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New York

Provisional

President: Mr. Fernandes (Mozambique)

Members:

Albania	Mr. Hoxha
Brazil	Mr. De Almeida Filho
China	Mr. Dai Bing
Ecuador	Mr. Montalvo Sosa
France	Mr. De Rivière
Gabon	Mr. Biang
Ghana	Ms. Barnor
Japan	Mr. Ishikane
Malta	Mr. Camilleri
Russian Federation	Ms. Evstigneeva
Switzerland	Mr. Hauri
United Arab Emirates	Mr. Abushahab
United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland . .	Mr. Eckersley
United States of America	Mr. Wood

Agenda

The situation concerning the Democratic Republic of the Congo

Report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Organization
Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (S/2023/208)

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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

Report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (S/2023/208)

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

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite Ms. Bintou Keita, Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, to participate in this meeting.

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/2023/208, 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. Keita.

Ms. Keita (*spoke in French*): First of all, I would like to thank members for the opportunity to present the Secretary-General's report (S/2023/208) on the situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. I also welcome the Permanent Representative of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Mr. Georges Nzongola-Ntalaja, the Permanent Representative of the Republic of Rwanda and the Permanent Representative of the Republic of Burundi to today's meeting.

Since my previous briefing to the Council (see S/PV.9215), there has again been a marked deterioration in the security situation in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo. An intensification of the conflict with the Mouvement du 23 mars (M-23) and the persistent activity of other armed groups, such as the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF), the Zaire and the Coopérative pour le développement du Congo

(CODECO), to name only a few, continue to inflict unbearable suffering on civilians and exacerbate the increasingly tragic humanitarian situation. In North Kivu, South Kivu and Ituri, hundreds of thousands of people have fled the abuses of armed groups and the clashes between M-23 and the Forces armées de la République démocratique du Congo (FARDC) and between CODECO and the Zaire. In North Kivu in particular, clashes between the M-23 and the FARDC have forced 900,000 people to flee their homes. The already considerable humanitarian needs in the Democratic Republic of the Congo continue to increase. The humanitarian crisis remains one of the most neglected in the world.

The displaced persons whom I visited live in extremely dangerous conditions. I also take this opportunity to call for the mobilization of the necessary resources for the implementation of the 2023 humanitarian response plan, which requires \$2.25 billion. I condemn the persistent obstacles to humanitarian access, such as the attack on a United Nations Humanitarian Air Service helicopter in February, which forced the World Food Programme to temporarily suspend its flights in conflict zones. I call upon all parties to the conflict to respect international humanitarian law and facilitate humanitarian access to vulnerable people, wherever they are located. With regard to the issue of displaced persons, I would like to focus on the particularly dangerous situation in which women find themselves. To ensure protection that is tailored to their needs, funding for the 2023 national plan for the prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse is essential. More than \$2 million is required to support those activities, especially in the areas affected by the M-23 crisis. Among the initiatives currently under way, I welcome the creation of a victim support fund and the provision of psychological assistance to women by the World Health Organization.

(spoke in English)

In response to those immense security and humanitarian challenges, the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) is working tirelessly in hostile environments to fulfil its mandate. Our efforts are focused on supporting the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo in the execution of its core responsibility for the protection of civilians, as well as for the disarmament and demobilization

of armed groups and the implementation of security sector reform.

With regard to the protection of civilians, MONUSCO has remained firmly engaged with the Congolese armed forces in the discharge of its key strategic priority of protecting civilians through a wide range of actions, including joint patrols, fire support, information-sharing, intelligence-gathering and logistical support. Our force has adopted an agile posture, allowing for the quick redeployment of troops in response to early-warning alerts and outbreaks of violence.

In Ituri, armed groups of CODECO, the ADF and the Zaire have taken advantage of the FARDC's shift in focus towards Masisi and Rutshuru against the M-23. MONUSCO set up static combat units in Kambala and Bokuku to address the rising insecurity in Djugu territory, facilitate the movements of displaced people and secure humanitarian corridors. I urge the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo to reinforce its military and police deployments in Ituri and pursue efforts to address the grave threat to civilians posed by the armed groups operating in the province.

The Mission also responded quickly to improvised explosive device terrorist attacks by the ADF in Beni territory by providing demining support and through the medical evacuation of injured civilians. In South Kivu, the Mission provided dedicated protection to the displaced populations in Bijombo and Mikenge. I would like to stress that the effectiveness of MONUSCO's protection depends to a large extent on close and transparent collaboration with the FARDC and the foreign forces that are deployed in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, either bilaterally or under the East African Community regional force, in order to ensure optimal planning and coordination, mutual safety and human rights protection. The year 2022 was one of the deadliest on record for MONUSCO peacekeepers. MONUSCO is operating in an increasingly complex, volatile and dangerous environment. Far too many of our United Nations peacekeepers are paying the ultimate price. I want to pay tribute to the sacrifices made by our forces and once again express my condolences following the death of a South African Blue Helmet during the attack on a MONUSCO helicopter near Goma in February.

Military operations alone will not provide stability in eastern Congo. I commend the regional efforts

under way, such as the third phase of Nairobi process consultations, the Luanda process mini-summits and the successive holding of summit meetings by the East African Community and the African Union Peace and Security Council. Through the stewardship of regional bodies, the Nairobi and Luanda peace processes are being tailored to foster efforts to find sustainable solutions to the conflict in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo. I call on the Council to lend its full weight to those efforts by encouraging the parties to abide by their commitments and ensuring that recalcitrant actors are held to account. I commend former President Kenyatta, as facilitator, for launching the preparations for the fourth stage of the Nairobi process, and Angola's President Lourenço, as Chair of the International Conference on Great Lakes Region, mandated by the African Union, for deciding to deploy an Angolan contingent to support the ad hoc verification mechanism and the M-23 cantonment.

Tomorrow, 30 March, is the last day granted by the regional initiatives for the M-23 to withdraw to the vicinity of Mount Sabinyo, at the border with Rwanda and Uganda. The FARDC and the Angolan army have jointly identified locations for their cantonment. While the M-23 has withdrawn from some of its positions, it is still in control of large portions of Masisi, Rutshuru and Nyiragongo territories, in violation of the Luanda communiqué. I am once again calling on it to fully comply with the Luanda communiqué. The territorial integrity and sovereignty of the Democratic Republic of the Congo must be respected by all in the region. While insecurity spreads, the tensions between the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Rwanda have continued to increase, resulting in several cross-border incidents. Those confrontations pose a severe risk of regional escalation.

(spoke in French)

In a context of insecurity and humanitarian crisis, the Democratic Republic of the Congo is preparing for general elections, scheduled for 20 December. I commend the dedication of the Congolese authorities and the Independent National Electoral Commission in their determination to meet the deadlines in the face of logistical challenges, and especially in the face of insecurity. In eastern Congo, the violence, clashes and population displacements, and the problem of the areas under the control of the M-23, are serious obstacles to the task of registering voters. In the west of the country, intercommunal violence in Mai-Ndombe

province, which is still going on, is also a hindrance to the process. In the light of those challenges and in line with its mandate, MONUSCO, in partnership with United Nations agencies, is supporting the electoral process and has responded by transporting 126 tons of electoral material for the Electoral Commission to North Kivu, South Kivu and Ituri. MONUSCO is also supporting the inclusiveness and proper conduct of the electoral process through engagements with prospective candidates and civil society.

I welcome the efforts of the Electoral Commission, which is endeavouring to address the operational challenges of voter registration by extending registration periods, imposing sanctions to deter malpractice on the part of its agents and denouncing hate speech. However, the electoral process is still marked by a worrying lack of trust between the main stakeholders in civil society and the opposition, and has even led to a call for a boycott of the voter registration by part of the opposition. I reiterate my appeal to all Congolese stakeholders to work together to ensure a peaceful, transparent, credible and inclusive electoral process in strict compliance with the Constitution and electoral law. I reiterate the Mission's readiness, through its mandate to use its good offices, to support them in that regard.

(spoke in English)

On 24 March, President Tshisekedi Tshilombo reshuffled his Government. I wish his new Administration success in implementing its programme. In addition to supporting the protection of civilians, MONUSCO remains committed to supporting the Government's disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR) and security-sector reform efforts. The Demobilization, Disarmament, Community Recovery and Stabilization Programme is the flagship DDR initiative in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and MONUSCO is mandated to support it as a priority. While the Mission is assisting the development of screening and vetting mechanisms for ex-combatants, I encourage the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo to remain firm in banning amnesty and army reintegration for those responsible for serious human rights violations. That will be essential to restore trust between the populations and State institutions. Greater complementarity must be promoted between the Programme and the national transitional justice process, with national consultations under way.

