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Provisional

President: Mr. Nebenzia/Ms. Evstigneeva (Russian Federation)

Members:

Belgium	Mr. Kridelka
China	Mr. Dai Bing
Dominican Republic	Mr. Singer Weisinger
Estonia	Mr. Jürgenson
France	Mr. De Rivière
Germany	Mr. Sautter
Indonesia	Mr. Djani
Niger	Mr. Aougi
Saint Vincent and the Grenadines	Ms. Gonsalves
South Africa	Mr. Matjila
Tunisia	Mr. Ben Lagha
United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland . .	Mr. Roscoe
United States of America	Mr. Turner
Viet Nam	Mr. Dang

Agenda

The situation in the Great Lakes region

Report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework for the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Region (S/2020/951)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.05 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in the Great Lakes region

Report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework for the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Region (S/2020/951)

The President (*spoke in Russian*): 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 Mr. Huang Xia, Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for the Great Lakes Region, to participate in this meeting. Mr. Huang Xia is joining today's meeting via video-teleconference.

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/2020/951, which contains the report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework for the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Region.

I now give the floor to Mr. Huang Xia.

Mr. Huang Xia (*spoke in French*): I am pleased to brief the Security Council on the most recent report (S/2020/951) of the Secretary-General on the implementation of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework for the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Region.

At this time of the ongoing coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, allow me to again begin with a thought for the victims of that health crisis, in particular women and young people, who are paying a heavy price both in the region and elsewhere. As members may expect, throughout the past period the countries of the region have spared no effort in trying to contain the spread of the pandemic and to respond to its negative economic and social consequences. The Governments and the peoples of the region have continued to show resilience and determination in their fight against this

global crisis. May they find herein the expression of my wholehearted support.

At the same time, I would like to acknowledge the commitment of the Governments of the region to continuing their efforts to improve political, economic and security cooperation, in line with the commitments under the Framework agreement and the 2006 Pact on Security, Stability and Development in the Great Lakes Region.

As I address the Council, the Chiefs of Staff of the armed forces of States members of the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region (ICGLR) are meeting in preparation for a meeting of the Defence Ministers to follow up on the implementation of the decisions taken by the Heads of State at the 2017 Brazzaville summit.

The situation in the region over the past months has remained stable overall with encouraging progress despite the ongoing challenges. On the political front, I welcome the peaceful transfer of power in Burundi following the May general elections and the prospects for greater regional stability, as illustrated by the return of Burundian refugees from Rwanda and Tanzania, as well as the visit by the Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Democratic Republic of the Congo to Bujumbura on 4 and 5 October.

I also welcome the organization, on 7 October, by President Tshilombo Tshisekedi of the Democratic Republic of the Congo of a mini-summit gathering his Angolan, Ugandan and Rwandan counterparts to discuss important issues relating to security and economic cooperation. That initiative demonstrates the sustained commitment among leaders of the region towards joint efforts, which I hope it will be possible to strengthen during the upcoming meeting of Regional Oversight Mechanism for the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework for the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Region.

I also welcome the fact that the countries of the region are availing themselves of diplomatic means and regional mechanisms to resolve their differences peacefully, as seen in the resolution of the border dispute between the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Zambia. The commitment of Rwanda and Uganda to proceed in the process of normalizing their relations through the good offices of Angola and the Democratic Republic of the Congo is another positive example.

In terms of the security and humanitarian situations, the situation nevertheless continues to be cause for concern. In the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo, as recalled in the latest report by my colleague, Head of the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) Leila Zerrougui, which is before the Council today, sporadic cross-border incidents and the activities of armed groups operating in the east of the Democratic Republic of the Congo continue to cause of intolerable humanitarian suffering. The impunity enjoyed by those responsible for those crimes traumatizes the population and negatively affects relations between those countries.

We must therefore step up our efforts to fight impunity. For my part, I intend to continue my advocacy among the countries of the region for them to strengthen their fight against impunity, in particular by effectively implementing the Nairobi Declaration on Justice and Good Governance.

Let me to say something about the initiatives I have carried out since I last addressed the Council on 22 April, in particular on cooperation with the African Union and the ICGLR with a view to advancing the implementation of the Framework agreement centred around the five priorities that I had identified.

With regard to the mobilization of the international community in favour of the countries of the region — my top priority — we asked the Peacebuilding Commission and international financial institutions to provide continuous support to the region, given the devastating consequences of the pandemic. While, to date, significant resources have been mobilized for the countries of the region, the International Monetary Fund considers them insufficient for launching an ambitious recovery. I reiterate the importance of greater support from international partners for countries in the region. We must seek to facilitate their access to options, such as financial relief, most applicable to their needs, including but not limited to debt relief and restructuring initiatives.

Turning to support for dialogue efforts — my second priority — the fruitful consultations I had with the authorities of Angola, Burundi, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Uganda and Rwanda, among others, gave me hope for improvement in good neighbourly relations and for regional stability.

Regarding regional security cooperation, my Office remained in close contact with the ICGLR to identify avenues of action for increased support for the efforts of the Expanded Joint Verification Mechanism of the ICGLR. We will also continue to work to promote non-military measures, such as strengthening disarmament, demobilization and reintegration programmes at the regional level.

With regard to efforts to promote transparent and sustainable use of natural resources, my fourth priority, the preliminary results of a study commissioned by my Office have shown that, even in the midst of a pandemic, illicit trade in minerals in the region, unfortunately, continues unabated, primarily thanks to the strong price performance of gold, the safe haven par excellence during periods of uncertainty.

With regard to my fifth priority, I note with satisfaction the decision of the Democratic Republic of the Congo to organize a virtual meeting of the Regional Oversight Mechanism in order to overcome the constraints imposed by the pandemic. The Conference on Investment and Trade will be organized by the Rwandan authorities in 2021.

As we mark the twentieth anniversary of the adoption of resolution 1325 (2000), I welcome the progress made in the Great Lakes region, whose countries are among the 25 nations with the highest rates of parliamentary representation of women in the world. However, conscious the remaining challenges and in the face of the devastating effects of the pandemic on women, my Office organized, on 28 July and 11 and 20 August, three round tables on women's private entrepreneurship, the prevention of sexual and gender-based violence, as well as women's political participation in the context of COVID-19. The conclusions of those consultations recommend the full integration of the women and peace and security agenda into peacebuilding and development efforts in the Great Lakes region, in particular through strengthened partnerships and effective engagement with women and young people.

