ready to assist him in supporting dialogue processes and confidence-building. In that regard, we urge regional leaders to attend relevant meetings in person whenever possible in order to enable frank exchanges on the common challenges facing the region.

Secondly, the United Kingdom remains deeply concerned about the security and humanitarian situation in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo, which continues to deteriorate despite the state of siege in North Kivu and Ituri provinces. I reiterate our call on the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo to ensure that the state of siege remains transparent and time-limited and that it is implemented with respect for human rights and humanitarian law. The United Kingdom recognizes the launch of the Contact and Coordination Group on non-military measures as an important step towards enhanced security cooperation in the region. We support the Secretary-General's recommendation that the Group's operational cell be established swiftly in order to ensure effective implementation of its action plan.

Thirdly, the concept note (S/2021/874, annex) for today's meeting and its many interventions have identified the illegal exploitation and trade in natural resources as a driver of conflict and instability. We thank Kenya for successfully leading on the adoption of presidential statement S/PRST/2021/19 on this issue. We also congratulate the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region, the Office of the Special Envoy and the Government of the Sudan on convening the high-level workshop in Khartoum, where participants agreed on a coherent approach to addressing the illegal exploitation and trade in natural resources. The United Kingdom encourages regional Governments to play their part by ramping up national efforts to tackle corruption and improve the rule of law and domestic taxation.

We are deeply concerned that the Group of Experts on the Democratic Republic of the Congo has been on hold since August. That has prevented the Group from providing their concrete and actionable reporting on illicit smuggling of natural resources in the region, which is of enormous value to regional and international actors dedicated to tackling that issue.

In conclusion, in addition to continuing to focus on natural resource exploitation, let me highlight the importance of also discussing and addressing

other priority areas, including human rights, good governance, freedom of expression and civil liberties, in order to reduce conflict and promote peace in the Great Lakes region.

Mr. Zhang Jun (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): I welcome you, Foreign Minister Omamo, as you preside over today's meeting, and thank Special Envoy Huang Xia; Executive Secretary Caholo and Assistant Secretary-General Pobee for their briefings.

I also welcome Mr. António, Foreign Minister of Angola; Mr. Ibalanky Ekolomba, High Representative of the President of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and the representatives of Uganda, Burundi and Rwanda to today's meeting.

The overall situation in the Great Lakes region has been improving for some time now. Several countries have held general elections and progress has been made in the peace processes in the Central African Republic, the Sudan and South Sudan. Burundi has been successfully removed from the agendas of the Security Council and the African Union Peace and Security Council. Cross-border security incidents in the region have been on the decline. Rapprochement and enhanced cooperation have gained momentum. There is now a window of opportunity for peace and development in the region.

As a good friend and partner of the countries of the Great Lakes region, China welcomes that development and congratulates those countries. We hope that all parties will build consensus and continue to deepen cooperation in an effort to implement the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework for the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Region, with a view to achieving broad-based and lasting peace, development and prosperity as soon as possible.

I would like to underscore the following points.

First, it is important to maintain cooperation efforts and to continue to improve relations among the countries of the region. Enhancing mutual political trust and strengthening relations are effective ways to improve the situation in the Great Lakes region. Countries of the region have recently conducted intensive, high-level consultations and signed a number of cooperation agreements. They are now striving to build good-neighbourly relations, which are welcomed.

The Democratic Republic of the Congo, Burundi, Rwanda, Tanzania and Uganda have held meetings

of security and intelligence services and established the contact and coordination group on non-military measures, thereby making major headway in the area of regional security cooperation. China deeply appreciates the efforts of the countries of the region and encourages all parties to continue to deepen cooperation in order to provide high-level guidance and political assistance in an effort to improve the situation in the region.

We look forward to the upcoming tenth high-level meeting of the Regional Oversight Mechanism, which provides an important opportunity to promote the implementation of the Framework document.

