



Security Council

Seventy-fourth year

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Monday, 18 March 2019, 10 a.m.
New York

Provisional

President: Mr. Delattre (France)

Members:

Belgium	Mr. Pecsteen de Buytswerve
China	Mr. Wu Haitao
Côte d'Ivoire	Mr. Ipo
Dominican Republic	Ms. Hidalgo
Equatorial Guinea	Mrs. Mele Colifa
Germany	Mr. Heusgen
Indonesia	Mr. Djani
Kuwait	Mr. Alotaibi
Peru	Mr. Duclos
Poland	Ms. Wronecka
Russian Federation	Mr. Polyanskiy
South Africa	Ms. Mogashoa
United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Mr. Clay
United States of America	Mr. Cohen

Agenda

The situation concerning the Democratic Republic of the Congo

Letter dated 15 February 2019 from the Secretary-General addressed to the President of the Security Council (S/2019/159)

Report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (S/2019/218)

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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 concerning the Democratic Republic of the Congo

Letter dated 15 February 2019 from the Secretary-General addressed to the President of the Security Council (S/2019/159)

Report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (S/2019/218)

The President (*spoke in French*): In accordance with rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representative of the Democratic Republic of the Congo 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: Ms. Leila Zerrougui, Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and Ms. Anny Tenga Modi, Executive Director of Afia Mama.

Ms. Modi is joining today's meeting via video-conference from Kinshasa.

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/2019/159, which contains a letter dated 15 February 2019 from the Secretary-General addressed to the President of the Security Council, and document S/2019/218, which contains the report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

I now give the floor to Ms. Zerrougui.

Ms. Zerrougui (*spoke in French*): Over the past year, the Council has invited me to brief it every month, and sometimes several times a month, and I thank you for it, Sir. Your interest has been commensurate with the stakes in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Happily, my statement today shall be delivered in a

context that is far more tranquil than was the case in December and January.

The handover of power in the wake of the elections was the first in the recent history of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and unrolled peacefully. I cannot fail to note that the results of the elections were contested by a segment of the opposition, but we can also say that the majority of Congolese welcomed the inauguration of President Tshilombo Tshisekedi with relief.

I should like to point out that the electoral process, which continues with the scheduled elections of governors and the holding of postponed polls in four constituencies owing to insecurity and the Ebola epidemic, is a decisive step towards strengthening democracy and the rule of law in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Nevertheless, the reactions of some political parties and their supporters to the results of last week's senatorial elections represent a challenge and reveal the fragility of the political process under way in the country.

In his first public statements, the Head of State has pledged to work for the consolidation of peace, the rule of law and democracy, and the promotion and protection of human rights. These statements of intent have been followed by concrete actions, especially with respect to the easing of tensions. Some political and opinion prisoners have just been released; meetings held across the country by the opposition leader and presidential candidate Martin Fayulu have unfolded without hindrance; and announcements have been made in favour of the return of political exiles. It is important to continue in this direction, especially by maintaining spaces for expression by the opposition, which we encourage to work closely with all political parties, the Congolese authorities and civil society.

Discussions for the formation of a new Government are currently under way between Front commun pour le Congo, which won the majority of legislative seats at the national and provincial levels, and the Cap pour le changement platform, which had supported the candidacy of President Tshilombo Tshisekedi. The two parties agreed last week on the upcoming appointment of a *formateur*, who will in fact be the future Prime Minister of the Republic.

It is hoped that the new Government team will soon be established and operational and able to work according to the guidelines of President Tshilombo

Tshisekedi's programme. Indeed, the expectations of the Congolese population are immense and it is crucial not to make them wait too long or to disappoint them. These expectations of a better life, as embodied in easier access to education, care and employment, and an existence free from fear and threats, is one of the greatest challenges facing the authorities currently in place.

I assure Council members that I continue to take to heart the mission of good offices that they have entrusted to me in order to support this political transition and thereby advance the peace and security agenda in the Republic. Democratic Republic of the Congo. There are now real opportunities to strengthen peace and security in several provinces of the country following the voluntary surrender of hundreds of fighters of armed groups or their expressed wish to do so, thanks to the change of presidential power.

Another current challenge will be to seize these opportunities in time by quickly identifying options for reintegrating these ex-combatants into their communities. The task will not be easy but it is urgent to act together here, in the field and in capitals to provide qualitative support to the Congolese authorities. We have noted other positive signs in this regard, including the reaffirmed will of regional actors at the level of States and organizations to tackle the root causes of the conflict in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and, we hope, thereby end it.

(spoke in English)

Despite the opportunities arising to achieve lasting peace and security in the country today, I remain concerned about several developments in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo. In North Kivu's Grand Nord region, where the now second-largest Ebola outbreak in history is ongoing, the Allied Democratic Forces and Mayi-Mayi elements continue to attack civilians and the Forces armées de la République démocratique du Congo (FARDC) alike, and in several cases, humanitarian workers and the personnel of the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO). MONUSCO's force, including the Intervention Brigade, and the Mission's police component, are sparing no effort to protect civilians and to support the FARDC and the Police nationale congolaise in the provision of security, while our civilian teams are actively pursuing

good offices, advocacy and dialogue initiatives at the local level.

Following recent attacks against Ebola response centres in Butembo and Katwa, MONUSCO redeployed additional uniformed and civilian personnel to support the security of Ebola response staff and operations and efforts to address community resistance to the response.

Meanwhile, preparations are ongoing in the area for upcoming national and provincial elections at the end of this month. We will be doing our utmost to prevent and mitigate any risk of violence throughout this politically sensitive period. In Minembwe, South Kivu, clashes have flared up between the militias of two communities, resulting in significant displacements of the population, with the potential of further deterioration. MONUSCO is supporting a reinforcement of the FARDC presence in the area, in addition to our own standing combat deployment and intercommunal mediation efforts. In these hotspots, the Government has shown a genuine willingness to respond quickly, although the capacity of national security forces must be further enhanced. However, in North and South Kivu, structural violence is profoundly entrenched and conflict dynamics related to identity, access to land and resources and regional issues have taken deep root in the fabric of everyday life.

To sustainably address those drivers of insecurity, concentrated engagement will be needed in the period ahead, including with the region. Even areas not historically affected by armed conflict can prove fragile, and we must collectively encourage the Government to take measures to preventively address and mitigate the potential causes of violent conflict country-wide. The shocking violence in Yumbi in December 2018 — which, as documented by our Office, left at least 535 dead, 111 wounded, 19,000 displaced and many homes and livelihoods destroyed — is a troubling reminder of how quickly violence can escalate.

In the light of the opportunities and the challenges that exist in the Democratic Republic of the Congo at this time, I encourage the Security Council to continue to support the consolidation of that which has been achieved in the country in recent months and to support the country in addressing the remaining threats to peace and security. We must support the Government in its efforts to honour the expectations of the Congolese population to advance political dialogue and collaboration and seize the opportunities we are

now seeing for a sustainable reduction of armed groups in some areas.

The President (*spoke in French*): I thank Ms. Zerrougui for her briefing.

I now give the floor to Ms. Modi.

Ms. Modi (*spoke in French*): On behalf of Congolese women, I thank the Council for giving me the opportunity to brief it on the situation of women and girls in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

I also thank the members of the Security Council for their commitment and for recognizing and highlighting the leadership of African women in the area of peace and security last month by adopting resolution 2457 (2019). That resolution clearly acknowledges the platform of the African Women Leaders Network, in which I participate as a member of the Young Women Leaders Caucus and FemWise, which champion the revolution in conflict prevention and mediation.

First of all, we welcome the civic maturity of the Congolese people, who have managed to ensure a peaceful turnover of power at the pinnacle of State authority, including by making the ultimate sacrifice. We dedicate our thoughts to all those, including women, who lost their lives in the period leading up to the elections held on 30 December 2018.

The Democratic Republic of the Congo, as a Member of the United Nations, has signed a number of legal human rights and international humanitarian law instruments, including resolutions 1325 (2000) and 2250 (2015). In that regard, we welcome encouraging signs that spaces, such as media outlets, are beginning to reopen, as well as the release of prisoners. My briefing today will focus on the electoral process under way, an overview of the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the importance of the participation of women, including young women, in efforts to build peace in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and provide a few recommendations.

The electoral process in the Democratic Republic of the Congo has been marked by a political and security crisis, with electoral disputes and the organization of public demonstrations. Government authorities have worked, among other things, to restrict public freedoms by considering draft freedom-destroying laws for adoption by Parliament. That situation has led to a stalemate in the political process. That is why

two dialogues — the first facilitated by the African Union and the second by the Conférence épiscopale nationale du Congo — were held in 2016 with a view to identifying a mechanism that would bring together the various stakeholders around the same table to reach a political consensus by easing tensions and implementing practical methods for organizing elections.

The Commission électorale nationale indépendante (CENI) was made responsible for the practical aspects of organizing the elections. In that regard, it used election technology — voting machines — which reignited the debate because there was no consensus in their regard. The organization of the elections was not perfect. Certain shortcomings led to contestations, which raised several challenges. CENI used only one channel of the two recognized by law — USB flash drives but not the hard copy of minutes — for announcing the election results.

Civil society organizations, in particular women's organizations, were barely involved in observation missions. Political parties did not prepare the observers and the people had not been sufficiently educated about the electoral process. The failure to consider gender parity remains an obstacle to the effective participation of women. The delivery of materials to polling stations presented another challenge.

Notwithstanding such shortcomings, the elections in the Democratic Republic of the Congo provide a reference point for the rest of the region. The country is at a historic and decisive juncture. However, with regard to the 2006, 2011 and 2018 election cycles, the Democratic Republic of the Congo has not made rapid progress. Fears persist with respect to local elections, which could spark inter-ethnic conflicts, similar to those that occurred during the senate elections, if the process is not monitored and supported.