During my last visit, I referred to the steps taken for the development of the United Nations strategy for peace consolidation and conflict resolution and prevention in the Great Lakes region, at the request of the Secretary-General. I am pleased to inform the Council that, following an inclusive process and thanks to the valuable contributions from all

countries and partners in the region, I submitted the strategy here at Headquarters yesterday for the attention of the Secretary-General. Subject to what action the Secretary-General may wish to take, I can already indicate that 10 priorities, structured around three pillars — namely, peace, security and justice; sustainable development and collective prosperity; and resilience to old and new challenges — emerged from the various consultations held.

Those priorities aim to provide a comprehensive 10-year road map for United Nations action in the region focusing on a number of concrete priority actions, particularly in the areas of preventive diplomacy, security cooperation, development, the promotion of human rights and strengthening of the role of women and young people by the year 2023, marking the tenth anniversary of the Framework agreement. Of course, the efforts of the United Nations will be effective only if it wins the support of all, not only full ownership by the countries and organizations in the region but also continuous support from the international community. I therefore call for the Council's support in that regard.

I would like to conclude, as always, on a hopeful note for a region that has come a long way. There is scope in the Great Lakes region for discreet and progressive diplomacy on certain sensitive issues harming regional relations. My discreet but committed action in support of the initiatives under way by the four countries of the region will continue.

Moreover, I will continue working in close collaboration with MONUSCO, the Resident Coordinators of the United Nations system, as well as the co-guarantor institutions of the Framework agreement, to promote non-military measures within the fight against spoilers. High-level political buy-in and adequate resources are essential to improve the regional security environment. In that context, the holding of the next summit of the Regional Follow-up Mechanism will be crucial to secure political support at the highest level from the countries of the region.

Finally, given the alarming economic impact of COVID-19, it will be just as important to step up efforts for dynamic economic cooperation around cross-border projects and the collective management of natural resources, focusing on a holistic approach, inclusive of all stakeholders and drawing strengthened regional mechanisms, in particular those of the ICGLR.

Despite the remaining challenges, not least the pandemic, the people and the countries of the Great Lakes region continue to show great resilience and determination to move forward. I call on the Security Council to remain committed and sustain its support for the region.

The President (*spoke in Russian*): I thank Mr. Huang Xia for his briefing.

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

Mr. De Rivièrè (France) (*spoke in French*): I thank Mr. Huang Xia, Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for the Great Lakes Region, for his briefing. I would like to emphasize three points.

First of all, progress on regional cooperation should be encouraged. France welcomes the positive developments in recent months. In particular, I welcome the continuation of the consultations between Rwanda and Uganda, facilitated by the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Angola; the collaborative approach on the demarcation of the borders between the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Zambia; the agreement between the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Uganda to strengthen their cooperation on security issues; as well as the holding, on 7 October, of the Great Lakes summit, at the initiative of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. It is essential to continue the encouraging, committed momentum we have seen since the election of President Tshilombo Tshisekedi, which could be spurred on by the political transition in Burundi, in order to further reduce tensions and build confidence.

The continuation of that regional momentum is critical to respond to the security challenges and achieve the common objective of stabilizing the Great Lakes region. Unfortunately, the situation in the region remains marked by the activities of armed groups, particularly in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo. In that regard, I commend the tireless efforts of the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Secondly, and more generally, the region must also address the root causes of instability. The development of a natural resource development plan and a transparent extractive sector would help combat the illegal exploitation of natural resources. France is playing its full part in collective regulatory efforts, with a view to

the entry into force, on 1 January, of the regulation on minerals from conflict zones. France stands ready to participate in the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region workshop on this issue. Devising national and regional frameworks for disarming, demobilizing and reintegrating armed groups would facilitate their sustainable return to communities. Progress to that end in the Democratic Republic of the Congo by the Force de résistance patriotique de l'Ituri group must be rapidly consolidated to prevent a return to violence.

Efforts must also focus on human rights violations and the fight against sexual and gender-based violence, which are obstacles to peace and stability in the region. International humanitarian law must be respected. That goes hand in hand with the strengthening of the rule of law, security sector and justice reform, as well as the fight against corruption and impunity. On its part, France has selected the Great Lakes region as one of the priority areas in its national action plan to implement the women and peace and security agenda.

Nevertheless, the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic particularly affects women, refugees and displaced persons and has contributed to worsening food insecurity, particularly in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Regional cooperation is critical in that regard as well. In that connection, I welcome the commitment undertaken last week by the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Rwanda, Angola and Uganda to establish a cross-border plan to combat COVID-19. France is doing its part to support the region by allocating €1.2 billion of our development aid to health issues in Africa.

Thirdly, the United Nations has an important role in supporting the region. France reiterates its support for the work of the Special Envoy, who plays a critical role in supporting the implementation of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework for the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Region and monitoring commitments. The COVID-19 pandemic has made it impossible for consultations to be as inclusive as in the past. We hope that dialogue can resume. I also welcome the Special Envoy's steps taken to prepare the second conference on investment and trade in the Great Lakes region.

The United Nations strategy for peace consolidation, conflict prevention and resolution in the Great Lakes region will be a key tool for concretely strengthening political stability and peace in the region. It should

also make it possible to respond to the challenges of economic integration and sustainable development in the region as a whole. Like other external partners that have actively contributed to its elaboration, we await the strategy with great interest and hope that it will lead to an operational action plan.

France and the countries of the Great Lakes region share the same objective — stability and development in the region. To that end, we offer them and the United Nations our unflinching commitment and support.

Mr. Singer Weisinger (Dominican Republic) (*spoke in Spanish*): We thank Mr. Huang Xia for his detailed briefing.

The Dominican Republic commends the efforts of the countries of the Great Lakes region to curb the spread of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic and mitigate its socioeconomic impact. We also welcome the progress in the region, including the signing of a peace agreement between the Government of the Sudan and the armed groups, as well as the peaceful manner in which affected countries have managed cross-border security incidents. This friendly rapprochement demonstrates the maturity of regional leadership and their commitment to peace and stability. In that context, we urge them to continue to resolve their differences through diplomacy.

Despite regional progress and the continued military operations of the Forces armées de la République démocratique du Congo to counter armed groups, we continue to be worried about the ongoing attacks carried out by foreign and local armed groups against civilians and Congolese armed forces. There is no doubt that this violence is the primary factor of destabilization in the region, due to the number of deaths and calamities suffered by the people, who are forced to leave their homes and live in deplorable conditions as internally displaced persons.

We therefore call on the leaders of the region to regain control over the illicit trafficking of small arms and light weapons, including the transfer of such weapons among armed groups, and to intensify efforts to prevent the training, residence and transit of armed groups through their territories. We further call on them to use the certificate of the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region to manage and trade natural resources.