Similarly, the Demobilization, Disarmament, Community Recovery and Stabilization Programme cannot succeed without security-sector reform. I urge the new Government to invest in the operationalization of those processes, without which there can be no progress in stabilizing eastern Congo. Successful security-sector reform is also necessary to enable MONUSCO's exit strategy and the transition to a new partnership with the United Nations. It will enable the deployment of the security forces and adequate financial resources required to re-establish State authority and swiftly implement development programmes, as well as to uphold human rights and foster community reconciliation. The Mission's departure from Tanganyika illustrates what can be achieved with the necessary resolve. MONUSCO supported the deployment of 174 police officers to enable the successful handover of Bendera camp to the Congolese National Police in February. However, a stronger presence of Congolese security forces is required to avoid protection gaps. While United Nations agencies have mobilized resources to consolidate peace through joint projects, Government-led development and reconciliation efforts are still badly needed to sustain peace and stability.

(spoke in French)

In conclusion, I would like to thank the Council for its continued support to the Democratic Republic of the Congo and for its visit from 9 to 13 March, which demonstrated United Nations solidarity and mobilization in the face of the security, electoral and structural challenges in the country. I note that it was quickly followed by a visit from the African Union Peace and Security Council, demonstrating the solidarity and commitment of the region. I also welcome the Pope's visit to Kinshasa from 31 January to 3 February, which brought messages of peace and reconciliation in these difficult times for the country.

Finally, my thanks once again go to all the troop- and police-contributing countries and their personnel, and to the national and international civilian staff of the Mission. I commend their continuous efforts in support of the national and provincial authorities and the defence and security forces in the implementation of our mandate in a particularly difficult context.

The President: I thank Ms. Keita for her briefing.

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

Mr. De Rivière (France) (*spoke in French*): I thank the Special Representative for her briefing, and I would like to emphasize three points.

First, we must consolidate our efforts to guarantee the integrity and sovereignty of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. For more than a year, the actions of the Mouvement du 23 mars (M-23), an armed group sanctioned by the Security Council and the European Union, have been destabilizing the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo. In recent days, the M-23 has withdrawn from a number of positions, notably around Sake. Those initial disengagements must continue in accordance with the Luanda process agreed by the African Union. As President Macron recalled during his visit to Kinshasa on 4 March, the steps that were agreed by all must be carried out: respect for the ceasefire and the verification thereof under Angolan supervision; the cantonment of the M-23; the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration process; and the deployment of regional forces. All external support to the M-23 and the other armed groups active on Congolese territory must cease immediately.

The Luanda and Nairobi processes must mutually reinforce each other. France welcomes the efforts of the East African Community regional force, whose deployment must continue in the areas liberated by the M-23 withdrawal. France also welcomes the upcoming dispatch of an Angolan contingent to secure the M-23 cantonment areas and protect the ad hoc verification mechanism. We also condemn the attacks carried out by the armed groups of the Allied Democratic Forces and the *Coopérative pour le développement du Congo*, as well as the ongoing activities of the *Forces démocratiques de libération du Rwanda*. All the combatants must disarm.

Secondly, all the actors on the ground must work together to protect civilians and the most vulnerable. The United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) and the Congolese armed forces must work together with the regional forces in a coherent and coordinated manner to protect civilians. France calls on the Secretary-General and Member States to provide MONUSCO with the necessary means to implement its mandate. MONUSCO also needs to be able to support the deployment of the East African Community regional force. We call for continued support to be provided to the Congolese authorities so that they can assume their primary responsibility of protecting civilians. That same

spirit of partnership must also be given a priority in the humanitarian response. During its visit to the Bushagara camp, the Council noted that outstanding efforts are being made by the different actors working together, in particular the United Nations actors. More sites must be made available by the Congolese authorities to receive refugees and displaced persons. France, which is engaged in the response to the humanitarian emergency in Goma, will provide €34 million in aid to meet the needs of the most vulnerable populations. As part of the European Union's humanitarian airlift, three flights have brought in 100 tons of cargo, including emergency shelters, hygiene kits and medicines. The European Union will provide €50 million in humanitarian aid to the Democratic Republic of the Congo in 2023.

Thirdly, progress must continue in the area of justice and in preparing for the elections scheduled to be held in December. Progress has been made in the fight against impunity. I refer specifically to the law adopted last December for the protection and reparation of victims of sexual violence. Efforts must also continue to be made to ensure transitional justice, protect human rights and combat hate speech and incitement to violence.

In conclusion, France reaffirms its support for the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo in organizing transparent, free and inclusive elections within the time frame provided for by the Constitution. Major efforts have been made to incite voter registration. MONUSCO is providing logistical support. The International Organization of la Francophonie is also working, at the request of the Independent National Electoral Commission, to provide support to the institutions and civil society involved in the electoral cycle. The right conditions must be in place for the proper holding of elections throughout the territory of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The Democratic Republic of Congo must not be allowed to fall victim to war. A path to peace is possible if everyone shoulders their responsibilities.

Mr. Eckersley(United Kingdom): I thank the Special Representative for her very helpful briefing and for all the support she and her team gave to the Security Council on our recent visit to the Democratic Republic of the Congo, during which we saw at first hand the severity of the security crisis in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo, as well as the extremely difficult context in which the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the

Congo (MONUSCO) is operating. We also saw some of the tragic human cost. The United Kingdom remains deeply concerned about the intensifying violence and the deteriorating humanitarian situation in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo. We strongly condemn the continuing advance across North Kivu province of the United Nations-sanctioned Mouvement du 23 mars (M-23), an illegal armed group. The resumption of violence has caused significant human suffering and displaced more than 800,000 people since March 2022. We strongly condemn the violence perpetrated by all other armed groups. All support for armed groups must stop, including external support for the M-23, and we call on all the parties to exert any influence they have to de-escalate the situation.

We welcome the indications of M-23 withdrawal and the handing over of locations to the East African Community regional force, but any withdrawal must be complete and in line with the agreed process based on the Luanda road map. Now is the time, as we heard from the Special Representative. We reiterate our full support for regional diplomatic efforts, including the Nairobi and Luanda processes. The United Kingdom urges all the parties to respect the commitments made under those processes, including with respect to the withdrawal of the M-23, an end to all support for armed groups and stopping the use of incendiary hate speech. The regional and bilateral forces deployed in the Democratic Republic of the Congo — including the East African Community regional force, the Uganda People's Defence Forces, the Burundi National Defence Force and the recently announced Angolan troop deployment — must engage with each other and with MONUSCO substantively on the de-confliction of their operations. That is critical to ensuring the protection of civilians, the safety and security of peacekeepers and the effective implementation of MONUSCO's mandate.

The United Kingdom fully supports MONUSCO, including its vital role in protecting civilians and facilitating humanitarian assistance. We commend the Mission and the Special Representative for their work in challenging circumstances, but MONUSCO cannot tackle that crisis alone. The effective cooperation of the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo with MONUSCO is vital to ensure that the Mission can implement its mandate, in particular with respect to the protection of civilians. We encourage the Government to engage in a serious dialogue with MONUSCO to clarify how we might achieve a responsible, conditions-

based reconfiguration of the United Nations presence in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. We look forward to receiving options for that in July. The Government must also do its work with MONUSCO on critical pillars of the peace process, such as the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration process and security sector reform.

We must come together as a Council to give a very simple message. The violence must stop to give dialogue a chance to succeed. That is the only way to build confidence and provide a lasting resolution to the crisis in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Mr. Montalvo Sosa (Ecuador) (*spoke in Spanish*): I would like to thank Ms. Bintou Keita, Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO), and I welcome the participation in today's meeting of the Permanent Representatives of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Burundi and Rwanda.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the Permanent Representatives of France and Gabon for their leadership in organizing the Security Council's visit from 9 to 12 March to Kinshasa and Goma, which reflected the Council members' commitment to continuing to work to overcome the challenges posed by the situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. For Ecuador, it was also a valuable and unique opportunity to take a close, objective and transparent look at some of the country's needs, challenges and opportunities. We are grateful for the openness shown to us by members of the national authorities, civil society and the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) in terms of access to information, which has given us a much better understanding than usual of what we read in the reports that the Council receives.

We recognize the work done by the Independent National Electoral Commission in the voter registration period for the 2023 elections. We are encouraged by the efforts that have been made to increase women's participation and call for that type of initiative to be stepped up in the light of the women and peace and security agenda. We remain concerned about the effect on the population of the deteriorating security conditions and the possibility that this could put the upcoming elections in jeopardy. We therefore urge all the actors involved to continue working to ensure free, transparent

and inclusive elections, as the only mechanism that can enable the transition to a lasting peace.

Ecuador condemns the continuing attacks on the civilian population by various armed groups, such as the Allied Democratic Forces, the *Coopérative pour le développement du Congo*, the *Mouvement du 23 mars*, the *Mayi-Mayi* and others, and we acknowledge the enormous work that MONUSCO is doing to monitor and provide information about them within the Mission's main areas of operations in the provinces of Ituri, North Kivu and South Kivu. We believe it is crucial to ensure that the Mission has the necessary resources to do that work in order to guarantee humanitarian access and assistance for the protection of civilians. This morning Ms. Keita gave us a comprehensive report on these issues, all of which require unwavering attention on the part of the Council. Nor can we remain indifferent to the violence in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The high levels of abuses and human rights violations, with 844 reported cases, of which at least 628 involve summary and extrajudicial executions, 11 of them involving women and 52 involving children, show that the situation in the country is an emergency.