Secondly, it is essential to adhere to a development-oriented approach and strive to eliminate the root causes of conflict. Poverty and underdevelopment lead to tensions over resources and trigger conflicts and confrontation, which are major drivers of protracted wars in the region. Countries of the region should strictly regulate the exploitation and utilization of natural resources, strengthen regional cooperation so as to combat their illegal exploitation and trade, and cut off sources of illicit profit for armed groups. China supports the countries of the region in turning their resource advantages into development advantages by helping their people gain employment, eradicating poverty, accelerating industrialization and modernization, enhancing the capacity for independent development and innovation and promoting peace with development, all in a legal way.

China welcomes the positive outcome of the Khartoum workshop on natural resources and looks forward to the successful holding of the second Great Lakes Investment and Trade Conference, coordinated by the Special Envoy.

The coronavirus disease pandemic has had a severe impact on the region. The current regional vaccination rate stands at only 6 per cent. The International Monetary Fund estimates that it will be difficult for countries of the region to restore their pre-pandemic per capita income before 2025. China calls on the international community to increase vaccine assistance to countries of the region and to take pragmatic debt relief and development assistance measures in order to support the pandemic response and speed up reconstruction. Since the outbreak of the pandemic, China has provided several batches of anti-epidemic supplies and vaccines to the Great Lakes region. Some 12 countries in the region use Chinese vaccines.

Thirdly, we must strengthen coordination for action and jointly implement the new United Nations Strategy for Peace Consolidation, Conflict Prevention and Conflict Resolution in the Great Lakes Region and action plan. China welcomes the fact that the Special Envoy has formulated a new strategy and action plan after fully considering the views of countries of the region, which we believe will guide the United Nations in its comprehensive response to regional challenges. The international community must provide the necessary financial support for the implementation of the new Strategy and action plan. United Nations agencies on the ground, the African Union and the International Conference of the Great Lakes Region must cooperate closely in that regard and, together, transform the vision into practical results.

China welcomes the establishment of the high-level Senior Policy Group by United Nations agencies in the region and believes that it will help build synergies. The United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) is currently implementing its drawdown strategy. China encourages the Office of the Special Envoy and MONUSCO to strengthen coordination and cooperation on the implementation of the two strategies, eliminate drivers of regional instability through comprehensive measures and build a solid foundation for the realization of lasting peace in the region.

The President: I now call on the Minister for External Relations of the Republic of Angola.

Mr. António (Angola): I would like to acknowledge the presence today of our dear friend the Minister of Overseas Development Aid and Diaspora of Ireland, as well as of my dear brother Claude Ibalanky Ekolomba, High Representative of the President of the Democratic Republic of Congo.

At the outset, allow me to congratulate you, Madam President, and, through you, the Government of the Republic of Kenya on the country's assumption of the presidency of the Security Council for the month of October.

On behalf of His Excellency Mr. João Manuel Gonçalves Lourenço, President of the Republic of Angola, in his capacity as Chair of the International Conference of the Great Lakes Region, I would like to take this opportunity to thank the Council for the invitation extended me to participate in today's important high-level ministerial Security Council

debate on the theme “Supporting the renewed commitment of the Great Lakes countries in seeking sustainable solutions to the root causes and drivers of conflict”. We wish the Council fruitful deliberations aimed at finding lasting solutions to the problems of the Great Lakes region.

I wish to thank the Secretary-General’s Special Envoy for the Great Lakes region, my dear friend Huang Xia, while joining my voice to his appeal for more vaccines in the region.

I would also like to thank the Executive Secretary of the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region (ICGLR), Mr. João Samuel Caholo, and the Assistant Secretary-General for Africa, my dear sister Mrs. Martha Ama Akyaa Pobee, for their very informative briefings touching on pertinent and critical realities in the Great Lakes region.

The Republic of Angola assumed the chairmanship of the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region on 20 November 2020 and embarked on a path of redynamizing and strengthening the Conference to enhance its capacity to address the challenges of peace, security, stability and development in the region, with the support and collaboration of bilateral as well as multilateral partners, namely, the African Union, the European Union and the United Nations.

The Angolan chairmanship’s strategic plan is anchored on the Pact on Security, Stability and Development in the Great Lakes region of 15 December 2006 and governed by the principles of international law, as enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations and the Constitutive Act of the African Union. In that context, the Government of Angola remains committed to a regional approach for the effective implementation of its strategic plan, as well as the United Nations Strategy for Peace Consolidation, Conflict Prevention and Conflict Resolution in the Great Lakes Region, in line with the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework for the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Region. We believe that the full implementation of that agreement is a sine qua non condition for resolving the deep-seated causes of the conflicts and obstacles that continue to undermine progress towards socioeconomic development and regional integration.