The impact of the reduction of economic activities due to the pandemic, the violence of armed groups, natural disasters and the violation of human rights, including gender-based violence, abductions and the lack of development opportunities, are the driving force behind the grave humanitarian situation in the region. The large number of internally displaced persons in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, of Congolese refugees and of refugees from other countries in the region being hosted by the Democratic Republic shows the serious state of the humanitarian situation in the country. In addition, according to the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa, the economic recovery of the region could not begin before 2021, and only if the COVID-19 pandemic is properly managed. Accordingly, we encourage donor countries to increase their support through official development assistance and innovative financial and debt relief programmes for the countries most affected by the pandemic and its devastating consequences.

In addition, we call for the vaccine and other health technologies needed to address COVID-19 to be made available in an equitable manner and for their distribution to be guaranteed to all human beings on the planet. To that end, the role played by the World Health Organization, donor countries and the private sector is essential, based on cooperation, solidarity and justice.

As peace and development are intrinsically linked, we call on the signatories to the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework for the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Region to promote national and regional development programmes aimed at providing employment opportunities, especially in cross-border areas, and at involving more women and young people in conflict resolution and decision-making.

In conclusion, we thank all the facilitators, including Special Envoy Huang Xia, for the progress made their efforts aimed at implementing regional peace and cooperation mechanisms. We urge the signatories to the Framework agreement and its co-guarantors to continue working in favour of a region where justice, peace, respect for human rights, equity and sustainable development prevail for all.

Mr. Jürgenson (Estonia): I would like to thank Special Envoy Huang Xia for his valuable briefing.

The coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic has added pressure to the numerous interconnected challenges in the region: conflicts with armed groups,

human rights violations and abuses, health epidemics and socioeconomic difficulties. Addressing such challenges benefits from a regional approach. The shared benefit from working together is always greater than that of any country acting individually. We would like to commend the resolute cross-border steps of the countries of the Great Lakes region, such as the mini-summit hosted last week by President Tshilombo Tshisekedi and the border-dispute solutions being facilitated by the Southern African Development Community. We would also praise the work of the quadripartite process on Uganda and Rwanda and the resolve of Rwanda and Burundi in normalizing their bilateral relations. We look forward to receiving an update on the new United Nations regional strategy on peace and security for the Great Lakes region.

Estonia condemns the violence perpetrated by armed groups in the region, in particular by the Allied Democratic Forces and the Cooperative for the Development of Congo in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Return, Reclamation, Rehabilitation militia group in the Central African Republic. The conflicts in the region continue to be accompanied by large numbers of grave violations and abuses of human rights. We are most worried about the increase in sexual and gender-based violence and the continued displacement of populations and the number of grave violations of children's rights.

The perpetrators of such crimes must be held accountable in order to fight the presence of a culture of impunity, which, if left unchecked, will only breed more violence. Rapid and robust implementation of the Nairobi Declaration on Justice and Good Governance would greatly assist in those efforts. The protection of human rights and the fight against impunity must remain priorities, in particular during the pandemic, and we appreciate the readiness of the Special Envoy to assist in that regard.

With elections coming up in several countries in the region, we would like to underline the importance of initiatives promoting the meaningful participation of women in political and electoral processes and advancing the women and peace and security agenda in the Great Lakes region. This is particularly important today, given the COVID-19 pandemic, which has negatively affected the implementation women and peace and security agenda in the region. The same applies to the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework for the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Region. I

would like to conclude by encouraging the signatories and co-guarantors of the Framework agreement to strengthen their cooperation and utilize innovative solutions to continue tackling regional challenges.

Mr. Sautter (Germany): I thank the Secretary-General for his report (S/2020/951), and the Special Envoy for his briefing. Let me make three brief points.

First, on regional cooperation, we commend the encouraging signals that we have seen recently, particularly in response to the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic. At the same time, we remain concerned about the negative impact the pandemic is having, especially with respect to health, socioeconomic and humanitarian issues as well as on the human rights situation. It is therefore important to strengthen health infrastructure, step up humanitarian efforts by the international community and mitigate the negative socioeconomic effects of the pandemic.

Human rights violations, including sexual and gender-based violations, must stop. We encourage the region to seize the current moment of collaboration in order to make further progress on regional economic integration and in the fight against the illegal exploitation of natural resources. There is an urgent need to address root causes in that regard. The creation of jobs and tax revenues and the reduction of incentives for armed groups and criminal networks to use violence are key. Regional organizations, such as the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region and the African Union, have an important role to play in that context.

My second remark is on armed groups. We remain especially worried by the situation in the eastern part of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, which continues to destabilize the country and the region. We commend the ongoing increased regional efforts, such as exchanges among regional intelligence and security services and the commitment to greater security cooperation by Rwanda, Angola, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Uganda that was reached at last week's regional summit. It is important that the delayed tenth Summit of the Regional Oversight Mechanism take place without delay.

I would like to make a third remark, on the situation in Burundi. We take note of some positive signals and gestures emanating from the new Burundian Government, which seems ready to normalize its relations with the region and the international

community. But visible change is needed; the peaceful conduct of elections has formed a solid basis, yet more progress needs to be achieved.

The issue of human rights in a difficult humanitarian situation is still a cause for great concern. Democratic spaces keep narrowing. We are worried about persistent human rights abuses. We hope to see improvements in that regard. We also encourage the Burundian authorities and all parties involved to respect the principle of the voluntary, safe and dignified return of refugees.

Let me conclude by expressing our hope to soon see a new peace and security strategy for the Great Lakes region.

Mr. Roscoe (United Kingdom): I want to join others in thanking Special Envoy Huang Xia for his briefing.

We share the concerns set out in the Secretary-General's report (S/2020/951) about both the immediate and the secondary impacts of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic in the Great Lakes region. We commend the efforts to strengthen regional coordination in responding to the pandemic and we echo the Secretary-General's call for regional leaders to capitalize and build on this by enhancing cooperation towards peace and development.

While we recognize the impact that COVID-19 restrictions have had on the implementation of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework for the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Region, we call for the resumption of these efforts as soon as possible, including through virtual engagement.

I wish to add our voice to those that have welcomed the recent steps taken by the region towards improved relations. As Mr. Xia reported, last week's mini-summit between the Heads of State of Uganda, Rwanda, Angola and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, as well as the Southern African Development Community initiative to resolve the border dispute between the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Zambia, are two encouraging examples of this. We also welcome the more positive tenor of dialogue between Rwanda and Burundi on the normalization of relations. This momentum from regional talks and dispute resolution efforts must be maintained; continued cooperation among regional Powers is crucial to bringing peace and stability to the region.

I will now turn to some of the individual countries of the region.

We welcome the peaceful transfer of power in Burundi, as well as the resumption of voluntary refugee returns from Tanzania and Rwanda. It is crucial that all refugee returns be and remain of a genuinely voluntary nature. With Tanzania and Uganda's elections on the horizon, we call on all national leaders and the international community to ensure that both sets of elections are peaceful, free and fair. Reports of shrinking democratic space in this respect are concerning.