Finally, and as was noted during the visit to the Democratic Republic of the Congo that I touched on at the beginning of my statement, neither can the Council ignore that there are factors originating in Rwanda that could exacerbate tensions. We therefore urge that any existing differences be resolved through dialogue and established conflict-resolution mechanisms, one of which is the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework Agreement for the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Great Lakes Region for the east of the country.

Mr. Abushahab (United Arab Emirates): I would like to begin by thanking Special Representative Keita for her briefing and welcoming the participation of the Permanent Representatives of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Rwanda and Burundi in today's meeting.

The Security Council's visit to the Democratic Republic of the Congo provided an opportunity for the United Arab Emirates to reinforce its commitment to the Democratic Republic of the Congo and its people, promote regional dialogue and de-escalation, and support the efforts of the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) at this critical time. The United Arab Emirates commends the important work that

Ms. Keita and other United Nations personnel have undertaken on the ground in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. We also thank the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the United Nations Secretariat for ensuring a successful visit, as well as France and Gabon for co-leading the mission.

The Council's visit was an opportunity to appreciate first-hand the work of MONUSCO peacekeepers as they carry out daunting but necessary tasks in a complex and often perilous landscape. The current situation is deeply concerning, and the insecurity in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo continues to deepen. The ongoing attacks by armed groups are targeting civilians and forcefully displacing hundreds of thousands of people. The *Mouvement du 23 mars* (M-23) and other armed groups represent a serious threat to the Democratic Republic of the Congo as well as to peace and security across the wider region. We also condemn the M-23's violations of the ceasefire. All armed groups, including the M-23, should immediately cease their hostilities and unconditionally lay down their weapons.

This is a pivotal moment for the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and the Council's focus should be on the security and safety of civilians, especially women and children. The Council's visit has firmly cemented my country's belief in an approach that simultaneously addresses the causes and symptoms of insecurity, while also prioritizing the protection of civilians. Following our visit to the Democratic Republic of the Congo, I would like to emphasize three key takeaways.

First, regional dialogue is essential to meeting the Congolese people's aspirations for peace and prosperity. We commend the efforts of regional leaders within the framework of the Nairobi and Luanda processes and their work to harmonize those peacemaking endeavours. The United Arab Emirates supports regional efforts that promote political dialogue and advance security and stability, such as the deployment of the East African Community regional force. For those efforts to bear fruit, the de-escalation of tensions is more important than ever. To that end, we echo the call for the implementation of the Addis Ababa Framework Agreement by its signatory States made by the African Union Peace and Security Council in its communiqué of 17 February.

Secondly, protection efforts must be prioritized to ensure long-term stability. MONUSCO's work is vital

to protecting women and girls and local communities from sexual and gender-based violence. Women's participation in peace efforts is a key driver of long-term stability. It is only when women are protected from violence that they can participate fully, equally and meaningfully in conflict management and peacebuilding efforts, and we encourage MONUSCO to make additional efforts to that end.

Thirdly, we are concerned about the ongoing spread of hate speech, disinformation and misinformation against both MONUSCO and the United Nations more broadly. We reiterate our call for MONUSCO to strengthen its efforts to counter hate speech and disinformation. The Security Council can and should support those efforts.

In addition, the disarmament, demobilization, reintegration and stabilization programme must be fully implemented, along with other projects aimed at reforming the security sector. Failed efforts have only exacerbated the conflict, and effective reintegration policies can further encourage members of the armed groups to lay down their weapons and re-enter civilian life. In that regard, MONUSCO's role is critical, particularly its work with all stakeholders to support social cohesion and resilience in communities. As we approach the elections, the armed groups must cease hostilities and renounce violence. We should continue to promote conditions conducive to a peaceful environment and support credible elections in which all Congolese can have their voices heard.

Finally, I want to address the appalling humanitarian situation in the east of the country. The Council's visit to the Bushangara internally displaced persons camp near Goma was a sobering reminder of the extremely dire situation facing millions of people who have been displaced from their homes and communities. It was also a clear example of the consequences that manifest themselves when international humanitarian law is not respected. It is imperative that all who bear arms adhere to their obligations and refrain from targeting civilians or civilian objects. Likewise, the successful delivery of aid requires the safety and protection of humanitarian workers. We must all recommit to meeting the urgent humanitarian needs of displaced persons and ensure that they have access to basic services.

For the United Arab Emirates, the Security Council's visit to the Democratic Republic of the Congo highlighted the work that remains to be done in order

to consolidate peace in the country and the greater engagement and cooperation among key stakeholders necessary to achieve that objective. The Council must continue to engage with all partners in promoting efforts to achieve stability in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the wider region.

Mr. Wood (United States of America): I thank Special Representative of the Secretary-General Keita for her briefing today. I also thank her for hosting the Security Council during its visit to the Democratic Republic of the Congo earlier this month. The visit gave us not only valuable insight into the important work of the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO), but also a deeper and more sobering understanding of the deteriorating humanitarian and security situation in the east.

The United States welcomes the initiative and commitment of regional partners, specifically those participating in the East African Community-led Nairobi process and the Luanda process, and we recognize the modest progress made to date towards the implementation of the commitments agreed in prior communiqués. The United States calls on all parties to act expeditiously to meet those commitments in full.

The United States reiterates its call on Rwanda to end support for the United Nations-sanctioned Mouvement du 23 mars (M-23) and urges Council members to consider how that kind of support runs afoul of the existing sanctions regimes. We remind all States of the importance of the territorial integrity of States as one of the founding principles of the Charter of the United Nations — something that the Security Council is working hard to protect. That is not to imply that Rwanda is solely responsible for the conflict. Rather, the M-23 and Rwanda's actions have escalated an already troubling humanitarian and security situation.

The United States has long been concerned by the collaboration of the Forces armées de la République démocratique du Congo with armed groups in the east, especially the Forces démocratiques de libération du Rwanda. Just as we stated on numerous previous occasions, we reiterate our call on the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo to fully professionalize its security forces and immediately end cooperation with armed groups.

It has become very clear that the level of disinformation and hateful rhetoric directed towards

Rwanda, minority groups and MONUSCO is increasingly putting civilians and peacekeepers in harm's way. While in Kinshasa, I called on officials of the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo to denounce hate speech, hold individuals accountable for inciting violence and correct such damaging narratives. I repeat those messages today. We also remain deeply troubled by the increasing number of attacks by the Islamic State in Iraq and the Sham-Democratic Republic of the Congo, also known as the Allied Democratic Forces, and the *Coopérative pour le développement du Congo* against civilians. The Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and its regional and international partners cannot neglect that ongoing violence.

In that very difficult environment, MONUSCO has been working to carry out its mandate, including providing limited logistics support to the Independent National Electoral Commission (CENI) of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, as officially requested. I was encouraged to learn that CENI had been closely coordinating with MONUSCO. That partnership will help to enable a timely and comprehensive voter registration process in preparation for elections later this year. The Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo should ensure free and fair elections in accordance with constitutional deadlines.

MONUSCO and the Democratic Republic of the Congo also continue to work together on the Mission's benchmark-driven transition plan. I remind the authorities of the Democratic Republic of the Congo of their responsibility to work closely with the United Nations leadership to fulfil those benchmarks so that MONUSCO can safely and responsibly withdraw at an appropriate time. The Democratic Republic of the Congo and the United Nations country team must work together to ensure that essential functions, including promoting human rights and ensuring accountability, continue before, during and, most important, after that transition.

Similarly, we remind the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo of the Security Council's request for a confidential report on weapons- and ammunition-management efforts following the Council's easing of sanctions in December of last year. That report will provide valuable insight into the Government's capacities and enable the international community to assist in the prevention of small-arms trafficking and diversion.

The United States offers its full support to Special Representative of the Secretary-General Keita and her team as they execute their mandate amid increasingly difficult circumstances. MONUSCO will not resolve the conflict on its own, and no one should expect as much. But supported by, and in coordination with, the Nairobi and Luanda processes, and alongside the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Rwanda, neighbouring States and the United Nations, MONUSCO can play an important role. I thank Ms. Keita for her commitment to bringing peace to the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the broader Great Lakes region.

Mr. Biang (Gabon) (*spoke in French*): I have the honour to deliver this statement on behalf of the three African members of the Security Council (A3), namely, Ghana, Mozambique and my country, Gabon. I take this opportunity to commend the significant work of Ms. Bintou Keita, Special Representative of the Secretary-General, which the Council witnessed directly during its recent mission to the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Her comprehensive briefing provides us with additional information, which allows for a better understanding of the activities of the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) and the situation in the country. I also welcome the presence of the Permanent Representatives of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Rwanda and the Republic of Burundi at this meeting. Our statement will focus on four points, namely, security, political, economic and humanitarian issues.