Resolution 1925 (2010) conferred a new mandate on MONUSCO by replacing the previous peacekeeping mission. The new MONUSCO mandate seeks to support the efforts made by the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, including with respect to the protection of civilians; humanitarian workers and human rights defenders threatened by violence; efforts to end impunity; support for the political process so as to ensure stability and peacebuilding; and ending the conflict by restoring the rule of law. To that end, the participation of women, including young women, in peacebuilding efforts is crucial.

With regard to the protection of civilians, it should be noted that the Democratic Republic of the Congo has made useful arrangements to ensure that women are represented in the security sector, in particular the army and police force, through the reform process under way.

The new functions of the Police nationale congolaise, operating in the community-based policing mode, focus on combatting reprehensible behaviour, including gender-based violence. This has led to the establishment of a special unit to address gender issues and gender-based violence. The executive secretariat of the Monitoring Committee for Police Reform — through its technical sub-working groups on the legal and regulatory framework and on gender, sexual violence, the rights of the child and human rights — has produced several draft laws and regulations promoting gender parity and eradicating gender-based violence within the national police. The list is not exhaustive. It includes the establishment of a national secretariat for the implementation of resolution 1325 (2000) and the adoption in 2018 of a national action plan for the second-generation implementation of the resolution. Women and young women are engaging in community work, advocacy and mentoring to promote the further participation of young women.

I would like to share some recommendations with the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

We need to raise awareness among men in Parliament and provincial assemblies on gender and women's rights so as to ensure their participation in the peacebuilding and security process. We recommend the adoption of specific measures to facilitate the inclusion of women in the defence and security forces. We recommend that our Government implement a disarmament, demobilization and reintegration programme for armed groups at the local level in the context of crisis prevention efforts. We call for the implementation of laws and measures related to gender and the women and peace and security agenda. We call on the Government to accept support for the organization of local elections. Article 13, paragraph 3, of the electoral law must be revised to mandate the inclusion of more women on partisan candidate lists.

We recommend the rollout of training programmes to boost managerial capacities, mentoring programmes and the sharing of best practices in order to establish role

models for the youngest sector of the population. We call on the members of the Security Council to support efforts to boost mass civic gender-awareness education at the community level, targeting leaders, young people and boys, in order to promote a model of positive masculinity in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Efforts must also be made at the subregional, regional and international levels to strengthen institutional capacities and regional and national mechanisms in the area of gender, women and peace.

It would be remiss of me to conclude without thanking Secretary-General António Guterres, Deputy Secretary-General Amina Mohammed and the African Union for all they have done to support us and the African Women Leaders Network.

The President (*spoke in French*): I thank Ms. Modi for her briefing.

I shall now give the floor to those members of the Council who wish to make statements.

Mr. Cohen (United States of America): I thank Special Representative Zerrougui for today's briefing and for her tireless efforts, which contributed to the first peaceful transfer of power in the Democratic Republic of the Congo earlier this year. I also thank Ms. Modi for joining us and adding her voice to those of other Congolese calling for change.

Since taking office, President Tshilombo Tshisekedi has responded to this historic moment by committing to combat corruption and human rights by Democratic Republic of the Congo security forces, improve security, strengthen the Democratic Republic of the Congo's investment climate and promote development. He has also committed to working closely with the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) to neutralize armed groups and pave the way for MONUSCO's drawdown and departure.

Just two months since this historic transfer of power, the Congolese people are already beginning to see positive developments. Last month, President Tshisekedi moved to arrest and prosecute police accused of firing on peaceful protesters. He has released prisoners of conscience and pledged to reform the Democratic Republic of the Congo's abusive national intelligence agency and close unofficial detention centres.

Partly in response to that change, thousands of combatants are laying down their weapons in hopes

of transitioning into a peaceful civilian life. We urge President Tshisekedi to keep the commitments he has made to fully implementing this hopeful vision for the future of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. We look forward to the naming of the Cabinet ministers who will help him carry that out.

The United States is committed to helping the Congolese people create a more peaceful and prosperous Congo. We hope to work with the new Government to forge a more constructive relationship with MONUSCO. We would like to recognize and support the proactive decisions taken by MONUSCO's leadership, consistent with its mandate, to redirect efforts away from Kinshasa and towards the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo, streamline the force and renew efforts to address the root causes of violence.

Turning to the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo, we are deeply concerned about rising tensions among Burundi, Rwanda and Uganda, including reports of cross-border attacks. Given the history, these are especially worrisome developments. No one wins from a proxy war in the Great Lakes. The United States urges all parties to refrain from the use of violence and to respect the territorial integrity of all States in the region. We urge MONUSCO, the Office of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for the Great Lakes Region and the Office of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Burundi to work more closely together as we refocus the peacekeeping efforts of the United Nations in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Finally, it has been two years since the murders of United Nations experts Michael Sharp and Zaida Catalán. From the first time he travelled to the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo to support the demobilization of child soldiers, Michael Sharp was deeply committed to peace and reconciliation. We regret that he did not live to see the changes taking place today in the Kasais and wish we could still benefit from his thorough reporting and his thoughtful analysis. The United States continues to call for accountability for those responsible for those murders. We urge the Council to continue to give robust support to the follow-on mechanism of the United Nations in support of Congolese investigations.

Mrs. Mele Colifa (Equatorial Guinea) (*spoke in Spanish*): We thank Ms. Leila Zerrougui, Special Representative of the Secretary-General, for her

briefing, which captured in broad terms the main developments in the country, the progress made by the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) in the fulfilment of its mandate and the challenges that lie ahead. We extend our gratitude to the entire staff of MONUSCO, the United Nations country team, the representative of civil society, Ms. Anny Tenga Modi, as well as to the troop- and police-contributing countries, regional organizations, bilateral and multilateral partners and non-governmental organizations for their commitment, ongoing support and devotion to the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Equatorial Guinea, as a member of the Security Council and as a brother country to the Democratic Republic of the Congo — we are both part of the same regional and subregional economic communities and participate in the same subregional security council, the Council for Peace and Security in Central Africa — welcomes the progress made in our brother country. We value the spirit of resolution 2424 (2018), which calls for respect for the sovereignty, independence, unity and territorial integrity of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, as well as for the full respect for the principles of non-interference, good-neighbourliness and regional cooperation in that country, neighbouring countries and other countries of the region as guarantors of their stability and development.

We believe that the Congolese have been able to take advantage of this historic opportunity by undertaking the first democratic transfer of power in the country in a civilized manner. We are sure that this is a decisive step towards the consolidation of democracy, peace, stability and social progress for all the Congolese people and that it represents the greatest expression of popular sovereignty. We commend the progress achieved following the elections and welcome the decisions issued by the Commission électorale nationale indépendante, reporting on the ongoing electoral process and establishing the definitive calendar of the combined direct elections of national deputies in the electoral districts, which were officially postponed for health and security reasons, and the indirect elections of senators, governors and deputy governors in the provinces.

We welcome the appointment of His Excellency Mr. Félix Antoine Tshilombo Tshisekedi as second Vice-President of the Bureau of the Assembly of Heads

of State at the thirty-second Summit of Heads of State and Government of the African Union, which took place in Addis Ababa. We also welcome with optimism his statements reiterating his commitment to working to build peace, the rule of law and democracy and the need to foster socioeconomic development, eradicate corruption, address the scourge of armed groups, begin meaningful reforms in the security sector and strengthen good relations throughout the region, which has resulted in several visits after assuming his responsibilities as Head of State.

Thanks to those acts, the country is moving with determination towards building a rule of law that guarantees respect for the fundamental freedoms of citizens and communities, equal opportunity, democracy, good governance and the freedom of opinion, which makes the dream of genuine national reconciliation a reality that will solidify stability in the country, the establishment of the conditions necessary for its development and the maintenance of a peaceful and harmonious post-electoral atmosphere.

We appreciate the measures taken by the Government, such as the release of political prisoners, the improvement of the human rights and humanitarian situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. However, the destabilizing activities of armed groups and the ongoing conflicts among communities ensure that 12 million people continue to need humanitarian assistance and protection and remain exposed to malnutrition, cholera, measles and Ebola, requiring the provision of adequate technical and financial assistance. The international community must provide sufficient funds for the updating of the three-year humanitarian response plan that ended in mid-January.

We condemn the frequent attacks on humanitarian personnel, their transport and equipment. Such actions are considered to be violations of international humanitarian law. All parties to armed conflicts must guarantee and facilitate full, safe, immediate and unhindered access for humanitarian and medical personnel, their equipment, transport and supplies and the timely delivery of medical assistance to affected areas and people in need. We encourage the Government to pursue its efforts to ensure the accountability of perpetrators of crimes of all kinds and to combat impunity.

As far as my delegation is concerned, it is essential that steps be taken to effectively apply and implement

the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework for the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Region, which was signed on 24 February 2013 in Addis Ababa, in order to neutralize the armed groups operating in the country, especially in the eastern regions of North and South Kivu, which are very rich in the natural resources that are plundered by the armed groups.

We welcome with optimism the surrender of weapons by some armed groups, which requires the effective implementation of the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration programme for former combatants and persons linked to armed groups so that they can convert and participate actively in the process of peace and stability in the country. We call on the States members of the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region, the African Union, the International Organization of la Francophonie, the Southern African Development Community and international partners to continue participating in the post-electoral period to strengthen stability and democratic governance in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Similarly, we encourage the Congolese authorities and regional partners to take measures to strengthen cooperation and good-neighbourly relations among the countries of the Great Lakes region, including in the fight against armed groups and the pursuit of economic integration.

In conclusion, I would like to highlight the important work to promote peace, security and stability being undertaken by the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, which has risen to the occasion and carried out its work within its mandate in a very complex context. I would like to mention in particular Special Representative Leila Zerrougui for the leadership and determination with which she is addressing the situation.

We are convinced that the collective endeavours of the United Nations, the African Union and regional and subregional organizations in support of the cause of peace and security in Africa will redound to greater effectiveness and ensure that due attention is paid to conflicts, which has led to the signature of a memorandum of understanding among those organizations as a concrete way of implementing the Joint United Nations-African Union Framework for an Enhanced Partnership in Peace and Security.