As ever, we remain concerned about the humanitarian situation in the region. This is particularly the case in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo, where conflict, human rights abuses by armed groups and natural disasters are driving displacement and food insecurity. We are also increasingly concerned about the illegal smuggling of natural resources. We underline the need for increased regional cooperation to tackle this illegal smuggling and to restrict financial flows to armed groups operating in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo.

We continue to be troubled by the human rights situation in the broader region. We are especially concerned by the increase in sexual and gender-based violence in connection to lockdowns and other COVID-19 response measures. We echo the Secretary-General's call for leaders of the region to continue to prioritize the protection of human rights and the fight against impunity.

Finally, I want to add that we welcome Special Envoy Xia's consultations with national, regional and international stakeholders on his regional strategy. We were very glad to hear that his report has been submitted to the Secretary-General and we hope to see greater detail and the finalization of this strategy as soon as possible. I would also underline the importance of Special Envoy Xia's work across the region to promote more joined-up efforts across the United Nations family in order to ensure that the United Nations is delivering as one. It is crucial that the regional strategy for the Great Lakes be well coordinated with both the transition strategy of the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and with Assistant Secretary-General Keita's review of United Nations engagement with Burundi.

Mr. Ben Lagha (Tunisia): I have the pleasure to deliver this statement on behalf of the A3+1, namely, the Niger, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, South Africa and Tunisia.

Let me first express our appreciation to Mr. Huang Xia, Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for the Great Lakes Region, for his informative briefing. We commend the work carried out by the Special Envoy and his Office in promoting peace in the region through good offices, mediation and preventive diplomacy, as well as his efforts in supporting election processes and capacity-building activities in several countries.

Our statement will focus on issues pertaining to the security, political and humanitarian situations in the Great Lake Region; on the progress made on the implementation of the commitments under the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework for the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Region; and on the implementation of the road map of the Special Envoy.

As is the case with the rest of the world, the Great Lakes region is not immune from the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic. In this regard, we commend the efforts of the countries of the region to curb the spread of the virus and mitigate its socioeconomic impact. We nevertheless regret that the pandemic has exacerbated the plight of vulnerable populations and had a disastrous effect on social and economic activity and on the implementation of some initiatives and projects pertaining to the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework.

With regard to the security situation in the Great Lakes region, and despite the harsh constraints due mainly to the COVID-19 pandemic, we salute the ongoing efforts of the Special Envoy and his Office and we are encouraged by the positive response of several member States in the region to the Secretary-General's call for a global ceasefire, which was supported by resolution 2532 (2020).

We equally salute the willingness of countries to resort to diplomatic channels and dialogue to resolve their disputes and differences. We encourage leaders of the region to further reinforce their relations for the sake of peace, stability and prosperity in the whole region.

We are nevertheless concerned by the ongoing activities of many armed groups that continue to perpetrate attacks against civilians and engage in clashes with the military forces of some of the region's countries.

While the security situation in the region remains critical, we note with satisfaction the

political development reflected mainly in the regional cooperation and diplomatic initiatives led by the leaders of the region, despite the COVID-19 pandemic. Countries such as Burundi have witnessed peaceful and well-organized legislative and presidential elections, and we are looking forward to the accomplishment of similar processes, mainly in Tanzania and Uganda. We are encouraged by the ongoing efforts of Rwanda and Uganda to normalize their relations, thanks to the facilitation of Angola and the Democratic Republic of the Congo and in the framework of the quadripartite process.

In this regard, we note with encouragement the holding of the virtual mini-summit of Heads of State of the Great Lakes region, called for by President Tshisekedi, on 7 October, as part of his regional outreach to promote cooperation between the Democratic Republic of the Congo and its neighbours and to advance the implementation by all stakeholders of the Addis Ababa Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework for the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Region.

We concur with Secretary-General about the critical nature of the humanitarian situation in the region, which has been further exacerbated by the negative impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, natural disasters and the persistent threat posed by the continued guerrilla activities of armed groups. In this respect, we express our deep concern over the displacement of large numbers of people in the region, which has further increased their vulnerability. Despite the fact that the human rights situation in the region has witnessed some positive developments, mainly with the progress made in the fight against impunity, we express our deep concern over the continued reports of human rights violations and offenses, including sexual and gender-based violence, both by armed groups and by State actors.

The Niger, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, South Africa and Tunisia emphasize the centrality of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework to the Great Lakes region, which remains an essential mechanism to achieve durable peace and stability. We encourage enhanced cooperation among all signatory countries. In that regard, while we reiterate the call for the signatory countries to abide by their commitment to non-interference in the internal affairs of neighbours, we nonetheless welcome the recent engagement of leaders of the region, through their bilateral and

multilateral efforts, to strengthen their ties and enhance mutual cooperation.

In that respect, we commend the efforts of the African Union, the Southern African Development Community and the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region, along with the East African Community and countries of the region, in supporting those endeavours in line with their respective commitments under the Framework. We also commend the work of subregional organizations and mechanisms aimed at sharing best practices in tackling the COVID-19 pandemic and facilitating cross-border coordination measures to contain that plight. We encourage initiatives by leaders of the region aimed at further reinforcing security cooperation and military intelligence-sharing to protect their respective borders and contain activities by armed groups.

The role of the international community remains of paramount importance in the Great Lakes region. In that regard, we note with satisfaction the engagement of international partners who focused their attention on questions pertaining to development, electoral processes and ways to support the region in meeting challenges linked to the COVID-19 pandemic. In that respect, we commend the work of the United Nations Peacebuilding Commission aimed at supporting regional efforts to improve economic cooperation, development and peacebuilding in the region.

The A3+1 welcomes the continued and active engagement of the Secretary General's Special Envoy with key stakeholders in the region, the co-guarantors, international partners and other actors on ways and means to further consolidate the gains achieved in the implementation of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework. In that regard, we commend the Secretary-General's good offices, as reflected in his Special Envoy's national and regional efforts, aimed at facilitating dialogue, cooperation and confidence-building initiatives among countries of the region. We equally encourage the Special Envoy's efforts to support the fight against impunity and promote the rule of law in the countries of the region.

Addressing the issue of the illicit exploitation of, and trade in, natural resources in the region remains a real barrier to sustainable development and a source of instability, insecurity, mistrust and tension among countries of the region. We therefore call on the Special Envoy to continue his efforts and consultations in view

of the adoption of a holistic and pragmatic approach to tackle the issue and contain its negative impact on the region.