That being said, and as aptly pointed out in the concept note prepared for this debate (S/2021/874, annex), we cannot help but note and welcome the notable progress made in the Great Lakes region over

the past few years, occasioned by the peaceful transfers of power in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Burundi, including the signing and implementation of peace agreements in the Central African Republic, South Sudan and the Sudan.

However, despite the achievements under the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework agreement, some challenges still need to be overcome. Those include the illicit exploitation of natural resources, tense relations between some countries of the region, a high number of refugees and internally displaced persons, violations of human rights, humanitarian issues and the growing terrorist threat in the subregion.

Angola remains strongly committed to the central role that preventive diplomacy plays in conflict resolution in the Great Lakes region and the urgent need to place the Great Lakes region on the path of sustainable development through the promotion of investments and the increased participation of international financial institutions and the private sector in order to improve the livelihood of the people.

Angola, as Chair of the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region, convened, respectively, on 20 April and 16 September, the second and third mini-summits for the revitalization of the Political Agreement for Peace and Reconciliation in the Central African Republic. At the second summit, it was decided that a working group, co-chaired by the Foreign Ministers of Angola and Rwanda, would be created to implement, in collaboration with the Central African authorities, the recommendations from the second summit following consultations with armed groups and the Government of the Central African Republic.

During the third mini-summit, the Heads of State approved a joint road map for peace in the Central African Republic. That road map includes, among other issues, the continuation of consultations with the leaders of armed groups to renounce violence, a ceasefire declaration by the Government of the Central African Republic and the launch of the activities of the working group created at the second summit. As a result of the road map adopted at the Luanda mini-summit, His Excellency President Faustin Archange Touadera announced a unilateral ceasefire across the country on 15 October. We urge all parties to respect the ceasefire and constructively engage, through an inclusive political dialogue, in the implementation of

the Political Agreement for Peace and Reconciliation in the Central African Republic signed in 2019.

We also take this opportunity to recall the request made to the Security Council by His Excellency Mr. João Manuel Gonçalves Lourenço, President of the Republic of Angola, in his capacity as Chair of the ICGLR, at its 8802nd meeting held on 23 June (see S/PV.8802) regarding the need to lift the arms embargo on the Central African Republic.

(spoke in French)

While we believe that President Gonçalves Lourenço's request remains valid, we are concerned by the existence in the region of fragile State institutions, including defence and security forces, at a time when we are witnessing the proliferation of terrorism throughout Africa and the illicit trafficking of natural resources, which constitutes a major source of financing for armed groups.

(spoke in English)

As part of the high-level diplomatic initiatives in the region to strengthen cooperation in security matters, a Contact and Coordination Group has been established by Burundi, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Rwanda, Tanzania and Uganda. The Group is tasked with coordinating the implementation of non-military measures to complement military operations against negative forces in the region.

The establishment of the Contact and Coordination Group is the result of a consensus between the military and civilian intelligence services of countries of the Great Lakes region on the need for a comprehensive approach in the fight against illegal armed groups. We are confident that that initiative is an important step towards reducing the threat posed by armed groups. It cannot be overemphasized that the success of the Contact and Coordination Group will depend on the level of commitment and engagement of all countries involved.

The Great Lakes region has been plagued by conflict and political instability for decades. Evidence points to the illicit exploitation and trade of natural resources as one of the key drivers of instability. Angola joins its voice to those speakers who have already elaborated profoundly on that very issue. It is therefore of fundamental importance that the nexus between natural resources and conflict be brought

to bear in the formulation of adequate responses and mitigation measures.

In that regard, the eastern part of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, which has one of the highest concentration of minerals and precious metals, represents a multidimensional challenge for the economic and human development of affected countries and the region as a whole. A renewed commitment is therefore required to put the Great Lakes region back on the path to sustainable development. Strong leadership, political will, strong and viable institutions and State-building are essential prerequisites to ensure the effective participation of citizens and communities in socioeconomic and political choices, the choice of decentralization service providers, transparency in the public sector and financial management. Sustaining peace is an important objective to be achieved through open dialogue among all stakeholders.