Mr. Pecsteen de Buytsverve (Belgium) (*spoke in French*): At the outset, I would like to thank the Special Representative of the Secretary-General,

Ms. Leila Zerrougui, and Ms. Anny Tenga Modi for their briefings, which, along with the most recent report of the Secretary-General (S/2019/218) on the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) give us a better overview of the current situation in the Democratic Republic of Congo.

I would like to focus my statement on three key messages.

First, with regard to the political situation, we welcome the statements of the new President in favour of change, which was sought by the population, and we encourage all political stakeholders in the Democratic Republic of the Congo to adopt tangible measures to produce that profound change in the political space, following in the steps of the initial gestures, which we welcome, such as the release of some political prisoners. In the European and bilateral context, we also welcome the recent developments, which demonstrate a genuine willingness to strengthen our relations.

However, we must not forget that the electoral process has not yet ended. Elections have yet to be held in Beni, Butembo and in Yumbi. In the meantime, the formation of a new Government is still pending. There are numerous reports of widespread corruption in the context of the recent senatorial elections, despite the fact that the most senior judicial authorities in the Democratic Republic of the Congo had issued explicit warnings.

Against that backdrop, President Tshilombo Tshisekedi has decided to address the situation. As the guarantor of institutions, we exhort him not only to restore institutional order and the rule of law, but also to credibly begin combating the corruption that threatens the country's governance. The consolidation of solid, competent and impartial national institutions must make it possible to strengthen the legitimacy of the State, prevent future institutional crises and promote a lasting entrenchment of the culture of democratic change.

My second message concerns the pacification of the territory of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the restoration of State authority. In that regard, we hope that particular attention will be paid to the persistence of violence and attacks against civilians, which continue to plunge the Congolese population into one of the worst humanitarian disasters in the world. We recall the unprecedented violence of the recent

organized intercommunal attacks in Yumbi, which killed several hundred people and displaced thousands in a few days in December 2018. That violence, which according to the United Nations could constitute crimes against humanity, would not have been possible if the authority of the State had been present in the area. The persistence of fighting between armed groups in Masisi, deadly attacks by the Allied Democratic Forces in Beni territory and recent fighting in Minembwe are all dramatic situations that require strong and urgent measures. The restoration of State authority is essential to ensure the pacification of the territory, but also the resolution of the root causes of conflicts and the security of populations, as well as development and the rule of law for the benefit of the Congolese people.

My third message concerns MONUSCO and its future. In our opinion, the future of MONUSCO must be based on a genuine exit strategy based on reference points — “benchmarks” in proper French — clearly identified by an independent strategic review. Such a strategy must be based on the capacity and real willingness of the new Congolese authorities to themselves take on the tasks currently being carried out by MONUSCO. In the meantime, the protection of civilians in the military, health and human rights contexts must continue to be the cornerstone on which MONUSCO is based. Belgium is of the opinion that an interim mandate that would be limited in time would allow us to deepen our reflection on these points of reference while avoiding the risk of being immobilized in a changing context.

Finally, we must remain attentive to the regional context and its evolution. Our attention today to the future of MONUSCO should not divert our attention from the fact that the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Great Lakes region are closely linked. The problems are often shared problems; the solutions must therefore also be shared solutions. In that regard, we welcome the opportunity that will be given to the Security Council in the coming weeks to discuss the latest developments in the region.

Mr. Heusgen (Germany) (*spoke in French*): I thank the French presidency for having chosen two women as speakers — or, in the new French, as “briefers” — which was very encouraging. I would like to thank Ms. Zerrougui for her testimony. As she said, the context is much better than the last time she briefed the Security Council (see S/PV.8318), and I think what she just said is really encouraging. I do not want to

repeat everything he has done, but the new President Tshilombo Tshisekedi has taken some good and very important steps. He has opened up the political space, which I think is very important. But Ms. Zerrougui also said that the political process remains fragile, which is why I would also like to take advantage of the presence of the Ambassador of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and his delegation to encourage them to continue along that path. It is difficult, but in my opinion that is the only alternative.

In that context, let me mention what the briefer from the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ms. Anny Tenga Modi, said. I think what she just said was very important, and perhaps in his statement the representative of the Democratic Republic of the Congo could answer some of the Ms. Modi's questions she asked and respond to her demands, namely, for a stronger role for women in the country's political process. I would like to repeat some of what she said because it is extremely important to make men in the military and political forces aware of the issues that need to be addressed in terms of integrating women into the military forces.

There are not enough women in the military and police forces. In the elections, as was the case in the past, there were not enough women on the electoral rolls. We really must see to it that more women appear on the rolls in the communal elections and that there be more female observers in local elections. In general, I understood what Ms. Modi said: there is a need for broader civil education to highlight the rights and strengths of women and what they bring to politics in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. I see that already the President's diplomatic adviser is a woman, for which I offer my congratulations.

I would like to mention an issue that is very important, even if my colleagues have already raised it: the rule of law. I believe that every effort should be made to strengthen the rule of law. Justice must be strengthened. We must curb corruption, as my Belgian colleague said, and fight impunity. I would also like to echo what my American colleague has just said about the murders of Michael Sharp and Zaida Catalán, which remain unsolved. And there is still sexual violence used by security forces. Also, as my Belgian colleague said with regard to Yumbi, there a real possibility that crimes against humanity were committed there. The rule of law is needed. There must be no impunity for crimes that have been committed.

With respect to the region, I echo what my American colleague said: the situation between Uganda and Burundi is not encouraging. The situation in the region, including Burundi, has security implications for the east of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. We have to keep watching this situation, especially in a region that has been hit by Ebola and where humanitarian assistance providers continue to be attacked.

With regard to the future of the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, I think we have to wait. We have to see how the President sees the situation. There are still some tasks to be done. We must focus on the most important tasks, and we have just referred to them. I think that a drawdown and exit of the Mission should not be a goal in itself. There must be an independent strategic review to identify what the future looks like for the Democratic Republic of the Congo. That is also very important for the troop-contributing countries, as it will give them an idea of how long they can expect to remain in the country. There is currently no real path towards withdrawal. We also need to make sure that we send a clear message that the international community remains fully engaged on the situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Ms. Mogashoa (South Africa): At the outset, let me join others in thanking the Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO), Ms. Leila Zerrougui, as well as Ms. Anny Tenga Modi, of the civil society organization Afia Mama.

South Africa welcomes the peaceful holding of the elections in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. We congratulate the millions of Congolese people who went to the polls. True to his promise to not hold onto power, former President Joseph Kabila Kabange peacefully transferred power to the opposition-party leader President Félix Tshilombo Tshisekedi. We commend that young leader's positive legacy in the Central African region.

We encourage the Congolese people and political actors to continue with their peaceful conduct during the local Government elections and approach those elections with the same spirit as they did in the presidential and legislative elections. We furthermore encourage reconciliation in the post-election period to build a peaceful Democratic Republic of the Congo.

We commend the opening up of the political space by President Tshilombo Tshisekedi, marked by peaceful demonstrations and access to media.

South Africa welcomes the important role played by national and regional observation missions, including by the Southern African Development Community (SADC) and the African Union. In that regard, South Africa calls for a sharper focus on the situation in the eastern part of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, while acknowledging the importance of addressing the intercommunal violence in provinces such as Mai-Ndombe and Kasai. We therefore support the Secretary-General's call for MONUSCO's adjustment to redirect the priorities of the Mission to the eastern part of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, where instability and violence remain prevalent.

South Africa supports the Secretary-General's recommendation for a 12-month extension of the mandate of MONUSCO. That will enable adequate time for a more comprehensive review of MONUSCO, in full consultation with the Democratic Republic of the Congo Government, as well as SADC and all the relevant stakeholders. In that regard, South Africa would like to emphasize considering a 12-month mandate renewal, taking into cognizance that there is a newly appointed Government. As such, South Africa believes that the new Government should be given time to determine and outline its priorities prior to the drawdown of MONUSCO, while mitigating a security vacuum.

The South African delegation therefore further supports the Secretary-General's proposed strategic review of MONUSCO. Furthermore, any consideration of an exit strategy should be based on the positive evolution and evaluation of the security situation on the ground. South Africa therefore calls for the strengthening of the multidimensional nature of MONUSCO in order to address the challenges of peace, security, governance and development in a concurrent manner, based on the understanding of the nexus between peace and development.

South Africa welcomes the contribution made by all troop-contributing countries (TCCs) in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. We further call on all TCCs and police-contributing countries to make a concerted effort to increase the participation of women peacekeepers in MONUSCO to address those and other challenges.

South Africa welcomes the positive developments in the Kasai region with the laying down of arms. As such, we encourage other regions to do the same.

South Africa reaffirms the importance of fully supporting the Force Intervention Brigade, in collaboration with the Forces armées de la République Démocratique du Congo, in order to neutralize belligerent groups, such as the Forces démocratiques de libération du Rwanda, the Allied Democratic Forces and other armed groups that continue to threaten the stability of the entire region. We commend the complementary support provided by the Force Intervention Brigade in containing the Ebola epidemic.

South Africa emphasizes that it is of the utmost importance to uphold and implement the protection-of-civilians mandate, which should be conducted without any hindrance and in a manner that strengthens the trust among the people of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the Government and MONUSCO.

Ultimately, South Africa sees the protection of civilians in the Democratic Republic of the Congo as dependent upon the broader stabilization of the country. In that regard, we call for a more proactive approach through mechanisms such as the International Security and Stabilization Support Strategy in order to support and fulfil the implementation of the broader Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework for the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Region. South Africa calls on the Security Council to reaffirm its calls for all signatories to the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework to implement their commitments under the Framework to ensure long-term, sustainable peace and stability in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

South Africa also emphasizes the need for disarmament, demobilization and reintegration strategies and support provided by MONUSCO to take into account the socioeconomic environment and economic prospects of demobilized combatants. We call for support to be provided for skills development for demobilized individuals in order to facilitate reintegration and economic development in communities.