In conclusion, while we look forward to receiving the United Nations strategy for peace consolidation and conflict resolution and prevention in the Great Lakes region, the members of the A3+1 reiterate their full support for the Secretary-General's initiative and commend the efforts of the Special Envoy with national, regional and international stakeholders in leading the development of the strategy, which we hope will help identify and elaborate priorities and streamline the United Nations peace consolidation, conflict prevention and conflict resolution engagements in support of ongoing efforts by Governments and regional organizations in the Great Lakes region. We also emphasize the importance of a coherent whole-of-system approach that synthesizes the efforts of all peace and security, development and humanitarian actors in the region. In the same vein, the A3+1 would like to stress the importance of further strengthening partnerships with regional and international organizations and mechanisms, as well as related United Nations entities, and mainly the co-guarantors of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework.

Mr. Turner (United States of America): We appreciate today's briefing by Special Envoy Huang Xia on the latest developments in the region.

Since we last met to discuss the situation in the Great Lakes region, the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic has continued to turn our world upside down. The Great Lakes region, which was in the midst of overcoming the second-most deadly Ebola epidemic in world history, is no different. Despite the obstacles to travel created by the pandemic, we are encouraged by the ongoing and constructive diplomatic efforts that continue to be made to address root causes of conflict in the region.

October is an important month for the engagement of the United Nations in the Great Lakes region, with three prominent forthcoming reports — a United Nations regional strategy for the Great Lakes region, an assessment of the United Nations role in Burundi and a report on the exit strategy and the drawdown benchmarks for the United Nations Peacekeeping operation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The United States looks forward to receiving those reports

and working with the United Nations to advance long-term stability and security in the region.

The United States is pleased to see that Governments have already taken important steps to improve stability. A case in point: we commend the efforts of the Governments of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Zambia, supported by the Southern African Development Community, towards work to address a long-standing border dispute. We also welcome reports of meetings between Rwandan and Burundian security officials, as well as continued progress to mediate disagreements between Uganda and Rwanda. This news bodes well for regional stability.

At the same time, the United States is disappointed by reports of violations of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework for the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Region. The report of the Secretary-General (S/2020/951) includes many allegations of troops carrying out attacks and operations outside their borders, underscoring the need for all Governments to uphold their commitments under the Framework. Those incidents must stop, and those responsible must be held accountable. The United States calls on regional oversight mechanisms to address those violations in earnest and take steps to ensure that such violations no longer occur. We believe that Special Envoy Huang Xia and his team have a key role to play.

Of particular importance, the United States commends the efforts of President Tshilombo Tshisekedi to energize regional reconciliation through a virtual eastern Congo summit. We hope that conversations like that one can maintain momentum for much-needed dialogue among Heads of State that can trickle down into concrete proposals for regional economic integration. We have a rare window of opportunity to work together to address long-standing issues that impact security for all Great Lakes countries. Governments of the region could build a different way of doing business by tackling the illicit flows of minerals that fund armed groups.

This October also marks the twentieth anniversary of resolution 1325 (2000), which established the Security Council's women and peace and security agenda and recognized the important role women play in conflict prevention, resolution and recovery. We must continue to support women as drivers of social and economic recovery and put in place the building blocks for them to contribute fully and meaningfully.

The United States is very concerned by reports of wide-spread sexual exploitation and abuse by personnel who claim to be employed by international organizations and private relief agencies as part of the Ebola response. We urge the organizations and agencies involved to ensure that their recently announced investigations are thorough and conclude in a timely manner, with appropriate steps taken to address the situation in a survivor-centred manner.

Finally, the role of Special Envoy Huang Xia is more critical than ever. We urge his Office to innovate, including by using video-teleconferencing technology to support Governments in continuing the conversations they have started. There are a number of important regional conversations under way that will need his constant support.

Mr. Dai Bing (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): I thank Special Envoy Huang Xia for his briefing.

Amid the difficulties caused by the coronavirus disease (COVID-19), Special Envoy Huang Xia has actively carried out good offices to promote improved relations among the countries of the region and strengthen regional cooperation in order to overcome the challenges. He has done a great deal of work to support the implementation of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework for the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Region. China commends such work, and we will continue to fully support the Special Envoy in performing his mandate.

In recent years, through the joint efforts of States of the region and the international community, the situation in the Great Lakes region has stabilized and improved. The region has a rare window of opportunity for peace and development. The past six months have seen the strengthening of that positive momentum. The general elections in Burundi took place smoothly. The reform agenda of the Democratic Republic of the Congo has moved forward steadily. Relations among States of the region are gradually improving, along with a greater willingness to resolve disputes peacefully.

The countries of the Great Lakes region share common interests and a common future. Threats to the security of any country may spill over to its neighbours, and one country's crisis may become a challenge for the region. COVID-19 and Ebola have highlighted the urgent need for regional cooperation. China calls on the countries of the region to build consensus, strengthen cooperation and turn challenges into opportunities

with a view to achieving regional peace, stability and common development as soon as possible. In that regard, I wish to stress the following four points.

First, with regard to joint cooperation to earnestly implement the Framework, countries of the region should respect each other's sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity. That is necessary for the implementation of the Framework and a precondition for regional peace and stability. China encourages the countries of the region to continue to resolutely fulfil their commitments under the Framework and enhance mutual trust and good-neighbourliness. China calls on the international community to respect the leadership of countries of the region in dealing with their own affairs and support regional and subregional organizations, such as the African Union, the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region (ICGLR), the Southern African Development Community (SADC) and the East African Community (EAC), in playing their respective important roles.

Secondly, with regard to steadily advancing national political agendas, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Burundi have successfully completed their political transitions. Tanzania and Uganda will hold general elections this and next year, respectively. With their political situations stabilized, the focus of governance in various countries has gradually shifted to national reconstruction and increased reform. The international community should create an enabling external environment and actively help countries of the region strengthen capacity-building and improve national governance. The political and security situation in Burundi has significantly improved and no longer poses a threat to regional peace and security.

The time is ripe to remove Burundi from the agenda of the Security Council. China welcomes the visit by the Secretariat to Burundi, as requested by the Security Council. We look forward to its report, which we hope will objectively reflect Burundi's progress in the political and security fields and put forward realistic proposals with regard to future cooperation between the United Nations and Burundi.