In conclusion, we would like to reiterate that Angola will continue its efforts under its chairmanship of the ICGLR to consolidate peace and conflict prevention and resolution in the Great Lakes region, while working in close cooperation, consultation and coordination with all stakeholders, to promote a shared vision in addressing the complex challenges of peace, security and development in the Great Lakes region.

The President: I now call on the High Representative of the President of the Republic and Coordinator of the National Monitoring Mechanism of the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Mr. Ibalanky Ekolomba (Democratic Republic of the Congo) *(spoke in French)*: At the outset, allow me to perform the pleasant duty of conveying to you, Madam President, my delegation's satisfaction to see the Security Council presided over for the month of October by the Republic of Kenya — a country with which the Democratic Republic of Congo enjoys excellent relations, characterized by mutual trust and esteem. I thank you, Madam President, for having convened this important Security Council meeting on the implementation of Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework for the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Region, also known as the Addis Ababa Framework agreement. This meeting provides us with a propitious opportunity to share our views on the Framework agreement and concur on the necessary measures for achieving the goals of peace, stability and

development for the benefit of the peoples in this region of Africa.

I welcome the report of the Secretary General (S/2021/836), published on 30 September, pursuant to resolution 2556 (2020), of 18 December 2020, on the implementation of the commitments under the Addis Ababa Framework agreement. I also welcome the briefing by Mr. Huang Xia, Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for the Great Lakes Region, on the ongoing situation in the region, the persistent challenges, the difficulties and obstacles that must be overcome and the immense opportunities for achieving peace, which the Security Council and all stakeholders must take advantage of so that all the people of the Great Lakes region can reap the benefits of peaceful coexistence.

I also thank His Excellency Mr. João Samuel Caholo, Executive Secretary of the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region (ICLGR); Mrs. Martha Ama Akyaa Pobe, Assistant Secretary-General for Africa; and my friend and boss, Mr. Tété António, Minister for External Relations of the Republic of Angola, for their participation and respective briefings at this meeting. I would like to assure them of the importance that my country attaches to the Addis Ababa Framework agreement. My presence at this meeting is a reflection of that importance and attests to the deep-seated political will and firm resolve of the leadership of the Democratic Republic of the Congo to fully implement all my country's commitments under the agreement. Despite the fact that challenges to be addressed remain, outstanding efforts have been made and significant results have been recorded in the implementation of reforms emanating from national commitments.

As the Council is aware, my country continues to confront the activities of local and foreign armed groups, which pose a serious threat to peace and stability in the region. In order to advance all efforts to undo the systemic insecurity of more than 25 years in the eastern part of the country, His Excellency President Félix-Antoine Tshisekedi Tshilombo decreed a state of siege, which has been in force since 6 May in Ituri and North Kivu provinces. Pursuant to the constitutional state of emergency, or state of siege, the Forces armées de la République démocratique du Congo are assuming full responsibility for the administration and security management of the provinces concerned, while at the same time undertaking military operations.

Significant progress has been made thanks to the stage of siege, in particular the neutralization of several hundred militia members; the surrender of many members of the armed groups; the recovery of weapons and munitions by Forces armées de la République démocratique du Congo; the dismantling of several networks involved in the illicit trafficking in weapons, munitions and minerals and the resupply of various products to the armed groups; the reclaiming of several areas in the eastern part of the country that were once occupied by rebels; the release of many hostages previously held by the armed groups, including the Allied Democratic Forces; the reopening of several major roads previously under the control of negative forces; and a significant decrease in raids on the civilian population.

My country advocates a combination of military and non-military measures to eradicate insecurity. We take this opportunity to call on the Security Council for its unequivocal support for the current state of siege and other concurrent peace initiatives, including the Disarmament, Demobilization, Community Recovery and Stabilization Programme, the effectiveness of the implementation of which requires the support of both bilateral and multilateral partners.