The A3 is especially concerned about the deteriorating security situation, particularly in the Ituri and Kivu provinces, owing to the recurring attacks by armed groups. The eastern part of the Democratic Republic of the Congo is continuously experiencing an escalation in killings and unprecedented violence, indiscriminately targeting children and women. That violence, primarily perpetrated by the armed groups of the *Mouvement du 23 mars* (M-23), the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF) and the *Coopérative pour le développement du Congo* (CODECO) and other rebel groups, has brought back a climate of terror among the population.

For 25 years, the Democratic Republic of the Congo has been suffocating under the yoke of local and foreign armed groups, with more than 10 million deaths. Young Congolese have been sacrificed, deprived of education and forcibly enrolled in armed groups, while women

are regularly victims of sexual violence. Mass pillaging and abuse in Kishishe in November 2022, and more recently in Beni on 9 March, and the hostage-taking and massacre of a dozen people near Bunia on 26 March are prime illustrations of the notoriety of the armed groups raging in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The population in the eastern provinces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, who suffer an ongoing cycle of brutality, seems to be destined to an ominous fate.

The taking over of part of the Congolese territory by the M-23 and the resurgence in violence in the occupied areas has resulted in the mobilization of substantial Congolese resources and shaped the efforts of the Forces armées de la République démocratique du Congo in trying to curb the activities of that vile group. CODECO, the ADF and other armed groups have therefore increased their attacks against civilians, stepped up pillaging and intensified atrocities against the population by using increasingly sophisticated improvised explosive devices.

Gabon, Ghana and Mozambique condemn that brutality and demand an end to abuses against civilians, the withdrawal of all foreign armed groups from the occupied areas, compliance by local armed groups with the Nairobi process and the Disarmament, Demobilization, Community Recovery and Stabilization Programme and an immediate end to all external forces. The authority of the Congolese State must be restored in the eastern part of the country.

We call on the Democratic Republic of the Congo to continue its efforts for security sector reform. In that regard, the support of MONUSCO is crucial to ensuring a better protection of civilians. The A3 reiterates the need to provide the Mission with the human and material resources necessary to implement its mandate.

It is also important that MONUSCO's mandate be better understood, both by the Democratic Republic of the Congo and by the troop-contributing countries, with a view to enhanced coordination on the ground. In this regard, the A3 welcomes the invaluable contribution made by MONUSCO to the Congolese defence forces. We acknowledge its important contribution, particularly in the protection of civilians and respect for human rights.

We encourage efforts aimed at coordination, communication and cooperation between the authorities of the Democratic Republic and MONUSCO. We denounce the campaigns of disinformation and

misinformation directed in particular against MONUSCO and the East African regional force. We welcome the measures taken by MONUSCO to combat these scourges, as well as the active support of the International Organization of la Francophonie in setting up partnership projects between civil society organizations on such issues as fact-checking.

With regard to the MONUSCO transition, Gabon, Ghana and Mozambique reiterate the imperative need for an orderly gradual withdrawal in consultation with the Congolese authorities. The A3 welcomes the progress made by the Democratic Republic's Government in implementing the benchmarks defined in the joint transition plan.

At the regional level, the Nairobi and Luanda processes are African political solutions for ending the crisis that deserve to be supported by the entire international community. We welcome the visit by the African Union Peace and Security Council to the Democratic Republic, as well as the visit by the Security Council, on which we were briefed this morning.

Ghana, Mozambique and Gabon remain convinced that the political solution to the crisis in the Democratic Republic must give priority to and be based on regional processes. That is why the implementation of the priority actions contained in the Nairobi and Luanda agreements for the cessation of hostilities and the immediate withdrawal of the M-23 must be irreversibly implemented.

We welcome the deployment of the East African Community regional force and the support of the African Union Peace Fund, and we commend the troop-contributing countries for their commitment to promoting regional peace and security. The A3 believes that there is still an opportunity for peace and friendly relations between the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Rwanda, which can be facilitated by ongoing regional initiatives supported by the international community. We welcome the announcement of the deployment of an Angolan contingent within the framework of the verification mechanism and take note of the preparations for the next meeting in Nairobi. In this regard, we call on international partners to support peacemaking efforts in the Democratic Republic by providing financial, technical and material expertise to the regional process.

On the political front, the A3 notes with satisfaction the launch of the voter registration process and the

announcement on 13 March of the registration of 70 per cent of the expected voters, at least half of whom are women and youth. This high number of registered voters demonstrates the interest of the Congolese population in the electoral process. We also call on the country's authorities to do their utmost to hold peaceful, inclusive and credible elections in accordance with the Constitution and laws of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. We call on all Congolese political actors to participate in these elections in good faith.

Addressing the security crisis in the Democratic Republic leads us to the issue of the plundering of the country's natural resources, which is the main source of destabilization and the principal cause of the abuses against the population. The A3 emphasizes the importance of censuring all individuals and entities involved in the illicit trafficking of resources, which feeds the networks of armed groups and community tensions. The international community must not remain indifferent to the suffering of the Congolese people or to the tears of distress of women and children in the east of the country. For more than two decades, the eastern part of the Democratic Republic has been prey to the worst atrocities. It is time to end this chaotic humanitarian situation. We must all commit ourselves to this.

In conclusion, the A3 reiterates our support for the Government and the people of the Democratic Republic and for MONUSCO. We also reaffirm our commitment to respecting the territorial integrity, intangibility of borders and sovereignty of the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Mr. De Almeida Filho (Brazil): I thank Special Representative Keita for her insightful briefing. I also thank her for her full support during the Security Council's visit to Kinshasa and Goma.

I welcome the delegations of Burundi, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Rwanda to today's meeting.

This is the first Council meeting on the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) since our visit to the Democratic Republic following a hiatus of more than four years. It was high time to listen to the people on the ground in order to get a better grasp of the enormity of the crisis that that country is facing. I thank the Mozambican presidency and the

Permanent Representatives of France and Gabon for their timely initiatives.

It is needless to repeat how large and varied a country the Democratic Republic of the Congo is. It is needless to insist on how far away the bustling streets of Kinshasa seem from the mountains and lakes in the east. The reality that the Council's mission encountered across the whole country is indirectly or directly affected by the conflict in the eastern provinces. Conflict not only destroys lives and livelihoods, but it also drains resources that could be used for development and social investments. Above all, conflict prevents the Democratic Republic of the Congo from fully tapping into its human and natural resources.

Naturally, the impact is greater in the areas where illegal armed groups operate, such as North and South Kivu and Ituri. The Security Council mission witnessed the distress and despair of thousands of people displaced by the *Mouvement du 23 mars*.

Brazil reiterates the Security Council's call for all armed groups to lay down their arms and disband. Furthermore, all external support for illegal armed groups in the Democratic Republic of the Congo must stop.

Tackling security in its own territory and protecting its population is primarily a responsibility of the Congolese authorities. But the international community can support — and has supported for years — those efforts. During our visit to the Democratic Republic of the Congo, we witnessed the work of MONUSCO and United Nations agencies on the ground. We bore witness to the dedication and professionalism of people from many different nationalities and backgrounds working in difficult circumstances.

We remind the host country of its responsibility to ensure a safe environment for peacekeepers. We call in particular for an end to misinformation and disinformation directed against the United Nations presence, which can directly lead to acts of violence against Blue Helmets and Blue Berets, and to restrictions to their freedom of movement, without which it is impossible for them to adequately fulfil their mandate.

This is not to reject out of hand any criticism of the United Nations or of MONUSCO. On the contrary, the Security Council visited the Democratic Republic of the Congo precisely to hear what more can be done for the country. And, from what we have heard and

have seen, it is clear that we cannot deal with the crisis in the eastern part of the country in a business-as-usual manner.

In that regard, I am glad to say that the new MONUSCO Force Commander, Lieutenant General Otávio Rodrigues de Miranda Filho, has already started his new functions. At the same time, we have taken note of the arrival of new contingents of the East African Community regional forces. The constant diplomatic efforts of the neighbours of the Democratic Republic of the Congo in the Nairobi and the Luanda processes deserve the full support of the international community.

Those positive developments must not, however, make us overlook the worrisome trend of rising tensions between the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Rwanda. We urge both parties to refrain from acts that may exacerbate tensions and to commit to peaceful dialogue to resolve differences between them, including in the framework of the Luanda process.

After 30 years of the Organization's presence, MONUSCO's transition cannot be postponed indefinitely. But neither can it be rushed. The Mission's departure without meeting the benchmarks in the transition plan would bring about even greater hardship for the people in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo. I have in mind, in particular, the priority benchmarks of the transition plan discussed by the Mission and the Government representatives of the Democratic Republic of the Congo in the joint working group on the transition plan.

As preparations for the upcoming elections gather pace, the concerns of opposition parties must be addressed in accordance with the law. We hope that the elections will take place in an orderly and timely manner. May they set a new milestone towards a more stable and more prosperous future for the people of the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Mr. Ishikane (Japan): I would like to express my gratitude to Special Representative of the Secretary-General Keita for her briefing, and I also welcome the participation of representatives from the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Rwanda and Burundi.