Thirdly, on the issue of attaching importance to resolving the underlying issues that lead to conflict, the root causes of the protracted turmoil and frequent conflicts in the Great Lakes region are complex and chiefly due to the lack of development. Countries of the region should jointly consider the issue of how to

turn the benefits of natural resources into a driver for development rather than tension or conflict. China supports such countries in strengthening consultations and cooperation so as to jointly resolve the problem of the illicit exploitation of, and illegal trade in, natural resources, while increasing its investment in socioeconomic development, thereby creating more jobs and means of subsistence. China anticipates that the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration activities being developed by States of the region can contribute to that goal. We welcome the fact that Special Envoy Huang Xia has been advocating the convening of a conference on trade and investment in the Great Lakes region. We commend such work to assist States of the region in scaling up their marketing efforts and attracting foreign investment. The first conference was a great success, and we look forward to the second one soon, if conditions allow. We hope that such a platform will bring new development opportunities to countries of the region.

Fourthly, with regard to joint efforts to address common challenges, the security threats and humanitarian challenges that countries of the region face are closely interlinked. Currently, the pandemic has led to the region facing new and complex issues, which have resulted in severe challenges to its economic development. Strengthening regional cooperation and promoting regional integration can help to provide impetus for the development of countries and bring lasting stability to the region. China welcomes the cooperation among States of the region in monitoring the pandemic, diagnosis and treatment under frameworks such as the ICGLR and supports the harmonized guidelines on trade and transportation facilitation adopted by the EAC and SADC. We welcome the progress made by the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Uganda, Burundi and Rwanda in their bilateral security cooperation. As a good friend and partner of countries of the Great Lakes region, China has always steadfastly supported countries of the region in advancing peace processes, actively participated in United Nations peacekeeping operations in the region and done its utmost to help States of the region strengthen capacity-building.

China stands ready to work with the rest of the international community in our continued resolute effort to contribute to achieving peace, stability, prosperity and development in the Great Lakes region.

Mr. Djani (Indonesia): It is my honour to deliver a joint statement on behalf of Viet Nam and Indonesia,

the two States members of the Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN) on the Security Council. At the outset, we would like to thank Ambassador Huang Xia, Special Envoy of the Secretary-General to the Great Lakes Region, for his briefing.

We have noted the Secretary-General's report of 28 September (S/2020/951), and we are encouraged by the progress on regional cooperation despite the unprecedented challenges caused by the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic. Indeed, the commitment and leadership of the signatories and guarantors to the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework for the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Region are now more critical than ever. To that end, Viet Nam and Indonesia would like to emphasize the following points.

First, we stress the importance of addressing the root causes of instability in the region. We welcome the region's positive progress, including the efforts of the Congolese in maintaining a favourable political climate, the peaceful political transition in Burundi and the regional commitments to continuing to pursue peace with neighbours. We continue to voice our support for the good offices of the Secretary-General and his Special Envoy, and we look forward to his United Nations strategy for the Great Lakes Region.

Given the volatile security situation, the region's positive progress should be further reinforced by enhancing the reconciliation process at the national and regional levels, addressing threats from armed groups, strengthening the governance of natural resources and providing development opportunities for countries. Without that, we will risk undoing the hard-won gains and exacerbate instability.

Secondly, the work of regional organizations and United Nations missions in the region should be supported by the Council. As two South-East Asian nations, Viet Nam and Indonesia fully understand the importance of regional and subregional cooperation. ASEAN's "One Vision, One Identity, One Community" is the result of the sustained efforts of all countries in our region over many decades. With shared goals and responsibility to our peoples, we could, and will, achieve a great deal together, including ensuring regional peace, security, stability and prosperity.

Based on such a conviction, we recognize the important role of the regional mechanisms in the Great Lakes region, including the co-guarantors of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework

Agreement and the 13 signatory countries. We welcome the engagements of the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region (ICGLR) and the Southern African Development Community in facilitating border negotiations, peaceful general elections and the bolstering of efforts with regard to COVID-19. The ICGLR continues to play a vital role for peace and in preserving stability by preventing the illicit exploitation and movement of natural resources.

We continue to support peace in the region through our contribution to the United Nations peacekeeping missions. Currently, ASEAN countries contribute more than 1,600 uniformed personnel to the various United Nations missions in the region.

Thirdly, during this global COVID-19 crisis, relief for the humanitarian situation must be prioritized. We must pay attention to those in dire need of assistance: the 22 million Congolese who are facing food insecurity; the 5.9 million internally displaced persons and refugees; and those who are vulnerable, including women, children and the disabled. We call on all international partners to continue to provide technical and financial support for countries of the region through bilateral and multilateral frameworks.

Addressing the complex peace and security challenges in the region is indeed not easy. We will maintain our commitment as true partners for the region together.

Mr. Kridelka (Belgium) (*spoke in French*): I would like to thank Special Envoy Huang Xia for his very informative briefing. Since this was the first time I have had the pleasure of hearing him speak, I commend his fluent command of French, which makes an outstanding contribution to the linguistic diversity of our Organization, for which I thank him. His briefing once again underscores the usefulness of regular discussions regarding the Great Lakes region. The timing is relevant because, as we know, the United Nations is currently developing a new strategy for the region, as well as a new approach with regard to Burundi.

Let me take this opportunity to make three points on the role of the United Nations, the regional dimension of the problem and human rights, including the universal right to high-quality education.

First, Belgium welcomes the development of a new strategy for the Great Lakes region. We look forward to

continuing to contribute to this actively as the process draws to a close. In that regard, allow me to thank Special Envoy Xia for its multiple and transparent consultations with various stakeholders, including my country, Belgium. This has involved several bilateral contacts, his personal participation in our Arria Formula meeting on 15 July, on illegal exploitation of natural resources, and numerous interactions with the International Contact Group.

Our expectations are high. We are convinced that the new strategy will encompass all pillars of the United Nations, including sustainable development and human rights. We hope that the strategy will allow us to have an adequate and coherent United Nations footprint in the context of the gradual exit from the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) and an adaptation of the United Nations approach and presence in Burundi.

Secondly, although there have been indications of an improvement in regional dynamics, I note that the Secretary-General's latest report (S/2020/951) and the Special Envoy's briefing continue to refer to multiple bilateral disputes involving several of the neighbours of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. This shows the continued importance of the good offices of the Special Envoy, which also contributed to the convening of the mini-summit in Goma last week. Belgium also welcomes the continued involvement of several regional institutions, including the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region and the Southern African Development Community.

I am also convinced that the Democratic Republic of the Congo's chairmanship of the African Union (AU) next year will give new impetus in this context. Regional problems require regional solutions. In this regard, Belgium and the European Union will play their role as strategic partners of both the AU and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. We therefore fully support our Congolese partners in their future efforts.

Thirdly and finally, despite the worrying persistence of widespread human rights violations in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo, we can welcome some positive developments in this context. The recent convictions of soldiers and police officers who committed sexual violence in the Democratic Republic of the Congo are important steps in the fight against impunity for human rights violations. The adoption of a

new national action plan for women, peace and security is another key development towards better protection for and the equal participation of women and girls.