South Africa continues to support a zero-tolerance policy against sexual exploitation and abuse. In that regard, South Africa has institutionalized in its legislation the zero-tolerance policy on sexual exploitation and abuse. In that regard, we call for the necessary support and mechanisms to be established to

support victims of sexual exploitation and abuse and enable the reporting of such incidents.

South Africa encourages all those countries and partners that have economic interests in the Democratic Republic of the Congo to ensure that the natural resources of the country are used for development and the benefit of the Congolese people.

Ms. Wronecka (Poland) (*spoke in French*): At the outset, I would like to heartily thank Ms. Leila Zerrougui for her enlightening briefing. I would also like to thank Ms. Anny Tenga Modi for her statement.

I would like to focus on three issues in my statement: first, the political process; secondly, the security and humanitarian situation; and, thirdly, the mandate of the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO).

With respect to the political process, despite the shortcomings of the electoral process, we hope that the new President and the new Government will show their commitment to carrying out the necessary reforms and work towards inclusive and sustainable development in their country. If that is the case, historians will point to the recent elections as an important turning point in the history of the country. If that is not the case, those elections will be seen as a new disappointment for Congolese society, which has overwhelmingly voted for change. The society's expectations are very high, and the new President and the new Government face many challenges. Those aspirations can be achieved only through profound institutional, social and economic reforms.

Poland welcomes the statements made by President Tshilombo Tshisekedi on the occasion of the first 100 days of his term, including those on the release of political prisoners, respect for and the promotion of human rights and good offices, the fight against corruption and the strengthening of good relations with the region. We also welcome the decision to reopen Schengen House in the country's capital.

Poland appreciates the fact that, despite the reported and undoubtedly justified concerns about the conduct and transparency of the electoral process, candidates who question its results have used legal remedies and that the situation in the country remains generally calm. We believe that the upcoming elections in the cities of Beni and Butembo in North Kivu and Yumbi in Mai-Ndombe province, as well as the local elections

to be held next year, will be a positive continuation of the institutional transition. It is extremely important that all citizens, especially the most vulnerable, such as women and people with disabilities, can participate in the elections safely.

Tensions and strains in community relations associated with rumours and a lack of transparency in decision-making processes are a threat to society. We hope that there will be an inquiry into the tragic events of December 2018 in Yumbi and that the culprits will be brought to justice.

At the same time, we are deeply concerned about the ongoing Ebola epidemic in the east of the country. Poland strongly condemns the continuing attacks against humanitarian workers, medical personnel and hospitals and other medical institutions. We call on all parties on the ground to create the necessary conditions for the safe delivery of humanitarian aid. We also call for access to areas affected by Ebola.

Despite the efforts made so far, the actions of foreign and national groups in the east and south of the country have had a significant impact on the security situation. We welcome the encouraging signals we received after the elections from several armed groups demonstrating their willingness to join the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration programme, which is supposed to be the focus of the efforts to stabilize the security situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Irrespective of those developments, Poland stresses the need to ensure responsibility on the part of those accused of crimes against humanity, war crimes and other serious violations of international law. State institutions are responsible for providing security to citizens. There is a need to prioritize resolving problems linked to the fact most human rights violations and cases of sexual exploitation are committed by representatives of the State.

Despite the taking of important steps to stabilize the Democratic Republic of the Congo, it is clear that much remains to be done. MONUSCO needs to be adapted to the post-election reality. Poland considers that the Mission should prioritize a comprehensive approach to the protection of civil society. At the same time, we see the need for MONUSCO to engage in a process of support for political transformation and strengthening State authority at all levels.

Yet all United Nations efforts in the Democratic Republic of the Congo will require good cooperation with the Government. We believe that the Security Council should give the new authorities a few months to define their agenda and demonstrate a willingness to cooperate closely with the United Nations in order to stabilize the country. In addition, we call on the Secretary-General to present to the Security Council an independent strategic assessment of the Mission, including proposals for key objectives for the future engagement of the United Nations on the ground.

In conclusion, allow me again to express our gratitude to Ms. Zerrougui and the entire MONUSCO team for their tireless efforts in support of stability in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Poland hopes that the authorities will cooperate constructively with the Mission to consolidate the important achievements already made and lay the foundation for lasting peace, stability and development.

Mr. Ipo (Côte d'Ivoire) (*spoke in French*): My delegation commends Ms. Leila Zerrougui, Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO), for the quality of her briefing on the situation in that country. We also thank Ms. Anny Tenga Modi, civil society representative, for her informative briefing.

Côte d'Ivoire notes with satisfaction the generally stable socio-political and security environment in the Democratic Republic of the Congo two months after the presidential, legislative and provincial elections. We welcome that positive dynamic, which will undoubtedly be reinforced by the measures taken by President Félix Tshilombo Tshisekedi, in particular the release of nearly 700 detainees, which will contribute to a peaceful atmosphere and the establishment of a socio-political environment conducive to consolidating peace; the intensification of diplomatic efforts to restore confidence and strengthen cooperation between the Democratic Republic of the Congo, neighbouring countries and the international community; and the resumption of dialogue with national and international actors.

In that regard, my country urges the international community, in particular the United Nations, the African Union, the Economic Community of Central African States, the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region and the Southern African

Development Community, to continue their support to the Congolese people and the new authorities, with a view to consolidating peace and stability in the country.

The post-electoral stability in the Democratic Republic of Congo suggests that improving the security situation in the east of the country remains possible. My country calls on the armed groups operating on Congolese territory, particularly those in the Kasai region and the provinces of Tanganyika and Ituri, to definitively join the peace process, cease all destabilizing activity and engage resolutely in the ongoing process of disarmament, demobilization and reintegration. We also call for increased cooperation between MONUSCO and the Forces armées de la République Démocratique du Congo, as well as the continuation of joint military operations by the two forces, which is essential for the neutralization of the armed groups.

Despite progress on the socio-political and security fronts, my country notes with concern the deterioration of the humanitarian situation in the east of the country. According to the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), about 260,000 children in the Kasai region suffer from severe acute malnutrition and need life-saving treatment. That situation is exacerbated by the return of at least 300,000 Congolese from Angola, which puts additional pressure on health centres, schools and other basic social services. My country therefore calls on the international community to support UNICEF's efforts to improve the living conditions of the people.

My delegation is of the opinion that MONUSCO should proceed with the redeployment of its troops and assets, with a view to better focusing on the hotbeds of violence and continuing the stabilization process in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. To that end, Côte d'Ivoire fully supports the recommendations of the Secretary-General for the renewal of the MONUSCO mandate.

In conclusion, my delegation welcomes the continued commitment of Ms. Zerrougi and all MONUSCO staff, as well as on the part of United Nations agencies, for strengthening peace, security and stability throughout Congolese territory.

Ms. Hidalgo (Dominican Republic) (*spoke in Spanish*): First of all, we would like to thank Ms. Leila Zerrougui, Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Organization

Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO), for her briefing. We commend her good offices during the difficult post-electoral process and the political transition. We urge her to continue supporting the Congolese people in the consolidation of peace, stability and economic development. Similarly, we thank Ms. Anny Tenga Moda, Executive Director and co-founder of the non-governmental organization Afia Mama and initiator of the movement of young women leaders of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, for being with us today and for her insights and recommendations on the subject of women and the changes needed to provide them greater opportunities.

We once again congratulate the Congolese people for the display of political maturity in establishing the legislative bodies, the procedures for appealing the results of the elections and the peaceful coexistence with the elected authorities. We hope that the indirect election of senators, governors and deputy governors, as well as the delayed elections in the city of Beni in North Kivu province and the area of Yumbi, will be conducted in a peaceful and transparent manner.

Due to the continuation of destabilizing activities by armed groups, inter-communal conflicts and the military operations of the Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo against those groups, we understand that the security situation remains tense. Clashes in the eastern part of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, with attacks perpetrated by the Allied Democratic Forces against the national security forces, civilians and MONUSCO and the activities of foreign and local armed groups alike continue to drive insecurity and displace thousands of people. The presence of such armed actors and groups poses a serious threat to civilians and a great challenge to the authorities. The time has come for the Congolese authorities, the countries of the region that are affected and the international community to implement strategies at the regional level to eradicate armed groups and finally bring to an end the interminable internal displacement and suffering of the civilian population.

We urge the authorities to uphold their stated intention to collaborate with MONUSCO in defining a disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR) approach. Such reintegration plans must take into account the needs of young people affected by armed conflicts through investment in capacity-building for them to meet labour demand through relevant educational opportunities designed to promote a

culture of peace. We believe that the effectiveness of weapons-collection and DDR programmes depends upon sustainable opportunities being provided for ex-combatants and the capacity of State institutions to foster an inclusive environment where people feel safe and secure, as envisioned in resolution 2220 (2015).

We must not forget the humanitarian situation generated by those conflicts. According to the MONUSCO report (S/2019/218), almost 13 million people need assistance and protection in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Moreover, according to UNICEF, more than a quarter of a million children in the Kasai region, and thousands more having fled with their families to nearby provinces, suffer severe or acute malnutrition, requiring urgent assistance. We urge donors to honour their pledged commitments to cover the funding shortfall.

Such a generalized humanitarian crisis can lead to the occurrence of epidemics. The Dominican Republic is concerned in particular about the Ebola virus. Already more than 500 people have died from Ebola, and hundreds more have been affected by the disease. Insecurity, attacks by armed groups against treatment centres and lack of access for health authorities and emergency services to Ebola-affected areas have hindered the monitoring of infections and other aspects of the humanitarian response. That puts the health of those affected at risk and multiplies the probability of the virus spreading to other cities.

In that regard, the Dominican Republic condemns and deplores the recent attacks on humanitarian, and especially medical, personnel. We recall that all parties to the conflict are under an obligation to respect international humanitarian law and to ensure full, secure, immediate and unimpeded access for medical personnel to the affected areas. We commend the Government and the United Nations system, including the World Health Organization, for their efforts to eradicate the disease under such difficult circumstances.