Council members will agree with me that building peace in the eastern part of the country requires addressing the root causes of armed violence, in particular by combating the illegal exploitation of natural resources and the trafficking in arms in the eastern part of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. That requires the mobilization of the countries of the region and the entire international community for more meaningful implementation by stakeholders and parties to the Framework agreement.

The Democratic Republic of the Congo is determined to work with all the countries of the Great Lakes region, which we would like to see live in peace, stability and prosperity. To that end, in recent months President Tshisekedi Tshilombo has engaged the country in a dynamic of economic and security cooperation, in particular with Uganda, Burundi and Rwanda, as mentioned in the report of the Secretary-General before us. It is a matter of promoting economic incentives for the sake of peace.

A rigorous analysis of the Addis Ababa agreement brings to light the state of gridlock that must be overcome in order to achieve its political goals and

related technical reforms, particularly as concerns national commitments. That has prevented significant progress in the fight against insecurity in the east of my country.

In order to better focus on the political goal of the Framework agreement and to promote clarity with respect to the processes aimed at the achievement of that goal, the Addis Ababa agreement national oversight mechanism, which is under the authority of the Head of State of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, has established peacebuilding and stabilization programmes in the east of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the region, generally known as road maps. The goals of the programmes include, first, to identify and tackle the root causes of recurrent armed conflict; secondly, to strengthen local, provincial and national capacities for conflict management; thirdly, strengthen national cohesion; and, fourthly, strengthen regional and international cooperation.

The peacebuilding and stabilization programmes comprise two major fronts, namely, the resolution of open and latent conflicts and peacebuilding. Here we wish to call for the support of the international community for the programme for peacebuilding and stabilization in the eastern part of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the region, which will be the subject of broad-based consultations held on the basis of an inclusive and participative approach.

Before concluding, I wish to reassure the Council of my country's determination to host the tenth high-level meeting of the Regional Oversight Mechanism of the Framework agreement on 8 December, which will be a hybrid meeting, held both in person in Kinshasa and by video-teleconference. My country hopes that the meeting will be not only ceremonial but will provide fresh momentum to promote greater ownership of the commitments undertaken under the Addis Ababa Framework agreement.

The Democratic Republic of the Congo remains resolved to fully implement all its commitments. My country calls for a strengthening of the dialogue so as to ensure a better synchronization of the efforts to be made by the Democratic Republic of the Congo, bordering countries, regional partners and the rest of the international community. That will make it possible to lend greater momentum to the Addis Ababa agreement and to ensure that it remains relevant.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Uganda.

Mr. Ayebare (Uganda): At the outset, Uganda congratulates the Republic of Kenya on assuming the presidency of the Security Council for the month of October. Allow me to extend regards from your colleague, My Minister, the Honourable Jeje Odongo, who could not be here. He sends his regards and assures you, Madam President, of Uganda's support for both your presidency this month and your entire tenure on the Council.

Let me also express my appreciation for the briefings delivered by Mr. Huang Xia, Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for the Great Lakes region, with whom Uganda has been working closely; Ambassador João Samuel Caholo, Executive Secretary of the International Conference on the Great Lakes region; and my sister Martha Ama Akyaa Pobe, Assistant Secretary-General for Africa, for their very insightful briefings.

Peace, security and stability in the Great Lakes region is of vital interest to Uganda. Since the signing of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework for the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Region in February 2013, the region has made a lot of progress in advancing peace, security and stability. That is illustrated by the recent positive developments in the political transitions in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Burundi, and the implementation of peace agreements in South Sudan, the Sudan and the Central African Republic.

We need to seize this moment of optimism and build on it to further improve bilateral relations and deal with the root causes of conflict in the Great Lakes region. The countries of the region and the wider international community will find Uganda a willing partner in this renewed optimism of cooperation and mutual trust in our region.

Allow me to give an example of the relationship between Uganda and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, as mentioned by the high representative of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, which has significantly improved the normalization of bilateral relations, increased trade, cross-coordination in dealing with negative forces, especially the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF), the official representative of the Islamic State in Iraq and the Sham in the Great Lakes region. His Excellency Mr. Yoweri Kaguta Museveni has found

a willing partner in his counterpart, His Excellency Félix-Antoine Tshisekedi, to not only address security challenges but to also invest in physical infrastructure along our common borders, which has laid the groundwork for the socioeconomic transformation of that region, which is known for conflict. Our President believes that improving infrastructure will lead to improved trade, not only between Uganda and the Democratic Republic of the Congo but the entire region, and would be a catalyst for peace in the region.