Another welcome development is the revitalization of the regional platform for youth engagement. In this regard, let me also refer to our Arria Formula meeting of 2 October, at which we underlined the need for access to education in conflict and post-conflict situations, as well as the importance of new technologies in that regard. Closer regional cooperation in this context could, while respecting all sensitivities, also lead to the sharing of best practices in the region, and we know that UNICEF has described some of these as model practices in terms of the uses of new technologies for education, including for children and adolescents, refugees and internally displaced persons. Likewise, we welcome the ongoing demobilization efforts specifically focused on children in armed conflict. In this regard, it is essential to facilitate the access of MONUSCO and UNICEF child protection advisers to demobilization centres.

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

At the outset, let me join the words of appreciation addressed to Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for the Great Lakes Region, Mr. Huang Xia, for his substantial briefing.

The security situation in the region is still defined by the state of affairs in the eastern provinces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, which remains rather complicated. The Congolese army and its supporting peacekeepers have not achieved a qualitative change in the fight against illegal armed formations. A number of border incidents and the spread of the coronavirus disease pandemic have further aggravated the situation in the region over the past six months.

Against this backdrop, we welcome the commitment of the regional States to enhance cooperation in order to overcome the emerging challenges. We note the successful settlement of the border dispute between the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Zambia, facilitated by the Southern African Development Community (SADC). We specifically welcome the four-party summits aimed at normalizing relations between Uganda and Rwanda that have been convened under the leadership of the presidents of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Angola, the most recent of which was held in a virtual format on 7 October. We also find

it very positive that, at the SADC summit in August, that regional organization reiterated its commitment to continue lending support to the Democratic Republic of the Congo as the country strives to stabilize its eastern provinces, inter alia, by sending contingents to the Force Intervention Brigade of the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. We cannot fail to note the productive efforts of the regional organizations in responding to the effects of the pandemic.

We believe that all these efforts deserve the strong support of the global community. We welcome the work of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General in that regard, in particular in terms of overcoming the deficit of trust by enhancing cooperation among the heads of intelligence and security bodies of the States of the region.

We proceed from the assumption that it is imperative that all countries fully and unconditionally comply with the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework for the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Great Lakes Region, which is the fundamental document and the tool for achieving stabilization in the region. We welcome the growing attention of regional players to the importance of upholding the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework. We believe that its full implementation will strongly influence the situation in the Great Lakes region. We expect that the regional strategy for the prevention of armed conflicts currently being drafted by the Office of the Special Envoy will give new impetus to implementing the provisions of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework.

We share the concern expressed in the report of the Secretary-General (S/2020/951) over the humanitarian situation in the Great Lakes region, which has deteriorated during the pandemic. Against that backdrop, one positive development is the ongoing repatriation of Burundian refugees from neighbouring countries. We believe that this process clearly attests to the qualitative transformation of the situation in Burundi, which no longer poses a threat to international peace and security. We hope that the Security Council will soon be able to take a decision on removing that country from its agenda.

In conclusion, I wish to reaffirm that Russia, as a member of the Group of Friends of the Great Lakes Region, intends to continue actively assisting the peace

process in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and promoting the stabilization of the region as a whole.

I now resume my functions as President of the Council.

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

Mr. Empole (Democratic Republic of the Congo) (*spoke in French*): I would like to thank you, Mr. President, for having taken the initiative to organize this meeting on the situation in the Great Lakes region. It is testimony to your commitment to improving the situation in the region.

I take this opportunity to thank Secretary-General António Guterres for his report on the implementation of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework for the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Region (S/2020/951), which is before the Council today. I would also like to thank all the members of the Security Council for their availability every time they are called upon to address issues related to the situation in my country and in the Great Lakes region.

My delegation wishes to express its appreciation for the report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of the Framework agreement, which Mr. Huang Xia, Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for the Great Lakes Region, introduced earlier. We welcome him today and commend him for his sustained commitment. My delegation regrets, however, that the report was not made available earlier on the United Nations website, which would have been useful.

We take this opportunity, following the briefing, to make a few key observations. I would like to briefly take up the topic of the political, security, humanitarian and human rights situation, and then conclude with some remarks on the implementation of the Framework agreement.

At the political level, the situation in the Great Lakes region remains driven by the new momentum of the diplomatic efforts made since early 2019 by Mr. João Manuel Gonçalves Lourenço, President of Angola; Mr. Félix Antoine Tshilombo Tshisekedi, President of the Democratic Republic of the Congo; Mr. Yoweri Kaguta Museveni, President of Uganda; and Mr. Paul Kagame, President of Rwanda. Their efforts have significantly contributed to easing tensions in the region, thereby strengthening relations

among their countries and restoring confidence among their Governments.

Despite the difficult context of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19), the four Heads of State have adapted to the new normal and held a mini-summit via video-teleconference, on 7 October, at the initiative of the President of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, in order to maintain the spirit of dialogue initiated at the start of 2019 as the main path for the easing of tensions and pacification in the African Great Lakes region.

The actions carried out by national and foreign armed groups, peace and security in the region, diplomatic relations, as well as economic recovery in the current context of combating COVID-19, were the main topics of discussion of the Heads of State mini-summit meeting. Indeed, in view of the troubling security situation in the region, the Heads of State not only condemned the actions of negative forces and armed groups operating in the Great Lakes region, but also reaffirmed their willingness to pool their efforts to eradicate them.

As part of diplomatic efforts to improve relations with and among all the countries of the Great Lakes region, President Tshisekedi visited his counterpart in the Republic of the Congo, Mr. Denis Sassou Nguesso, on 15 July. In addition, a delegation from the Democratic Republic of the Congo, led by Mrs. Marie Tumba Nzeza, Minister of State and Minister for Foreign Affairs, travelled to Bujumbura, Burundi, on 4 and 5 October, for a working visit within the framework of the second session of the bilateral ministerial consultation on peace and security between the Republic of Burundi and the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Moreover, the Secretary-General's report also highlights the efforts made by the Forces armées de la République démocratique du Congo (FARDC), in collaboration with the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO), to neutralize the armed groups still operating in the region. My delegation reassures the Council that those efforts will continue until those groups are totally eradicated, because peace and security remain critical factors for the stability of the Great Lakes region.

That is the reason for the President of the Republic's visit last week, from 5 to 8 October, to North Kivu province — to express his solidarity and support for the hard-pressed population in the east of the country,

as well as his determination to restore peace there. That is also why the FARDC's offensive operations against armed groups in the provinces of North and South Kivu must be enhanced, in accordance with the commitment made by the President of the Republic and Head of State bringing peace and stability to the region.