With regard to the protection of civilians and human rights, we commend the decision of the new President of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Mr. Félix Tshilombo Tshisekedi, to pardon approximately 700 political prisoners and arrest 15 people linked to the massacre of more than 800 people in the west of the country. However, we are alarmed at the ongoing threat posed to the life and well-being of the civilian

population by the clashes between the Congolese armed forces and armed groups.

While we commend the work of the MONUSCO in preventing and swiftly responding to attacks on civilians in the country, we believe we must continue strengthening early-warning mechanisms in the most vulnerable areas. In that context, we must underscore the particular vulnerability of women and children, who continue to be disproportionately affected. We therefore view it as crucial to work with the national Government to develop a strategy and implement an action plan to end and prevent sexual violence by the armed forces and armed groups.

Such violence, like the repeated human-rights violations in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, must not go unpunished. Greater effort must be made to prosecute human rights violations and abuses, without privilege or exception. We call on MONUSCO to continue promoting respect for international humanitarian law and human rights law, to ensure that those responsible are prosecuted and victims receive appropriate reparations.

In conclusion, we welcome the holding of consultations between MONUSCO and the Government on the future presence of the Mission and its priorities, pursuant to the recommendations of the 2017 MONUSCO strategic review and the Mission mandate for the post-electoral period. Any modification or adjustment to MONUSCO must be based on a robust strategic evaluation of the political, security and human rights situation, focused on consolidating and building on the progress attained to date, and aimed at the effective and efficient execution of its mandate.

We commend the MONUSCO for its work and express our hope that this new chapter in the political life of the Democratic Republic of the Congo will be characterized by full respect for human rights, thereby consolidating peace, the rule of law, democracy and socioeconomic growth in the country.

Mr. Duclos (Peru) (*spoke in Spanish*): We welcome the holding of this meeting and the informative briefings by Special Representative Leila Zerrougui and Ms. Anny Tenga Modi.

Peru welcomes the first acts of the Government of President Félix Tshilombo Tshisekedi aimed at achieved badly needed political de-escalation in the country, in particular the pardoning of 700 political

prisoners, many of whom had been arrested in the run-up to the elections last December, and the agreement for the return of the representative of the European Union to Kinshasa. We likewise welcome the commitment undertaken by the Government to tackle corruption and strengthen State authority throughout the territory, as well as the progress aimed at facilitating the holding of the forthcoming elections in the cities of Beni and Yumbi. We believe that those efforts aimed at consolidating reconciliation in the country are essential prerequisites for overcoming the major challenges still facing Congolese society.

We are concerned at the prevailing insecurity in various parts of the country, primarily in the Kivu, Kasai and Tanganyika regions, with the presence of numerous armed groups, as well as ongoing inter-communal violence.

In addition, the humanitarian situation in the country is critical — with almost 3 million people still dependent on assistance and protection — which is aggravated by the fact that there are millions more Congolese internally displaced or in third countries as refugees.

We also note with alarm the continued spread of the Ebola virus in the eastern part of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. We are confident that the third strategic response plan prepared by the Ministry of Health with the technical support of the World Health Organization and other United Nations agencies will make it possible to finally contain the crisis caused by that scourge.

In that regard, we recognize the courageous and hard work of officials of the Government, the World Health Organization, the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) and humanitarian agencies, who are in the field under difficult security circumstances undertaking outstanding prevention work through vaccination campaigns and humanitarian support to the population. Those efforts should continue to be supported by the international community as a whole.

Meanwhile, the stated desire to ensure a climate of trust and calm among the population cannot be achieved if measures are not taken at the same time to protect and promote human rights, particularly those that deal with the ongoing incidents of sexual violence. We welcome the efforts being made to that end, such as those mentioned by Ms. Tenga Modi, but they must be

complemented by robust measures to combat impunity through transparent and impartial investigations that will allow for those responsible for atrocity crimes to be brought to justice. In that regard, we wish to highlight the work of MONUSCO aimed at establishing effective measures to address the recruitment of children by armed groups.

I conclude by expressing our full support for the crucial role of MONUSCO in the country, particularly in protecting civilians and defending human rights, as well as its efforts to help bring about greater stability and lasting peace. We fully support the renewal of the MONUSCO mandate.

Mr. Wu Haitao (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): China thanks Ms. Zerrougui, Special Representative of the Secretary-General, for her briefing. We also listened to the briefing by Ms. Modi, Executive Director of Afia Mama.

At the end of last year the Democratic Republic of the Congo successfully held presidential and legislative elections, which achieved a smooth transition of power. Currently, the situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo remains stable. President Tshilombo Tshisekedi is actively forming a new Government, strengthening governance, building security capacity and promoting economic and social development. In areas such as the Kasai region, militiamen and armed groups are voluntarily engaging in the disarmament process.

China welcomes those positive developments and commends the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) for their efforts. That testifies to the will and ability of the Government and people of the Democratic Republic of the Congo to resolve their own issues through their own efforts. Meanwhile, the Democratic Republic of the Congo still faces challenges with regard to security, the humanitarian situation, the Ebola outbreak and development, among others. The international community should therefore focus assistance on the following three priorities.

First, in order to demonstrate its full respect for the country's sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity, the international community should support the ownership and leadership of the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo in dealing with its own affairs, enhance its cooperation with the Government, assist the country in overcoming its challenges in the

humanitarian, security and development fields, among others. The current focus should be on helping the Democratic Republic of the Congo to strengthen its security capacity-building and support the efforts of the Government to maintain peace and stability.

Secondly, the international community should continue to support the African Union, the Southern African Development Community, the Economic Community of Central African States, the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region and other regional and subregional organizations in doing their part to facilitate increased cooperation between the parties and the Government so as to promote implementation of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework for the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Region. In order to jointly contribute to realizing peace and stability in the country and the wider region, international partners should support efforts to ensure that armed groups in the Democratic Republic of the Congo abandon the military option and resolve issues through dialogue and consultation instead.

Thirdly, to continue to provide necessary humanitarian assistance and economic support to the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, international partners should focus on increasing contributions in the areas of education, health care, infrastructure and other assistance in order to help the country to increase employment opportunities, improve people's livelihoods and engage in socioeconomic development. We hope that bodies such as the United Nations Development Programme and the Peacebuilding Commission can play a greater role. The international community should continue its active response to the Democratic Republic of the Congo's call for humanitarian assistance, support the activities of the World Health Organization and the International Committee of the Red Cross and help to contain the Ebola outbreak.

The MONUSCO presence is currently crucial to the peace and stability of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. China supports the renewal of the Mission's mandate. We hope that MONUSCO can continue its activities in accordance with its mandate in order to help the country to achieve peace, stability and development. We hope that the Secretariat, the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the troop-contributing countries can work together, conduct a timely assessment in the light of the developments and put forward proposals for the adjustment of the MONUSCO mandate so as to ensure a gradual and

orderly handover of security responsibilities from the Mission to the security forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. China stands ready to work with the wider international community to continue to assist the efforts of the Democratic Republic of the Congo to achieve peace, stability and development as soon as possible.

Mr. Clay (United Kingdom): Let me begin by thanking Ms. Leila Zerrougui, Special Representative of the Secretary-General, and Ms. Anny Tenga Modi, Executive Director of Afia Mama, for their informative briefings this morning. I will focus my intervention on four issues: human rights; the political situation; the humanitarian situation; and the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO).

Helping survivors of sexual and gender-based violence is a priority of the United Kingdom in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. We welcome the opportunity to hear from Ms. Tenga Modi this morning, whose non-governmental organization does vital work to empower women, particularly those who are survivors of violence.

In that context, I would like to very briefly raise a project that United Kingdom aid has funded in 15 villages in the Ituri region, which is working to challenge the social acceptance of violence against women and girls. Over just two years the percentage of women experiencing domestic violence fell from 69 per cent to 29 per cent and the percentage of men reporting that they had carried out domestic violence dropped from 68 per cent to 24 per cent in the same period. Those results show that sexual and gender-based violence can be tackled effectively, even in conflict-related settings. The United Kingdom remains concerned that rape, including mass rape, continues to be used as a weapon of war by armed groups and State actors. The United Kingdom condemns all acts of sexual and gender-based violence, including conflict-related sexual violence. We call on the new Government to deliver on its promises to bring perpetrators of sexual and gender-based violence and other human rights abuses to justice.

This morning several other delegations have raised the situation in Yumbi. The United Kingdom is deeply concerned about the violence that took place in Yumbi territory in December 2018. The latest report of the United Nations Joint Human Rights Office in the Democratic Republic of the Congo indicates that

as many as 890 people were killed and thousands more displaced. We echo the comments made by the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Michelle Bachelet. We condemn all such violence and call for the perpetrators of those abhorrent crimes to be brought to justice swiftly. Our Embassy in the Democratic Republic of the Congo has raised our concerns with the Government authorities in the region and with local United Nations representatives.

The United Kingdom remains concerned over the reported discrepancies in the official results for the presidential, parliamentary and provincial elections. Continued efforts for increased transparency and inclusive dialogue with all political parties remain vital as the electoral process in Democratic Republic of the Congo continues towards local elections in late 2019 and 2020.

The Congolese people clearly voted for change. The United Kingdom will engage with President Tshilombo Tshisekedi and his team to understand their plans for improving stability and prosperity in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. A stable and prosperous Democratic Republic of the Congo is vital for the Congolese people, the region and the rest of the international community.

Turning to the Ebola outbreak, the United Kingdom commends the response to date, particularly given the challenging environment in which humanitarian and medical workers are operating. We deplore the recent attacks on Ebola treatment centres and those responding to the outbreak. We once again strongly urge all parties to the armed conflict to fully respect international law and to full, safe, immediate and unhindered access for humanitarian and medical personnel. The Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo just set out its Ebola response plan until the end of July. It is crucial that the international community steps up to support the Democratic Republic of the Congo and cure the outbreak as quickly as possible. The United Kingdom is making significant contributions to that plan and urges others to do the same.