Realizing sustainable peace and stability in the eastern part of the Democratic Republic of the Congo is essential for prosperity in the Great Lakes region and, indeed, in the entire African continent. The recent Security Council visit to the country was an opportunity

to reaffirm that conviction. Extensive meetings and the visit to Goma helped us understand the situation on the ground. Continued brutal human rights violations and abuses by numerous armed groups, the humanitarian crises they create and heightened regional tensions are our shared concern. The United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) has a vital role in alleviating people's suffering and facilitating the stabilization process, and Japan commends its continued dedication in volatile conditions.

To further our endeavour for sustainable peace in the region, I would like to highlight the following points relating to MONUSCO's strategic priorities today.

First and foremost, a cessation of hostilities and of any further advances by the Movement du 23 mars (M-23), as well as its withdrawal from all occupied areas, are a prerequisite for laying the ground for stabilizing this region. All external parties must immediately cease their support to the M-23. Japan welcomes ongoing regional initiatives such as the Nairobi process, led by the East African Community (EAC), as well as the Luanda process. The series of recent agreements require sincere implementation by all stakeholders. MONUSCO and EAC regional forces should closely coordinate and continue to monitor the implementation of those agreements.

Secondly, strengthening the rule of law is crucial. Listening to horrific stories in Goma directly from internally displaced persons (IDPs) fleeing from human rights violations and abuses was simply heartbreaking. The organized refugee and IDP camp has long exceeded capacity, yet vulnerable people continue to arrive. They should be able to settle in new camps under the Government's auspices. Regardless of the future course of MONUSCO, national security forces bear the primary responsibility for protecting civilians and ensuring social order. Security sector reform must proceed much more swiftly under national ownership while MONUSCO maintains its substantial presence on the ground.

Japan has been contributing to institution-building for more than 20 years in that sector. Our experts from the Japan International Cooperation Agency are working side by side with national police officers at their headquarters in Kinshasa. Our goal is to establish and expand credible community police systems by assisting

with technical training, infrastructure development and trust-building with local people.

Finally, solely military measures cannot break the cycle of violence. Tackling the illegal exploitation of the country's rich natural resources is another key challenge. We should further encourage regional and international cooperation to promote legitimate trade and tighten border controls to diminish the black market.

The facilitation of free and fair elections is also a vital step towards sustainable peace. Japan encourages the Democratic Republic of the Congo authorities to continue their efforts in the ongoing electoral process and MONUSCO to provide the necessary supports.

Japan remains committed to the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and we will continue working together with MONUSCO and all the countries of the region to achieve sustainable peace and stability.

Mr. Camilleri (Malta): I too thank Special Representative Keita for her detailed briefing today. I also welcome the representatives of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Rwanda and Burundi to today's meeting.

The recent visit of the Security Council to the Democratic Republic of the Congo was a tangible sign of our collective commitment to peace and stability in the eastern part of the country. The draft presidential statement that we agreed to is a step in the right direction.

As the Council listened to the authorities of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the people in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo, the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) and regional partners, it is clear that challenges continue. Entire generations have experienced only conflict and violence. We echo the Secretary-General's condemnation of the violence perpetrated by armed groups against civilians and his call for them to lay down their arms unconditionally.

We call on all parties to the conflict to respect their obligations under international humanitarian law. We also condemn all attacks against MONUSCO peacekeepers and express our condolences to the families of the victims. In the same vein, we urge all State actors to stop backing armed groups. We also underline the fact that the sovereignty and territorial

integrity of the Democratic Republic of the Congo must be respected.

The Movement du 23 mars (M-23), the Allied Democratic Forces, the Coopérative pour le développement du Congo and other armed groups keep ravaging a land rich in resources that should be a source of wealth for its people. It is crucial that efforts are made to tackle the conflict in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo. We urge authorities to continue tackling corruption, engaging in holistic security sector reform and doing their utmost to protect civilians.

We commend the Congolese armed forces for supporting age-verification assessments of more than 7,000 candidates for the armed forces. Vetting the codes of conduct is crucial for a professional and accountable security sector. We commend the extensive regional initiatives aimed at peace and stability in the country. Coordination with regional players remains key to ensure that all efforts to that end are mutually reinforcing. The full, equal and meaningful participation of women must also be supported at all levels. Furthermore, their safe participation as voters, candidates, observers and civil educators requires monitoring and reporting of violations and reprisals.

Malta strongly condemns sexual and gender-based violence against women and girls, including abductions and forced marriages. We urge the Government to develop, operationalize and resource the reparations fund for survivors of conflict-related sexual violence. Meanwhile, 30 per cent of the population requires humanitarian assistance and protection. We are concerned that M-23 offensives have caused the displacement of up to 800,000 people to Goma and its surroundings since March 2022. Through the extensive efforts of the European Union (EU), air bridges are now able to assist in alleviating the situation, while additional EU funds amounting to €47 million cover immediate needs, such as nutrition, health, water, sanitation, shelter and protection.

Malta commends the critical work of MONUSCO as it operates in an increasingly challenging environment. At the same time, the Mission continues to protect civilians and assist the authorities of the Democratic Republic of the Congo on multiple fronts. Gender must remain a cross-cutting consideration among the Mission's priority benchmarks. We also underline the need to redouble efforts to combat disinformation against MONUSCO. In view of the future Mission

reconfiguration and in order to ensure its success, troops must be appropriately equipped and ready to engage with a proactive and mobile posture. We also emphasize the Secretary-General's zero-tolerance policy on sexual exploitation and abuse.

I conclude by highlighting the fact that the elections scheduled to be held later this year are crucial and that process should lead us all to invest in breaking the cycle of violence. The people of the Democratic Republic of the Congo deserve an environment conducive to the realization of their aspirations.

Ms. Evstigneeva (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): We thank Special Representative of the Secretary-General Bintou Keita for her briefing. We also welcome the presence at this meeting of the Permanent Representatives of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Rwanda and Burundi. We are grateful to our colleagues, the Permanent Representatives of Gabon and France, for their briefing (see S/PV.9297) on the visit by the Security Council mission to the Democratic Republic of the Congo conducted from 9 to 12 March. We thank the Secretariat and the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) for organizing that important trip, which was extremely informative with regard to the processes under way in the country. We are grateful to the authorities of the Democratic Republic of the Congo for their warm welcome and their openness to holding frank and substantive discussions. We believe that it was especially important to be able to visit the eastern part of the country, in particular the city of Goma, the provincial capital of North Kivu, in the vicinity of which the situation remains tense. The Council's visit was particularly timely at this difficult juncture.

We are carefully following developments in the eastern part of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. We are deeply concerned about the most recent round of the crisis involving the renewed activity of the Mouvement du 23 mars (M-23). Its offensives have exacerbated the humanitarian crisis and have increased the number of internally displaced persons and refugees, human rights violations and the daily suffering of civilians. We note with concern that as the Government forces, MONUSCO and the East African Community (EAC) regional force have had to concentrate on containing the advance of the M-23, other groups, in particular the Allied Democratic Forces, the Coopérative pour le développement du Congo, the Mayi-Mayi, the

Forces démocratiques de libération du Rwanda and the Résistance pour un État de droit au Burundi, are taking advantage of the situation to strengthen their position in the east. The risk of escalating tensions between the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Rwanda is of the utmost concern.

We are convinced that the current top priority is to achieve a cessation of hostilities and launch an inclusive dialogue among all parties to the conflict. In that regard, we look forward to further effective steps being taken by neighbouring States in the framework of the Luanda and Nairobi processes, which seek to find joint solutions and a sustainable solution to the crisis. We welcome the commitment of the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo to conducting negotiations with armed groups on the political track of the Nairobi process, another round of which is planned to be held in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. We commend the efforts of the countries of the East African Community and the countries that have contributed troops to the EAC regional force. We also note the importance of linking and effectively coordinating the Nairobi and Luanda processes in order to create conditions for inter-Congolese dialogue and the restoration of relations between Kinshasa and Kigali. We hope that the understandings reached at the recent summits of the East African Community will contribute to normalizing the situation in the region and returning to the agreed framework, including the implementation of the Luanda road map.

We believe that we must continue to work towards the full implementation of the foundational 2013 Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework Agreement for the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Great Lakes Region. We support the work of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for the Great Lakes Region, Huang Xia, towards establishing inter-State dialogue in order to reduce tensions in that part of Africa. Political solutions will enable achieving a comprehensive cessation of hostilities and create the conditions necessary for sustainable stabilization. At the same time, we are convinced that Kinshasa must also redouble its efforts with regard to building its own effective armed forces and the reform of the country's security sector and other State institutions. Under the current challenging circumstances at both the international and regional levels, such increased efforts are critical for ensuring the country's adoption of its own independent foreign and domestic policy;

resolving its own complex national issues, which are to a large extent the result of the country's tragic history; and ensuring its control over its own natural resources for the benefit of the people of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. In that regard, we welcome the lifting last year of the notification requirement for arms imports by the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

We reaffirm our principled support for the efforts of MONUSCO and its leadership and peacekeepers. We thank them for their work under difficult conditions and their commitment to the protection of civilians. We offer our condolences to the Republic of South Africa, which lost a peacekeeper in early February. We strongly condemn all attacks and provocations against Blue Helmets and United Nations civilian personnel. We hope that all issues related to providing the Mission with resources — especially logistical resources — will be addressed swiftly and effectively.