Despite that notable progress, security challenges remain, including, as I mentioned earlier, the ADF, which has continued to commit terrorist acts against the population of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and its peacekeepers and remain a threat to the entire Great Lakes region and the southern African region.

The Security Council is uniquely positioned to decisively address that threat with a renewed focus on total elimination and stopping the proceeds from the illicit exploitation of, and the trade in, natural resources in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, which gives oxygen to that group and other negative forces.

It is critical that the United Nations, especially the Council, recognize the key role played by subregional and regional mechanisms in sustaining peace in the Great Lakes region. I will mention the East African Community and the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region (ICGLR), in which Uganda actively participates.

I wish also to recognize the vital role being played by Angola as the Chair of the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region not only in peacemaking and promoting confidence among member States but also in laying a solid foundation for socioeconomic development. Angola can count on the support of Uganda during its transformative chairmanship.

Let me emphasize the role that investments play in our region. In that regard, Uganda supports the planned investment conference set to take place in Kigali. That is not a new idea. It was started when the former President of Ireland, Mrs. Robinson, was the Special Representative of the Secretary-General. We are glad that we are finally seeing the fruits of this investment conference, which, in mobilizing resources within the region and beyond it, will be a catalyst for sustainable peace in the region.

Finally, Uganda is a strong supporter of regional initiatives against the illegal exploitation of natural resources. It is a signatory to the ICGLR Pact in support of peace and stability in the region, which contains the Protocol Against the Illegal Exploitation of Natural Resources, and has ratified both the Pact and the Protocol. The latter is a central tool for establishing a regional certification mechanism whose implementation is critical. Nevertheless, the Security Council and the Panel of Experts should take note of legitimate and legal cross-border trade.

Once again, Uganda congratulates Kenya, which can count on our continued support.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Burundi.

Mr. Maniratanga (Burundi) (*spoke in French*): First of all, I would like to congratulate you, Madam President, on the way in which you are presiding over this meeting. At the same time, I would like to convey the apologies of His Excellency Mr. Albert Shingiro, Minister for Foreign Affairs and Development Cooperation of the Republic of Burundi, who was prevented at the last minute from attending today's debate.

We would particularly like to thank Kenya for convening this very important meeting. We would also like to thank all the States members of the Security Council for having removed Burundi from the Council's agenda. We take this opportunity to inform the Security Council that Burundi has returned to peace and security and that the Government that emerged from the 2020 elections has put in place a national programme to capitalize on peace and social stability and promote economic growth, a programme that is inspired by the 2018-2027 national development plan, which focuses mainly on the six main priorities of the President of the Republic, namely, good governance, public health, agriculture and livestock, youth employability, social protection, and peace and national reconciliation.

One of the major problems in the Great Lakes region is the lack of funding to support economic development programmes. We would like such funding, as there is a very strong link between peace and development in the region. But it should also be noted that climate change is likely to negatively affect all peace efforts by the United Nations, the African Union and the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region.

All efforts should therefore be focused on the search for funding.

We welcome the efforts made by the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region, which is based in Bujumbura, to stabilize the region. Accordingly, we would like to take this opportunity to congratulate the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General of the United Nations for all the work he is doing to achieve lasting peace in the Great Lakes region. In particular, we welcome the approach that has been used to develop the regional strategy and its action plan. The participatory process in its drafting predisposes the region to obtain very positive results and, in the end, to restore peace and security to it. We therefore support all the efforts of the Special Envoy and call upon the international community to also provide assistance so that his action plan can be easily implemented.

Before concluding, we would like to promote the Burundian model of reconciliation for a lasting peace. We would also like to inform Council members that Burundi is willing not only to contribute to peace operations missions but also to serve in rapprochement processes or in good offices missions to try to use its peace-restoration model not just in the subregion, but wherever the need for it arises.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Rwanda.