Finally, as we approach the renewal of the MONUSCO mandate, the United Kingdom agrees that now is the time for the Mission to refocus on an exit strategy. It is incumbent upon all of us to ensure a responsible and sustainable exit of MONUSCO. Therefore, a fully consultative strategic review of the

Mission will need to be undertaken before the Council makes a decision on the shape of MONUSCO's exit.

Mr. Alotaibi (Kuwait) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, we very much thank Ms. Leila Zerrougui, Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO), for her valuable briefing, as well as for the briefing of Ms. Anny Tenga Modi, Executive Director of Afia Mama.

Before I proceed with my statement, I would like to extend my sincerest condolences to the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and to the families of the victims as a result of the merchant train crash in Kasai, which claimed scores of lives and left several injured people, whom we wish a speedy recovery. I would also like to extend my sincerest condolences to the families of the victims in several States of the Southern African region, namely, Mozambique and Zimbabwe, as well as Indonesia, owing to the natural disaster that claimed many victims. We extend our deepest condolences to the families of those victims.

I would like to focus on the following basic issues in my statement: first, the political situation; secondly, the security situation; and, thirdly, the humanitarian situation.

First, with regard to the political situation, I would like to begin with the conclusion of the most recent report of the Secretary-General (S/2019/218), published on 7 March, on the holding of elections and the peaceful handover of power in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, as well as the taking office by Mr. Félix Tshilombo Tshisekedi, the new President of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. That was a significant turning point in the country's history and in the implementation of the 31 December 2016 agreement. Indeed, since the beginning of 2018, the political situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo has seen positive developments, which was confirmed by Ms. Zerrougui in her briefing (see S/PV.8483) during the meeting with troop-contributing countries on Thursday, 14 March. We hope that those positive developments will continue to achieve political, security and economic stability in the country.

We welcome the official visits by President Tshisekedi to neighbouring States to discuss issues of common interest and strengthen partnerships among States in the region. We also express our

satisfaction with his commitment to endeavour towards promoting peace, the rule of law and democracy in the Democratic Republic of the Congo — something in evidence on multiple occasions since he assumed office. The most recent declaration was made during his participation in the thirty-second summit of Heads of State and Government of the African Union, held in Addis Ababa. We also welcome the support extended during the elections period by the African Union, the Economic Community of Central African States, the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region, the Southern African Development Community and all international partners. We hope that such support will continue in future and that the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo will take advantage of that important period to step up its cooperation and partnership with regional and international organizations, as well as with States in the Great Lakes region. That is important for achieving stability and ensuring economic integration.

We also call upon all Congolese stakeholders to continue to embrace the same spirit that prevailed during the elections and during the announcement of the official results, by refraining from violence and moving towards reconstruction, development and safeguarding the gains attained.

Secondly, with regard to the security situation, despite general improvements during the elections and following the announcement of the results, the incidence of violence and armed conflict continues to plague certain regions, particularly in the east of the country in North Kivu, where has been armed escalation, with direct repercussions and a threat to the lives of unarmed civilians. We call upon all parties involved in armed violence to end those acts, save civilian lives and achieve peace and stability. In that regard, we commend the great efforts of MONUSCO and its personnel to counter armed attacks and safeguard civilians. We also commend the decision taken by certain armed groups to lay down their weapons and rejoin their communities. We call upon other armed groups to lay down their weapons and cooperate with the Congolese Government. The Government must also provide special programmes for reintegrating into their communities those who have put down their weapons.

Thirdly, with regard to the humanitarian situation, it is still a source of concern in certain regions due to continued fighting among armed groups. A total of 13 million people are still in need of urgent humanitarian

assistance. Epidemics of chronic diseases, such as cholera and measles, continue to wreak havoc, as well as the Ebola outbreak in North Kivu and Ituri. It has been reported that 859 individuals have been stricken by Ebola, of whom 536 have died.

We commend the efforts of the Congolese Ministry of Health, in coordination with the United Nations and World Health Organization (WHO), to combat the Ebola virus. We also welcome the third strategic response plan adopted by those three entities on 13 February — drawn up by the Ministry of Health with technical support from WHO and United Nations agencies, for a duration of six months. We hope that the virus will be totally eradicated in the upcoming months.

We are also concerned about nearly 13 million people suffering from malnutrition in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, of whom a total of 4 million children suffer from acute malnutrition due to persistent armed clashes. In that regard, we recall the inter-ethnic armed violence between the Banunu and Batende groups in mid-December 2018 in Yumbi, which resulted in at least 500 victims.

Also on the issue of violence and murders, more than two years have passed since the assassination, on 12 March 2017, of Michael Sharp and Zaida Catalán, who were members of the Council's Group of Experts. We urge the Congolese Government to identify the perpetrators of those crimes and hold them accountable as soon as possible, as well as to cooperate with the mechanism established by the Secretary-General in that regard.

In conclusion, I again thank Ms. Zerrougui and all MONUSCO personnel for their tireless efforts and steadfast support for the Democratic Republic of the Congo. We look forward to the discussions on the draft resolution on the extension of MONUSCO's mandate. As penholder, France will soon circulate it to the members of the Council, with a view to adopting it by the end of the month. We support the Secretary-General's recommendation in his report on the extension of the mandate.

Mr. Djani (Indonesia): At the outset, I would also like to join my Kuwaiti brother in extending our deepest condolences to the people and the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo following the tragic train crash in Kasai. I also thank my Kuwaiti brother for his condolences on the recent natural disaster in eastern Indonesia, as well as in other parts of the world.

I would also like to thank Ms. Leila Zerrougui, Special Representative of the Secretary-General, for her important briefing. Her vast experience in the Democratic Republic of Congo has given weight to the updates, and we commend her tireless efforts in ensuring the effective contribution of the United Nations to peace and stability in the country.

Like others, I also wish to thank Ms. Anny Tenga Modi, Executive Director of Afia Mama. Ms. Modi's statement on women's participation in peacebuilding efforts in the Democratic Republic of Congo indeed provides viewpoints for the Security Council in moving forward on the country. In my view, we cannot separate the peaceful transfer of power in the Democratic Republic of the Congo from the role that women play in it. During last week's series of meetings of the Commission on the Status of Women, we were constantly reminded of the important role that women play in maintaining peace and security, and of course we applaud the work that Ms. Modi has been doing.

The Secretary-General's report of 7 March 2019 (S/2019/218) provided ample food for thought. Indonesia is certainly ready to work with the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo for the country's future. I would now like to focus on three pertinent points, which are, first, progress in the Democratic Republic of the Congo; secondly, the role of the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO); and lastly, providing resources for MONUSCO.

With regard to the first point, I would like to echo the Secretary-General when he says that the peaceful transfer of power in the Democratic Republic of the Congo is a turning point in the country's history. Like others, we welcomed the peaceful holding of presidential elections in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and we hope that the local elections still to come can be conducted peacefully. Now is the time for reconciliation and building a prosperous country, and I believe the people of the Democratic Republic of the Congo are expecting to see peace, stability and growth. We also welcome the support that has been provided by regional and subregional partners and their willingness to remain engaged in the post-electoral process.

Nevertheless, we realize that there is still a lot of work to be done, as the Special Representative of the Secretary-General also said. We must ensure a successful start for the delayed elections in Beni,

Butembo and Yumbi now scheduled for the end of the month. We must work on the issue of the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration of armed groups, as well as enabling the new Government, once it has been formed, to tackle a number of problems, including the outbreak of the Ebola virus and the establishment of good governance. With regard to the progress that we hear has been made on the ground, as well as the challenges that remain and that Ms. Zerrougui mentioned, such as the attacks in northern areas and on civilians in various places, it is clear that MONUSCO's role is as important as ever.

For my second point, we commend MONUSCO on its role in keeping the peace during the transfer of power in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. We urge it to engage in close consultation with the new Government so as to be able to give it effective assistance. We are also encouraged to know that armed groups in three provinces — Kasai, Tanganyika and Ituri — have shown a willingness to disarm and give up their weapons through MONUSCO. In our view, this represents important progress in this aspect of the Mission's work. Indonesia takes pride, along with South Africa, also here in the Chamber, in being one of the largest troop contributors to MONUSCO, contributing more than 1,000 peacekeepers — 1,041, to be exact, of whom 28 are women. Our contribution also includes an 850-member rapidly deployable battalion (RDB), requested by the Secretary-General, and we are proud to learn through the report that in February, through its close community engagement, the Indonesian RDB facilitated an armed group's handover of its rifles, magazines and uniforms to MONUSCO. Beyond the protection of civilians, such community engagement is an important aspect of peacekeeping.

My third point concerns MONUSCO's operation and resources. Its approved budget for the period from 2018 to 2019 was \$1.11 billion, which I believe is the second largest after the United Nations Mission in South Sudan. However, if we look at the numbers closely, we can see that the burden borne by individual peacekeepers in MONUSCO is quite heavy. MONUSCO, with 17,000 peacekeepers, is currently responsible for the whole of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, which has a population of 84 million people and an area of 2.34 million square kilometres, which is much larger than many parts of Europe. That means that on average, the mandate assigned to a single MONUSCO

peacekeeper involves protecting 4,941 persons across an area of 137 square kilometres.

I am citing this data in order to bring some perspective to our discussion of the renewal of the mandate. Peacekeepers in MONUSCO are still facing direct threats, and in that connection, I want to pay tribute to all our fallen peacekeepers. There is no question that the Mission needs adequate resources in order to maintain peacekeepers' safety and ensure that its mandate is effectively fulfilled. While we support the plan for an exit strategy and MONUSCO's eventual drawdown, we are concerned about the fact that an important United Nations peacekeeping mission like MONUSCO is being required to reduce its capabilities at the height of its work. The situation is still fragile. We should keep building on the success so far, and as long as civilians in particular continue to be victims, MONUSCO will be needed more than ever. The mandate and the resources should work together. The Council cannot continue to work in a silo, and we must engage in discussing the peacekeeping budgets with the General Assembly if we are to ensure mandates' smooth operation and fulfilment. And a commitment to the peacekeeping budget should be followed with that commitment's realization. It is high time that we re-examined the overall guidelines and resolutions that relate to peacekeeping financing in order to help the Secretariat fulfil its mandate in support of peacekeeping operations.