As a matter of principle, we regard the presence of MONUSCO peacekeepers in the conflict zone as an important stabilizing factor. We believe that the Mission needs to focus on the main tasks under its mandate. We look forward to greater coordination between the armed forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Mission, as well as with other regional and national institutions involved in resolving the conflict, in order to work more effectively to protect the population of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. With regard to the implementation of the joint transition plan for the phased drawdown of the Mission and its withdrawal from the country by 2024, we believe that we must take into account above all the development of the situation on the ground, and react to that in a gradual and responsible manner. We note the important role played in alleviating the humanitarian consequences of the crisis by the entities of the United Nations system, including the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, the World Food Programme, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations and others.

In conclusion, I would like to commend the continued work of the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo on its preparations for the holding of general elections in December. We hope that Kinshasa, with the support of MONUSCO and regional assistance, will be able to ensure conditions for elections that meet international standards and the aspirations of all Congolese citizens.

Mr. Hoxha (Albania): I would like to thank Special Representative of the Secretary-General Keita for her briefing, efforts and leadership of the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO). We also thank her for the excellent atmosphere during the Council's visit to the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

As was mentioned by other colleagues, this month the Security Council had the opportunity to see at first-hand the deep scars of the prolonged conflict in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, one of the deadliest in the world, and the persistent dire humanitarian costs in a country blessed by nature but devastated by human-made suffering. It is unfortunate that the much-needed progress in many areas, including economic development and preparations for elections, has been overshadowed by the sound of the guns. Albania is horrified by the deadly violence inflicted on the civilian population by armed groups, mainly the Allied Democratic Forces, the *Coopérative pour le développement du Congo*, the *Zaire*, the *Forces démocratiques de libération du Rwanda* and the *Mouvement du 23 mars (M-23)*. We saw the consequences of the tragedy in the eyes of the hundreds of thousands of people who have been displaced, living in disheartening conditions and often deprived of humanitarian assistance.

War, conflict and hostilities with terrible consequences for civilians and local populations have lasted for far too long in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. All Congolese and foreign armed groups must unconditionally lay down their arms and participate in the Disarmament, Demobilization, Community Recovery and Stabilization Programme. The progress made in implementing the Programme in South Kivu and Ituri is encouraging. Appropriate funding and a community-based approach in support of reintegration are essential tools that will encourage more fighters to join it.

We unequivocally condemn the actions of the M-23, which is mainly responsible for the renewed tragedy in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo. We urge it to adhere to the ceasefire, in line with the decisions of the Luanda mini-summit of 23 November, and withdraw from all areas it currently controls, not just some of them. To that end, it is crucial for the States of the region to respect the sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, stop providing any support for the M-23 or other armed groups and halt the illegal exploitation of

the country's natural resources. The national wealth of the Democratic Republic of the Congo belongs to the Congolese. It should improve their lives and build their future, not end up in the bloody hands of militias and their supporters.

The ongoing conflict in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo also represents a tangible regional threat. The alarmingly increasing tensions between it and Rwanda must be addressed through existing conflict-resolution mechanisms and dialogue, based on goodwill. War is never the solution and should not be the choice in any case. Any deterioration in an already volatile situation could trigger massive escalation, with dire consequences that could threaten Governments and populations across the Great Lakes region, contributing to further insecurity, refugee movements and the multiplication and growth of non-State military groups. Needless to say, such an eventuality would undermine gains made by the Government and further increase the sacrifices made by the Congolese.

(spoke in French)

The electoral process under way is crucial to the country's future. It must exhibit transparency, credibility and inclusivity, conditions that are prerequisites for the holding of free and democratic elections, so that the institutions that emerge reflect the aspirations of the Congolese people and all segments of society, including women and young people.

During the Council's visit, it was striking to note the widening gap between the expectations of the authorities and the people with regard to MONUSCO and its actual mandate. The tensions and hate speech must cease. They simply make it more difficult for the Mission to fully discharge its main mandate, which is to protect civilians. There can be no doubt that the only reason for the presence of the United Nations in the Democratic Republic of the Congo is to help the people and protect civilians. However, there should also be no doubt that the primary responsibility for security falls on the country itself and its institutions.

We hope to see the East African Community regional force further strengthened and becoming fully operational so that it can help the Congolese forces establish State authority in North Kivu. Albania supports MONUSCO's work and appreciates the efforts and sacrifices of the Blue Helmets, who are operating in a complex and dangerous environment. In that spirit, the re-evaluation of the joint transition plan for

MONUSCO, in close cooperation with the Congolese authorities, must be carried out expeditiously. However, it must also be realistic, in order to ensure that when the time comes, the drawdown of the Mission can take place in a responsible and orderly manner.

Mr. Dai Bing (China) *(spoke in Chinese)*: I thank Special Representative Keita for her briefing. I also thank the Permanent Representatives of France and Gabon for their briefings on the Council's visit to the Democratic Republic of the Congo (see S/PV.9297). I welcome the Permanent Representatives of Burundi, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Rwanda to today's meeting.

The Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo has been working for some time now to advance security-sector reform, combat armed groups, promote economic development and prepare for general elections. However, the security situation in the east of the country has continued to deteriorate, exacerbating the humanitarian crisis. The Council sent a mission to visit the Democratic Republic of the Congo this month to deepen its understanding of the situation on the ground and hear the opinions and expectations of people from all walks of life in the country. China thanks 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 work in hosting the mission and supports the issuance of a presidential statement in the light of the visit.

I would like to emphasize the following points. First, a ceasefire and a cessation of the violence are top priorities. The ongoing attacks by armed groups in eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo are likely to worsen the security situation in the area. With the help of the African Union (AU) and countries of the region, such as Angola, the Mouvement du 23 mars (M-23) announced an agreement on a ceasefire and dialogue in early March. China calls on the M-23 and other armed groups to honour their commitments, cease all violent activities and withdraw from the occupied areas. The Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo recently launched its Disarmament, Demobilization, Community Recovery and Stabilization Programme for 6,000 people in the three provinces in the east of the country. China expects to see relevant plans creating conditions there conducive to the programme's implementation and to the armed groups' participation in dialogue.

Secondly, regional organizations are encouraged to play an important role. We welcomed the recent AU and East African Community (EAC) summits on the situation in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo and the active mediation efforts of the leaders of Angola, Burundi and Kenya to de-escalate the situation. We expect the Nairobi and Luanda processes to continue to play an important role. This year marks the tenth anniversary of the signing of the 2013 Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework Agreement for the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Great Lakes Region. We hope that the countries of the region will draw on their experiences, reinvigorate that important process and commit to resolving differences through dialogue and consultation to build a common future. China encourages the Office of the Special Envoy for the Great Lakes and MONUSCO to jointly support the good-offices efforts in the region. The EAC and Angola are carrying out peacekeeping and security operations in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. All the parties should strengthen coordination to ensure synergy.

Thirdly, MONUSCO should be supported in providing targeted assistance. Special Representative Keita has led MONUSCO in overcoming difficulties and implementing its mandate and has done important work in conducting joint patrols, supporting security-sector reform, advancing disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR) and supporting the general elections. Given the current circumstances, MONUSCO should fulfil its core mandates to protect civilians and support the building of Government institutions and DDR in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. MONUSCO, the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and all sectors of society should strengthen their communications, enhance mutual trust and ensure the smooth performance of peacekeeping operations. The Secretary-General will submit a report to the Council in July on MONUSCO's reconfiguration of its uniformed personnel. China supports listening to the opinions of the countries concerned in advancing drawdown responsibility.

Fourthly, the international community should firmly support humanitarian responses. The deteriorating situation in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo has led to the displacement of 6 million people, resulting in enormous humanitarian needs. The international community should provide adequate resources for the humanitarian response plan for the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The relevant

United Nations agencies and the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo should work together to maximize the benefits of humanitarian assistance and ensure the safe and smooth delivery of supplies.

While meeting short-term humanitarian needs, we should also help the Democratic Republic of the Congo strengthen its capacity for independent development, based on its actual needs. China adheres to mutual respect, mutual benefits and win-win results in its cooperation with the Democratic Republic of the Congo and supports the country in transforming its resource advantage into a development advantage. The Chinese-Congolese cooperation project has achieved remarkable results in supporting local industry development, expanding employment and improving people's livelihoods, and has been welcomed by the Government and the people of the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

China would like to work with the international community to make further contributions to establishing peace in, and supporting the development of, the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Mr. Hauri (Switzerland) (*spoke in French*): At the outset, I would like to express my gratitude to the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for her briefing, as well as for all the work done by the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO). I welcome the participation of the Permanent Representatives of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Rwanda and Burundi.