These large-scale military operations, launched on 30 October 2019, enabled the FARDC to seize several bases of the Allied Democratic Forces and significantly weaken several other armed groups, both national and foreign. These Government and FARDC efforts have produced compelling results, but insecurity remains. In its distress, the enemy has even increased retaliatory attacks against the civilian population.

In order to enhance its offensive and increase pressure on the residual armed groups, my country hopes to, first, strengthen the offensive capacities of MONUSCO, in general, and of the Force Intervention Brigade, in particular; secondly, secure the collaboration of the countries of the region and; thirdly, garner the support of the international community in the fight against the illicit exploitation and trafficking of minerals from the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

With regard to the strengthening of the offensive capacities of MONUSCO and its Force Intervention Brigade, as we have already stressed to the Council, the wish of the Democratic Republic of the Congo is to see enhanced collaboration on the ground within MONUSCO units and with the FARDC in order to secure sufficient firepower to effectively protect the population and restore peace, security and full State authority throughout the national territory, including in localities with an armed group presence.

In his address to his counterparts on 7 October, regarding the collaboration of the countries of the region, President Tshisekedi called on them to pool their efforts and take constructive measures to jointly overcome obstacles and challenges for the benefit of the people of the four countries, insisting that

“in the current context, there is no alternative to pooling our efforts to meet these numerous challenges and putting an end to the recurrent cycles of armed violence that threaten the security of the States and people of the region”.

The illegal exploitation of natural resources in the Democratic Republic of the Congo has consequences for peace and security in the region and for the

protection of the environment. The support of the international community in the fight against the illegal exploitation of the country's minerals — which is the main cause of instability and violence in the east of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, a source of mistrust and tension among the countries of the region and the main source of funding for the illicit activities of armed groups — is crucial.

All actors — countries of origin, individuals, companies, civil society, transit countries and destination countries — have for quite a few years been involved in and are responsible for this flourishing traffic. We will never win the battle for peace in the Great Lakes region if armed groups are not cut off from the livelihoods that allow them to continue their harmful activities. Resolution 2502 (2019) called on the Office of the Special Envoy and MONUSCO to work with all stakeholders to reach a solution to stop the cross-border flow of armed combatants and the illicit exploitation and trade of minerals.

Against the backdrop of combating illegality, my delegation welcomes the reaffirmed willingness of the four Heads of State to campaign for strengthening the capacities of existing mechanisms in the subregion in order to cut off the negative force of sources of financing for armed groups' activities and jointly combat both regional and international mafia networks that contribute to the exploitation of and illicit trade in natural resources in the Great Lakes region. Further, my delegation would like to reiterate President Tshisekedi Tshilombo's appeal to the international community at the General Assembly to ensure that appropriate, targeted and effective sanctions are applied to those armed groups and mafia networks, which, through their harmful activities, are also wiping out all efforts to preserve and sustainably manage biodiversity and the protected areas located in the eastern part of our country.

Beyond these options involving military pressure, my delegation considers it necessary that all countries of the region be able to join non-military mechanisms. In this regard, the Democratic Republic of the Congo is engaged in discussions with some armed groups, some of which have already signed cessation of hostilities agreements with the Government and laid down their arms. The Government reiterates its appeal to all other armed groups that continue to hesitate to follow suit and lay down their arms.

The issue of human rights violations and restrictions on democratic spaces is at the heart of the actions of the President of the Republic who, since coming to power, has committed himself to working to promote the rule of law. This commitment has already been translated into action through the implementation of several measures. Indeed, in the quest to improve the human rights and social justice situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the Government, working under the leadership of the Head of State, has achieved a great deal. The political will to promote human rights, in accordance with the constitutional requirement to guarantee respect for and defence and promotion of all human rights, has been sufficiently demonstrated and the Government continues to implement its programme on the subject, with particular emphasis on fighting corruption and strengthening the rule of law.

The humanitarian situation in the region is dominated by the coronavirus pandemic and the problem of displaced persons and refugees. In order to contain the spread of the coronavirus disease, countries of the region reacted quickly with effective prevention measures. They are mobilizing to fight the pandemic by putting in place shared protective mechanisms, which was reaffirmed by the Heads of State of countries of the region at the mini-summit held on 7 October. Furthermore, it should be noted that the displacement of populations remains one of the main factors of insecurity and instability in the region, hence the importance, as stated by the Secretary-General in his report, of redoubling efforts to find durable solutions for refugees and displaced persons in line with the recommendations of the high-level ministerial meeting on the situation of refugees in the Great Lakes region held in Kampala in March 2019.

The Democratic Republic of the Congo remains committed to the Framework agreement, which it considers to be the way forward as it is the best regional strategy to follow to definitively end the situation of instability that has affected the region for quite a few years and for which it continues to pay a heavy price, with several million deaths. The implementation of this mechanism will also make it possible to avoid incursions by both sides into the territories of neighbouring countries, as described by the Secretary-General in paragraphs 5 to 12 of his report.

For its part, the Democratic Republic of the Congo will continue to work to implement all its national, regional and international commitments

under the Framework agreement and assume its share of responsibility in ensuring that peace and harmony return fully to the region. In this regard, as noted by the Secretary-General in paragraphs 36 to 38 of the report under consideration, the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo has taken concrete steps to implement its national commitments under the agreement. Several examples were cited, including the renewal by the Government of the national stabilization and reconstruction programme for areas emerging from armed conflict, with a view to further consolidating State authority, and the continuation by the Government and MONUSCO of dialogue at the community level in Ituri, as part of the implementation of the agreement signed with the Front de résistance patriotique de l'Ituri on 28 February for its disarmament, demobilization and reintegration.

Also, as part of its ongoing efforts to engage the region in the implementation of the provisions of the Framework agreement, on 19 October the Democratic Republic of the Congo will host the tenth summit of the Regional Oversight Mechanism as a video-conference, owing to the coronavirus pandemic. The meeting was initially scheduled to take place in Kinshasa on 28 October 2020. It is during this summit that His Excellency Mr. Félix-Antoine Tshisekedi Tshilombo, President of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, will assume the presidency of the Regional Mechanism.

In conclusion, allow me to reaffirm that the Government and the people of the Democratic Republic of the Congo remain committed to the Addis Ababa Framework agreement in which they have placed much hope. The Democratic Republic would like to take this opportunity to call on the countries of the region and the guarantors of the Framework agreement to take advantage of the regional momentum observed in recent months to implement the commitments that they have all undertaken. It should be noted that if the provisions of the Framework agreement are turned into concrete action, they will enable the region, through a logic of integration, to better manage peace and security issues, including and especially, cooperation and development issues. It is high time, indeed more than high time, that we offer the people of the Great Lakes region the well-being, peace and economic development to which they aspire.

The meeting rose at 11.40 a.m.