As we approach MONUSCO's mandate renewal, I also want to reiterate the importance of meaningful consultations with the troop- and police-contributing countries and the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. At the end of the day, the Government should have ownership when it comes to securing peace and stability in its country. And I want to highlight once again that at the end of the day, we are here to save lives and to protect the weak and needy. Peace is a luxury that the Congolese people have been deprived of for far too long. Let us work together with them and their new Government to ensure lasting peace in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Mr. Polyanskiy (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): First of all, like my colleagues before me, I would like to express my condolences to the Government and the people of the Democratic Republic of the Congo in connection with the railway disaster in Kasai province, as well as to the African States affected by Cyclone Idai. We also mourn the victims of

the horrifying natural disasters in our brother country of Indonesia. We wish the wounded and injured a speedy recovery.

We thank Special Representative Zerrougui for her thorough briefing on the overall situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the work of the United Nations presence there. We listened carefully to Ms. Anny Tenga Modi's report.

We view the presidential elections that took place after repeated postponements as a milestone event in the Democratic Republic of the Congo's political life. For the first time in their country's history, its citizens were able to achieve a democratic transfer of power to an unarmed, legally operating opposition. It is notable that the long-awaited vote was held in a calm atmosphere unclouded by any serious violations of public order. We welcome the fact that in the difficult post-electoral period all the country's political forces have competed through exclusively political methods, and we call on the Congolese people to continue to act in the interests of peace and to take steps to prevent any form of violence.

We are worried about the fact that the difficult military and political situation in the country's eastern provinces continues, as have the attacks by illegal armed groups, including the so-called Allied Democratic Forces. The situation has also been exacerbated by escalating intercommunal clashes and the ongoing Ebola epidemic in the Beni area. We hope that the fight against the armed groups will produce the necessary results. There should also be qualitative progress in the disarmament, demobilization and social reintegration of former combatants. In that regard, we note the fact that armed groups in Kasai province have expressed the desire to lay down their arms and the advances in the disarmament process in Ituri and Tanganyika provinces. We join the Secretary-General in urging that the window of opportunity opening there not be missed. We also expect the Congolese authorities to work to curb the illegal exploitation and export of the country's mineral resources.

We believe that the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo should continue to support the efforts of the authorities to normalize the situation in the country during the post-electoral period. We note the constructive approach that the new President, Mr. Félix Tshilombo Tshisekedi, has expressed about cooperating

with the Blue Helmets. However, we want to emphasize that any interference by anyone, whoever they may be, in the internal affairs of Kinshasa is unacceptable. For our part, we are ready to work constructively on the draft resolution extending the Mission's mandate. Russia, including as a member of the Friends of the Great Lakes Region, intends to continue to actively promote the peace process in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the stabilization of the situation in the Great Lakes region as a whole.

The President (*spoke in French*): I shall now make a statement in my capacity as the representative of France.

I would like to begin by joining previous speakers in expressing France's condolences to the Democratic Republic of the Congo in the wake of the horrific crash that occurred in the Kasai region, and to Indonesia following the natural disasters that have once again plunged the country into mourning.

I want to warmly thank Ms. Leila Zerrougui, Special Representative of the Secretary-General, and Ms. Anny Modi for their very informative interventions. At a time when the Security Council is preparing to renew the mandate of the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO), it is important for us to have a clear assessment of the situation in the country, MONUSCO's implementation of its mandate and the issues facing the Democratic Republic of the Congo in the coming months.

In January the Democratic Republic of the Congo experienced a historic event, the first peaceful change of a Head of State since the country gained independence. The Security Council, which has followed the electoral process very closely, congratulated the Congolese people on their conduct and sense of civic duty on the day of the election. Since taking office, President Tshilombo Tshisekedi has undertaken a number of important steps aimed at achieving peace and national reconciliation, opening the political space and ensuring respect for the law and for human rights in particular. The release at the end of last week of 700 prisoners imprisoned for political reasons is the latest example of that. France welcomes those initial important decisions and encourages the new authorities of the Democratic Republic of the Congo to continue to fulfil the commitments made by the President.

The next steps in the institutional life of the country must happen very soon and will also be an opportunity to demonstrate the new directions that the country is taking, including with the legislative and provincial elections in the areas where people were unable to vote in December, the formation of the new Government and the organization early next year of the first local elections in the history of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. As Ms. Modi emphasized, women's participation in that process can and must still be improved.

President Tshisekedi has also pledged to work to end the conflicts afflicting the country, particularly in the east, and the intercommunal clashes that have recently affected various regions, with a view to helping the Democratic Republic of the Congo's various communities coexist peacefully. A number of armed groups have expressed their willingness to lay down their arms, and several hundred combatants have already done so since January. This new development will be hopeful if we work collectively to do what must be done to ensure that those combatants can be disarmed and properly reintegrated into civilian life and their communities.

MONUSCO has an important role to play in all those aspects, and I want to once again commend the exemplary commitment of Ms. Zerrougui and her entire staff and team. The Council has mandated MONUSCO to protect civilians and support the Government in its fight against armed groups. We need the determined involvement of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the countries of the region as part of an approach that combines military pressure, if necessary, and dialogue so as to normalize the situation throughout the country.

There are a number of important challenges that must still be addressed. Several of the country's regions continue to suffer from predatory activity by both Congolese and foreign armed groups financed by the illegal exploitation of natural resources. France urges both the Democratic Republic of the Congo and all of the countries in the region to act concertedly and resolutely to end such trafficking and cut off the resources that enable such groups to continue their abuses.

Certain kinds of community tensions have sometimes degenerated into extremely serious violence, as was the case in Yumbi in December, where crimes against humanity may have been committed. France

calls on the Congolese authorities to do everything to ensure that the perpetrators of those heinous crimes are held accountable for their actions. It will also be crucial to ensure that the new authorities shed light on the human rights violations committed during the election period.

Sexual violence against women is still too often used as a weapon of war, as Ms. Modi mentioned. France encourages the Congolese authorities to prosecute the people responsible and to provide the necessary support to the victims.

The Ebola epidemic continues to rage in the country's eastern regions and must be dealt with. I want to once again commend the exemplary commitment of the Congolese authorities and humanitarian actors, coordinated by the World Health Organization, in combating the epidemic, and the support provided by MONUSCO. On behalf of France, I once again firmly condemn attacks targeting humanitarian personnel who are assisting the sick. They must continue to receive our full support.

All the changes and challenges that I have mentioned will require the United Nations to adapt its engagement in the country and reconfigure its modes of action in order to give the best possible support to the restoration of peace and stability throughout the territory of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. That will mean reconfiguring MONUSCO as well. For that reason, in the draft resolution that France will submit early this week to Council members on the renewal of the Mission's mandate, we propose conducting a strategic review of MONUSCO. In the spirit of the Secretary-General's initiative on peacekeeping, we believe it is crucial to ensure that the Council can rely on a thorough assessment of the situation and the related needs in order to reconfigure MONUSCO by the autumn and begin the transition to other forms of long-term support. The reconfiguration should of course be undertaken in close coordination with the Congolese authorities, in accordance with President Tshisekedi's commitments and priorities.

For the past 20 years the United Nations Observer Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and, subsequently, MONUSCO have supported the Democratic Republic of the Congo on its path to recovery and national reunification. January's peaceful transfer of power shows that another stage has been reached. We must now adapt MONUSCO to the

challenges of the years to come so that it can eventually withdraw and so that the Congolese authorities are fully capable of providing security and establishing the right conditions for their people's development throughout the country. In support of that transition, it will also be the Security Council's job to consider the shape that the United Nations presence in the Democratic Republic of the Congo might take.

I would like to conclude by paying tribute to Michael Sharp and Zaida Catalán, who sacrificed their lives for peace in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and worked tirelessly to improve the lot of the Congolese people. We encourage the Congolese authorities to spare no effort in supporting the United Nations monitoring mechanism to ensure that the perpetrators of those crimes be tried and sentenced.

I now resume my functions as President of the Security Council.

I now give the floor to the representative of the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Mr. Gata Mavita Wa Lufuta (Democratic Republic of the Congo) (*spoke in French*): At the outset, I would like to congratulate you, Mr. President, on your assumption of the presidency of the Security Council for the month of March and to let you know how pleased my delegation is to see the friendly country of France leading the Security Council's deliberations today. I would like to thank you for organizing today's meeting on the situation in my country, the Democratic Republic of Congo. I would also like to take this opportunity to congratulate your predecessor, the Ambassador of Equatorial Guinea, who did an excellent job in presiding over the Council last month. And I particularly want to thank Secretary-General Guterres for his determination and commitment to my country's cause and for his report on the situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (S/2019/218), which is the subject of our discussions today.

My delegation has taken note of the Secretary-General's report on the United Nations Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO), just introduced by Ms. Leila Zerrougui, Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of MONUSCO, whose presence here today I welcome. I would now like to explain my Government's position on all the issues raised in the report and on the concerns raised by the members of the Council.

After the holding of presidential, legislative and provincial elections on 30 December, the main focus of the political situation in my country has been the establishment of new institutions, as the report emphasizes. In that context, on 24 January we held a ceremony to celebrate our country's historic first peaceful transfer of power to a new Head of State, from former President Joseph Kabila Kabange to the newly elected President of the Republic, Mr Félix Antoine Tshilombo Tshisekedi, followed by the installation of Assemblies at both the national and provincial levels.

The political situation has also featured the preparation of the elections that were postponed in the Beni and Butembo areas of North Kivu province in order to prevent the spread of Ebola virus disease, and in the Yumbi district, in Mai-Ndombe province, following bloody clashes that had resulted in the loss of human lives. I need hardly say that those elections are scheduled for 31 March, in accordance with the revised timetable of the Commission électorale nationale indépendante.