We thank the Democratic Republic of the Congo for its welcome during the visit of the Security Council to that country. The exchanges with the authorities, MONUSCO and civil society enabled the Council to gain a better understanding of the issues involved in promoting peace and security in the region. We reiterate our full solidarity with the Congolese people. I would like to highlight three points.

First, the deterioration of the security, humanitarian and human rights situations in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo is alarming. Since November 2021, the renewed Mouvement du 23 mars (M-23) offensive has displaced hundreds of thousands of people, exacerbating the already dire humanitarian crisis. Attacks by the M-23 and other armed groups on civilian populations and infrastructure, including schools, hospitals and internally displaced persons

sites, are unacceptable. We are also concerned about the use and mass recruitment of children by various armed groups. In that context, we call on all parties to respect international law and to ensure unhindered humanitarian access to the population in need. We recall that the primary responsibility for protecting civilians lies with the Government. Switzerland encourages the Democratic Republic of the Congo to continue its collaboration with MONUSCO in order to foster an environment conducive to the implementation of its mandate and to combat misinformation surrounding the Mission.

Secondly, only a coordinated political solution can contribute to peacebuilding. We welcome the diplomatic efforts at the national and regional levels to address the root causes of the conflict. In particular, we express our support for the Nairobi and Luanda processes. Any military action, including the deployment of the East African Community regional force, must be undertaken within the framework of the ongoing political processes and lead the armed groups to lay down their arms. We encourage the Government to continue to put in place conditions conducive to the operationalization of the Disarmament, Demobilization, Community Recovery and Stabilization Programme. Furthermore, all parties must immediately cease their collaboration with armed groups. We call on Rwanda to halt all of its support for the M-23. At the same time, we call for an end to the support given to the armed groups by a number of elements of the Forces armées de la République démocratique du Congo.

Thirdly, the rule of law and the fight against impunity must be strengthened. The high level of conflict-related sexual violence cannot continue to be ignored. We are also concerned about intercommunal violence and the spread of hate speech, especially against the Rwandophone population. It is essential that the Government ensure accountability and restore trust between communities, as well as with the State. As elections approach, we encourage the authorities to protect civic space and ensure inclusive democratic processes, including with the opposition. We welcome President Tshisekedi Tshilombo's statement on International Women's Day calling for an equal society. In that respect, we hope that women candidates and voters will be able to fully participate in the upcoming electoral process.

Switzerland is committed to achieving lasting peace in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Our

presence in Kinshasa, in particular in the east of the country with cooperation offices in Bukavu and Goma, allows us to be as close as possible to the people and their needs. Next month, the President of the Swiss Confederation is due to visit the Democratic Republic of the Congo, principally to express his support for the political peace efforts. As the violence continues, there is an urgent need to find a lasting solution. As a member of the Security Council, Switzerland will strive to build bridges, support humanitarian and development efforts and contribute to peacebuilding in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

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

Mr. Nzongola-Ntalaja (Democratic Republic of the Congo) (*spoke in French*): I would like to thank Secretary-General António Guterres for his commitment to my country's cause. I would also like to thank all the members of the Security Council, in particular the three representatives of the African continent in this organ. My delegation has taken note of the report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) (S/2023/208), which was just introduced by Ms. Bintou Keita, Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of MONUSCO, whom I welcome. I had an opportunity to meet with Ms. Keita yesterday, and as always she was full of excellent advice. We fully support the work she is doing in our country. Allow me to make a few comments on the issues raised in that report and the various concerns raised by the members of the Council.

The political situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, as highlighted in the report, is dominated by the ongoing registration process leading up to the 2023 elections and the regional and international efforts to reverse the spiral of insecurity in the east of the country. With regard to the elections, it is important to emphasize that the registration operations, which began on 24 December 2022, will continue both within the national territory and abroad, in particular in France, Belgium, Canada, the United States and South Africa. I would like to reiterate my Government's commitment to the holding of credible, transparent and inclusive elections. Moreover, in that spirit of constructive partnership and at the request of the Head of State, President Félix-Antoine Tshisekedi Tshilombo, the Government launched an appeal to the European Union and other partners, encouraging them to deploy

observers during the elections. That request for support in election observation at this stage of the process could also contribute to the resolution of a number of upstream challenges.

At the regional level, political, security and diplomatic efforts are being centred around the Nairobi and Luanda processes. As for the Nairobi process, the preparations for the fourth phase have gone well, so that it could be launched in early May this year. In short, the fourth round of Nairobi process consultations will serve to help those armed groups that have responded to the call to lay down their arms to begin demobilization and join the Disarmament, Demobilization, Community Recovery and Stabilization Programme. The efforts that my Government is undertaking with its own funds to operationalize that structure deserve to be supported. We are taking advantage of that platform to launch an appeal to partners for a greater mobilization of funds as a prelude to the more efficient implementation of such a key institution.

Concerning the security situation in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo, it clearly continues to be dominated by the militant activities of the terrorists of the Da'esh-affiliated Allied Democratic Forces (ADF), the *Coopérative pour le développement du Congo (CODECO)* and the *Mouvement du 23 mars (M-23)*, a proxy of Rwanda. The unforgivable massacres carried out daily by those negative forces against the women, young people and children of the Democratic Republic of the Congo must stop. As Pope Francis said, the forgotten genocide that is openly taking place in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo must stop.

To return to the M-23 — which is so easily confused with the Rwandan army — despite some indications of its withdrawal, we want to draw the Council's attention to the number of ceasefires that it has already violated. That speaks volumes about the fickleness of the movement and its clearly identifiable sponsor. The Council must be vigilant, and the multifaceted bilateral and multilateral pressure must not stop until the group surrenders completely and the troops of the Rwanda Defence Force withdraw fully from the territory of our country that they have invaded.

What is there to say about the intolerable humanitarian situation of internally displaced persons, which is largely the result of the militancy of armed groups? During their visit to the Democratic Republic of the Congo the members of the Council had the

opportunity to see that reality with their own eyes. The 2023–2024 emergency humanitarian aid plan launched in Kinshasa in an attempt to curb the crisis needs more funding to ensure its implementation.

MONUSCO remains an important partner of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. My Government is currently engaged in a constructive dialogue with the Mission on redefining the transition plan. The Democratic Republic of the Congo's vision for its future partnership with MONUSCO will involve revisiting and adjusting the plan. I ask the Council to take full account of my Government's deep and relevant concerns, detailed in the memorandum transmitted to Council members on 10 March during their visit to Kinshasa. I continue to believe firmly that those elements will go a long way to ensuring the clarity and transparency of MONUSCO's actions in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. As the host country, the Democratic Republic of the Congo also hopes that by the 2023 deadline the Council can transform MONUSCO from a peacekeeping into a peacemaking force, or at the very least, into a support force for the *Forces armées de la République démocratique du Congo (FARDC)*. In that context, my Government calls for the reactivation of the *Force Intervention Brigade*.

Before I conclude, I would like to clarify two points about which my country is often unfairly attacked. The first is the allegations about ethnic hate speech directed at Rwandophone people. The position of the President of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the Congolese authorities, our civil society and the major Christian churches, including both Catholic and Protestant, are clear and unambiguous. They do not tolerate such speech and condemn it regularly. The demagogues who appear from time to time on social networks are listened to by a minority of the population only, while the majority rejects such divisive statements.

While intercommunal violence may occur from time to time in disputes over land or access to waterways, the Democratic Republic of the Congo has not seen episodes of deadly violence based on xenophobia and ethnic hatred since 1994. The Congolese people, who are made up of 450 ethnic groups, are not divided into majorities and minorities competing for hegemony. It is a fact that intermarriage has become common in urban areas and that discrimination on the basis of ethnicity is far less prevalent today than it was during the colonial regime, whose foundation was divide-and-rule. Moreover, we should ask who is more hateful — is it someone who

spends most of their time demonizing Rwandophones or someone who kills and maims innocent men, women and children, or who rapes women and girls before finally maiming or killing them? Or is it someone who uses improvised explosive devices to kill people who have done them no harm? Those who keep saying that the Democratic Republic of the Congo is mired in ethnic hate need to ask themselves that question.

As for the group of former genocides who make up the Forces démocratiques de libération du Rwanda (FDLR), it is clear that many of them are already too old to pose a real threat to Rwanda's territory. The young people who succeeded their parents and uncles and are haunted by Rwanda limit themselves to mafia-style activities, like the other rebel groups in the region. As I have already explained to the Council, Rwanda has been at liberty to eliminate the group on several occasions. The first was between September 1996 and July 1997, when Commander James Kaberebe was the leader of the Rwandan expeditionary force deployed in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and later, when he was Chief of Staff of the Congolese army — meaning that he, a Rwandan officer, was the leader of the Congolese army. That decision — to put a Rwandan at the head of the Congolese army — was made by Laurent Kabila's friends Presidents Kagame and Museveni. So if he was in charge of the security of the Democratic Republic of the Congo for an entire year, why did he not eradicate the FDLR?