Mrs. Rugwabiza (Rwanda): Rwanda congratulates the Republic of Kenya and you, Madam President, for Kenya's presidency of the Security Council during this month and, more importantly, for organizing today's very important Council debate on supporting the renewed commitment of the countries of the Great Lakes region in seeking sustainable solutions to root causes and drivers of conflict.

I have the honour to deliver this statement on behalf of Mr. Vincent Biruta, Minister for Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation of Rwanda, who could not join today's important debate owing to unavoidable circumstances.

I thank the Assistant Secretary-General for Africa, Mrs. Martha Pobe, the Special Envoy for the Great Lakes Region, Mr. Huang Xia, the Executive Secretary of the International Conference of the Great Lake Region (ICGLR), Mr. João Samuel Caholo, for their very insightful briefings.

I also wish to acknowledge the representatives of the countries of the region and welcome in particular the presence today of His Excellency Mr. Tété António, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Angola and, through him, salute the leadership of Angola as the current President of the ICGLR and the impressive efforts that Angola has been making in support of peace and security in the Great Lakes region. I also wish to acknowledge the presence in this Chamber of the High Representative of the President of the Democratic Republic of Congo, Mr. Claude Ibalanky Ekolomba.

Today's debate is taking place at a time when the countries of our region are facing the full-blown social and economic impact of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic. Despite these circumstances, foreign and domestic "negative forces" operating in eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo continue to remain active. The recent report of the Secretary-General (S/2021/836) indicates that grave human rights violations continue to take place in the Great Lakes region, including in eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Rwanda has faced a number of cross-border attacks from negative forces that are illegally operating in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The most recent attack occurred on 27 August, when members of the Forces démocratiques de libération du Rwanda crossed the border into Rwanda through the Rubavu district before being neutralized. The illicit flows of arms and ammunition and the ongoing recruitment of new members by negative forces, as well as the illegal exploitation of mineral resources, mean that those forces are still able to organize and recruit new combatants, supply equipment and continue to cause instability and terrorize the local populations.

In that regard, we welcome the unilateral ceasefire that was announced earlier this week by His Excellency President Faustin Touadera. We heard from him earlier this week regarding the insecurity and human rights violations that continue to be caused by armed groups that are still operating in the Central African Republic. We hope that all goodwill partners, as well as the armed groups that are parties to the peace agreement, will join in respecting and supporting the ceasefire.

I wish to make the following three points to the members of the Security Council.

First, for the Great Lakes region to realize its potential for development and prosperity, peace and

security remain the foundation. Unless the negative forces operating in the region are neutralized, lasting peace, development and prosperity will continue to be either elusive or simply not sustained. Rwanda remains committed to making its optimum contribution to peace, security and development in the Great Lakes region in close cooperation with all members of the region.

Secondly, the strengthening and revitalization of the disarmament, demobilization, reintegration and repatriation, as well as resettlement, of combatants is central to achieving lasting peace in the region and severing the networks of supplies of equipment, including arms and ammunition, that continue to fuel the armed groups and negative forces.

Thirdly, increased security and development cooperation among States members of the Great Lakes region will make an immense contribution. The good news is that that is happening, and it should be encouraged and supported practically and effectively by the Security Council, as well as the international community.

An important part of regional cooperation on socioeconomic development, as well as security, is cross-border trade and investment, which promote confidence-building and trust, while enabling peacebuilding efforts to take root. In that regard, Rwanda is set to host the second Great Lakes Investment and Trade Conference, which will take place in Kigali on 22 and 24 November under the theme “Navigating a COVID-impacted world — fostering resilience and sustainability through cross-border investment, trade and accelerated regional integration”. The Great Lakes Investment and Trade Conference is a follow-up to another conference that was held in Kinshasa in 2016. The objective remains to mobilize private-sector investment in the region to harness the extensive natural resources and domains of the region and the existing economic opportunities. Private-sector investment has the potential to contribute to the collective efforts towards the sustainable peace, stability and transformation of the Great Lakes region. Legitimate trade and investment are possible in the Great Lakes region if we all work together.

The meeting rose at 1.25 p.m.