In order to emphasize his desire to strengthen good-neighbourly relations, work in harmony and cooperate with the leaders of the region right from the start of his term of office, President Tshisekedi undertook a tour that took him in turn to Angola, Kenya, the Republic of the Congo, Namibia and then to Nairobi for a second time. On 10 and 11 February, in Addis Ababa, he also participated in the thirty-second ordinary Summit of Heads of State and Government of the African Union, at which he was elected Second Vice-President of the African Union by his peers.

With a view to reducing tensions in the political climate, the President has authorized the return of those who had been exiled for their political and philosophical views, as well as the release of political prisoners, particularly those whose cases were considered symbolic. Before concluding this part, I should point out that negotiations on forming a Government are continuing between the parties concerned. In the meantime, the President has appointed the members of his Cabinet and published his programme of priorities for the first 100 days of his term.

I would like to respond briefly to the Ambassador of Germany by saying that the issues raised by Ms. Anny Tenga Modi are important and the Government is taking them into account. The fact is that gender parity is enshrined in the Democratic Republic of the Congo's

legislation, and women are therefore an integral part of all the country's institutions. The lower numbers of women in some State institutions has more to do with their lack of initiative and determination, owing mainly to the barriers presented by our civic education and traditional culture, as Ms. Modi herself acknowledged. We therefore want to point to the Government's efforts to establish programmes to encourage such initiatives and combat our traditional barriers.

The security situation continues to be a concern for the Government, which is why the President has made it a priority of his programme, as he stressed in his inauguration address. It is true that the eastern part of the Democratic Republic of the Congo continues to be a focus for the activities of both domestic and foreign armed groups, the most deadly of which is currently the Allied Democratic Forces, as is well known. These criminals are known for their murderous attacks on civilian populations in the region of Beni and Butembo and on positions held by MONUSCO and the Forces armées de la République Démocratique du Congo (FARDC). As we have told the Council before, the modus operandi of this hostile force, whose strongholds have already been dismantled, however, will force the FARDC and MONUSCO to review their strategies and combine their efforts to neutralize it and achieve sustainable security for the people in this part of the country and end the suffering they have endured for many years. The Government remains committed to continuing the efforts it has already undertaken in this fight, which is why we have increased the military strength of five of the 12 regiments operating in the Sokola 1 operational sector in the Beni region by 2,500 men and appropriate equipment.

The current report also mentions the changes that have occurred since the President took office, with members of armed groups surrendering en masse, particularly in the Kasais, the two Kivus, Ituri and Haut-Katanga. This trend should be fostered so as to encourage armed groups that are still active to renounce their hostile activity and lay down their weapons. My country urges the international community to support this process of voluntary disarmament so that combatants who surrender by laying down their arms can benefit from the support they need for social reintegration. In view of that, we advocate including disarmament, demobilization and reintegration as the second strategic priority in MONUSCO's new mandate, after the protection of civilians.

With regard to the Forces démocratiques de libération du Rwanda (FDLR) and former combatants of the Mouvement du 23 mars (M23), in order to comply with the decision of the Heads of State taken at the eighth High-level Meeting of the Regional Oversight Mechanism of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework for the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the region, held in Brazzaville on 19 October 2017, demanding the simultaneous and unconditional repatriation of former FDLR and M23 combatants held in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Rwanda and Uganda, my country has closed the transit sites in Kisangani, Walungu and Kanyobagonga that had sheltered FDLR elements, who have been repatriated to Rwanda along with their dependents and with the assistance of MONUSCO. A similar measure was taken for some former M23s based in Uganda who have now been returned to the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

With respect to the sad events that occurred in the Yumbi district on 17 and 18 December, on the President's instructions, a tripartite commission, consisting of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the Republic of the Congo and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, has been set up to identify and deal with our compatriots who took refuge in Congo-Brazzaville and to facilitate their return home. Police forces, supported by operational units, have been deployed in the area. In the next few days the President will appoint local authorities in order to restore State authority. He has decided to use military engineers to rebuild the schools and other basic infrastructure destroyed during the events.

With regard to the future of MONUSCO, the President made the following statement in his address to the diplomatic corps on 15 February.

"[W]e will assist the planned MONUSCO drawdown process, taking into account the evolving security situation, by fully participating in the development of a joint exit strategy and its gradual transformation within the framework of the strategic dialogue. During the discussions of the renewal of its mandate in March, we will ask for a reconfiguration through a qualitative reorganization of the troops, which should be fewer in number but better equipped and more experienced in dealing with asymmetric warfare in order to collaborate with the national army in tracking down armed groups, which are the main threat to civilians".

In the light of the guidelines drawn up by the Head of State, my Government requests the Security Council to take the following proposals into account in the draft resolution that it will adopt in a few days' time: renew the mandate of MONUSCO for a period of one year, until March 2020; qualitatively resize the troops that must be trained and the number of which should be reduced — in my Government's view, that reduction should not include the Intervention Brigade; and provide the troops with the appropriate means and equipment to enhance their operational capabilities to combat asymmetrical threats on the ground. Priority in that allocation should be given to the Intervention Brigade.

Moreover, given that the elections are now behind us, my Government requests that the mandate be readjusted and reflect the post-electoral configuration. In that context, troop deployment should take into account areas where the threat is known and the Mission can still play a role. Disengagement should therefore be considered in areas where the threat is no longer documented.

As I have already mentioned, the priorities of the mandate should now focus on the protection of civilians. With that in mind, my Government would therefore like to see the Council take into account, as one of the strategic priorities of the mandate, disarmament, demobilization and reintegration so as to enable, as we have already said with regard to voluntary surrenders, support for the social reintegration of the combatants who lay down their arms. The Council should also include the issue of dealing with the plundering of natural resources, which is one of the main causes of the conflict in the eastern part of my country, and take the regional dimension of the crisis into account in order to ask the neighbouring countries that are the sources of the foreign armed groups to engage in political dialogue with those groups in the context of resolving the crisis.

With regard to the upcoming discussions on the development of a joint exit strategy within the framework of the strategic dialogue, my country underscores the need to start at once the process of transferring MONUSCO's tasks to the Government, the United Nations country team and other relevant stakeholders, following an explicit and jointly established timeline, with a view to safeguarding the achievements already made and a responsible withdrawal of MONUSCO, thereby ensuring sustainable progress towards the stabilization of the Democratic Republic of the Congo,

the consolidation of State authority and the elimination of the threat posed by armed groups.

The humanitarian situation in my country is due mainly to the activity of armed groups and the conflicts that are also racking neighbouring countries, whose people seek refuge in our territory. In addition, there are natural disasters and the resurgence of certain epidemics, such as cholera and the Ebola virus disease. My country continues to address that situation with the means at its disposal. The Government would highly appreciate any additional assistance that our partners could provide to the distressed populations.

To return to the situation of Ebola haemorrhagic fever, it is important to inform the Council that the Government's efforts to control that disease, with the support of the World Health Organization, the African Union and other partners, are ongoing. Since the first outbreak of the epidemic, the cumulative number of cases as of 15 March is 936, with 871 confirmed cases and 65 likely cases. Of those cases, the number of people cured stands at 310.

Members of the Council will agree with us that the issue of human rights remains an ideal that all States in the world seek to achieve. My country is firmly committed to that ideal and will continue to work to entrench the rule of law, which our young democracy sorely needs. My delegation can therefore reassure those present that the fight against violations of human rights and fundamental freedoms is at the very heart of the action of the President of the Republic, who has committed to working for the promotion of the rule of law. With that in mind, he is determined to humanize the security services, fight abuses and close down detention centres that do not comply with the law. In the same vein, he is also committed to tackling impunity within the ranks of the army and police and improving the living and working conditions of the troops. He has also resolved to open access to the public media to all in order to promote freedom of expression, assembly and protest.

As report S/2019/218 points out, the recurrent armed conflicts in my country are at the root of sexual violence and the use and recruitment of children. The Government of my country is determined to continue the efforts undertaken, in cooperation with the United Nations and other partners to put an end to that situation. It is true that despite those efforts and the significant

progress already made by the Government in that fight, challenges remain.

My delegation believes that to meet those challenges, we must eradicate the armed groups. To that end, MONUSCO, in support of the Forces armées de la République Démocratique du Congo, should first and foremost carry out the missions entrusted to it by its mandate, namely, the protection of civilians and the fight against armed groups; apply the sanctions regime to armed groups to cut off their financing and supply of arms and ammunition; oblige all entities involved in the illicit flow of activities of armed groups — countries of transit and destination and multinationals — to comply fully with the sanctions regime; and apply sanctions to all such entities that will not comply with the existing sanctions regime.

As for the investigation into the assassination of the two United Nations experts, the case is still under investigation before the Kananga garrison military tribunal, in Kasai Central province. In addition to the various people who have already been arrested and charged in the case, the ongoing work on the case has allowed the tribunal to place in pretrial detention Colonel Jean de Dieu Mambweni for having put the experts in contact with the interpreter Betu Tshintela and suggested that they travel to Kananga-Bukonde to verify the information concerning a Kamwina Nsapu

militia training camp in the vicinity of the town of Ngombe, near Bukonde. The hearings, which had been suspended, will resume during this month.

I cannot conclude my statement without congratulating Ms. Leila Zerrougui, Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of MONUSCO, on her reappointment and expressing my Government's deep appreciation for the high quality of the work she has done during her mandate in my country at a particularly sensitive time. My Government expresses its deep appreciation to her and assures her of its full cooperation for the success of her mission. I must also thank all the troops of MONUSCO, and especially Force Intervention Brigade, for the ongoing sacrifices that they make to ensure the restoration of peace in my country.

Lastly, I would like to express the gratitude of the Congolese people and their Government to the United Nations, in particular the members of the Security Council, for their commitment to and engagement in the cause of my country.

The President (*spoke in French*): There are no more names inscribed on the list of speakers. I now invite Council members to informal consultations to continue our discussion on the subject.

The meeting rose at 12.30 p.m.