The second time was during Uganda's five-year occupation of North Kivu, which lasted from August 1998 to 2003, after which the Sun City Agreement was signed in South Africa. At the time Rwanda had control of North Kivu through the Rassemblement Congolais pour la Démocratie, a structure backed by Rwanda, just as the M-23 is today.

The third such occasion, as indicated in the 10 March memorandum to the Security Council from the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, was during a joint patrol with the FARDC under Joseph Kabila's regime when Rwanda and the Democratic Republic of the Congo were working together to combat the FDLR. In fact, in the memorandum, Council members can read that the FARDC did kill two major FDLR leaders. The FDLR is therefore not our friend. It is our enemy, because it is there to exploit our mineral resources. That is why it is engaged in mafia activities with those who want to buy our minerals, especially our strategic minerals. They are raping women and

exploiting our country's territory as if it were their own. And that essentially is why the FDLR is not our friend, contrary to what many people seem to think. What they should be asking is why the Rwanda Defence Force did not eliminate the FDLR.

In reality, the Rwandan regime has in fact succeeded in eliminating the FDLR as a military threat. In order to achieve its main objective of looting the strategic mineral resources of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Rwanda needs to keep the FDLR alive as a necessary pretext for invading our country and continuing to loot our resources such as coltan and gold, as well as other mineral, animal and forestry resources. While it is correct that the Democratic Republic of the Congo needs to strengthen its State to better protect its borders and its people, the Security Council has the responsibility to maintain peace and security all over the world and to do everything possible to ensure that the States Members of the United Nations respect international law, including the territorial integrity and sovereignty of all Member States.

For that reason, the Democratic Republic of Congo requests the Security Council to take the following actions. It should take into account the recommendations contained in the memorandum of 10 March addressed to it by the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. It should work to transform MONUSCO into a genuine peacemaking force, revitalize the Force Intervention Brigade by strengthening its equipment and logistics and support the Luanda and Nairobi processes. It should strengthen the sanctions against the ADF/Madina Tawheed wal Muwahedeen, CODECO and the M-23 terrorists and their leaders. It should demand that all armed groups, without exception, lay down their arms and join the Disarmament, Demobilization, Community Recovery and Stabilization Programme, and it should provide more support to that Programme. It should continue to exert and maintain strong pressure on Rwanda, its forces and the M-23 until they have fully and unconditionally withdrawn from the territory of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. There was a documented attack and the Charter of the United Nations was violated; the report of the Group of Experts is clear. The Democratic Republic of Congo asks those Council members who continue to hesitate to render justice to condemn Rwanda without ambiguity. The Democratic Republic of the Congo demands that Rwanda compensate the Congolese population for the damage done in terms of loss of human life — 10,000 people is

the figure we have — and in terms of the families torn apart and the people displaced from their homes. There should be targeted sanctions against Rwanda, Rwanda Defence Force officers and those who have committed violations and crimes for the aggression and support for the terrorist M-23 movement.

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

Mr. Gatete (Rwanda): I thank the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Ms. Bintou Keita, for her briefing, and the members of the Security Council for their remarks.

Let me start by commending the recent and ongoing deployment of additional East African Community regional force contingents to the Democratic Republic of the Congo from Burundi and Uganda. In the areas in which those contingents have assumed their interposition and monitoring roles, the implementation of the regional mechanisms is starting to bear fruit thanks to those two countries. To that effect, Rwanda encourages the parties to the conflict to strictly respect the ceasefire agreements for a peaceful resolution.

Rwanda has repeatedly noted that the crisis in the eastern Democratic Republic of Congo was started by, and is the primary responsibility of, the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Unfortunately, the situation continues to deteriorate owing to the Democratic Republic of the Congo's leaders' lack of political will, urgency and inaction. It has become evident that, even though the conflict continues to inflict terrible suffering on the civilian populations, the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo is using the conflict as a political stunt to obtain domestic support and silence opposition ahead of the upcoming elections. However, scapegoating Rwanda does not change the fact that the conflict stems from immense governance failures in the sociopolitical, economic and military arenas. Until the Democratic Republic of the Congo acknowledges its own governance failure, we will continue to have continuous political dialogues and deliberations that yield no substantial results and are ultimately inconsequential. Allow me to paint a clear picture of our primary concerns regarding the situation in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo.

First, the Congolese Government has refused to adhere to all the peace plans from the regional processes, a fact that is evident to everyone. The Nairobi and Luanda agreements, in particular, have 4 and 11

items, respectively. In both agreements, the first item is the ceasefire and the cessation of hostilities. Instead of implementing those agreements, the Democratic Republic of the Congo Government is instead stoking the conflict by encouraging hate speech and recruiting local armed groups and mercenaries to fight alongside the Forces armées de la République démocratique du Congo (FARDC). Those mercenaries and armed groups show little regard for civilian welfare, and therefore pose a major human rights challenge for the region and the international community. By fighting alongside the very armed groups it should be disarming, the Democratic Republic of the Congo is refuelling the conflict and ensuring that any progress made is quickly undone. For example, in the places in which the unilateral withdrawal of the Mouvement du 23 mars (M-23) has been conducted in the absence of the East African Community regional force, the FARDC and allied militias have repeatedly violated the terms of the Luanda road map. They have moved to reoccupy the positions vacated by the M-23, triggering a predictable resumption of hostilities at the expense of the local populations. On top of all that, the Democratic Republic of the Congo Government has also encouraged hostility towards the East African Community regional force and the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) itself. In the light of that, one wonders: What does the Democratic Republic of the Congo actually want? One evident answer is that it is not peace or security for the people and the region.

Secondly, our concern pertains to the Forces démocratiques de libération du Rwanda (FDLR), the genocidal militia sanctioned by the United Nations and given free rein in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Even though MONUSCO and the Security Council have full knowledge of the fact that the Democratic Republic of the Congo Government provides the FDLR with weapons and allows it to fight alongside the FARDC, no action has been taken. As a result of the FARDC and FDLR alliance, Rwanda's territorial integrity has been violated multiple times over the years. Like all States, Rwanda reserves the right to defend its borders and citizens against cross-border attacks. As you heard, my good friend says that FDLR members are too old, and I wonder how the ideology they possess can also become old.

Thirdly, but not least, we would like to reiterate our concern over the ongoing targeting of Congolese

Tutsi communities, which is on every form of social media concerning the activities that they conduct. They continue to endure hate speech and targeted killings incited by the Democratic Republic of the Congo's leaders, based solely on their ethnicity. We all know that the sustained persecution of, and discrimination against, a people is an early-warning sign for future atrocity crimes and genocide. Rwanda's concerns have been echoed in a number of reports and statements, including two statements by the Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide in November 2022 and January 2023, the report of the 2022 Group of Experts on the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and those of the Human Rights Commission and the European Union and many other statements delivered by Security Council members present at this meeting today. Unfortunately, while the hate speech and the subsequent human rights violations have intensified, MONUSCO has chosen to be a silent observer, which gives the impression that the targeted killings of specific communities in the Democratic Republic of the Congo are becoming normal and acceptable. As the Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide noted, the presence of the FDLR and the genocide ideology are at the heart of the atrocity crimes perpetrated against Congolese Tutsi communities. Given all the reports expressing concerns over the escalating hate speech, what is the way forward for the Security Council? Is there going to be an investigation? The reports should not be the end, but should be a call for appropriate actions to be taken.

In conclusion, we object to the ongoing Democratic Republic of the Congo campaign to characterize Rwanda as the cause of its instability. The Democratic Republic of the Congo's undermining of peace efforts, its refusal to repatriate Congolese refugees, its acquisition of mercenaries, its recruitment of armed groups and its alliance with FDLR demonstrate that the Democratic Republic of the Congo is using this crisis for short-sighted political gains, at the expense of the civilian populations and diplomatic relations.

Rwanda once again appeals to the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo to acknowledge its obligation and implement the signed regional agreements for peace and stability. As always, Rwanda remains committed to the bilateral, regional and international efforts to stabilize the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo and the region, and we look forward to their materialization.

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

Mr. Maniratanga (Burundi) (*spoke in French*): At the outset, I would like to congratulate the Mozambique presidency of Security Council for the month of March on having convened this meeting. I welcome the participation of, and briefing by, Ms. Bintou Keita, Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO). I also welcome the participation in this meeting of the Permanent Representatives to the United Nations in New York of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Rwanda.

For more than a quarter of a century, the basic norms of international law, international humanitarian law and international human rights law have been barely respected in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo due to a very fragile security situation as a result of the presence of armed terrorist groups and negative forces.

Peace in the Great Lakes region and in the Democratic Republic of the Congo should be an absolute priority in view of the upcoming elections, which require the restoration of lasting peace in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo. In an attempt to address that, the international community has made tremendous efforts through the MONUSCO mandate, *inter alia*, to restore peace, security and stability in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Several missions have been deployed to the Democratic Republic of the Congo and, as Council members clearly noted during their visit to Kinshasa and Goma in early March, it is evident that security concerns remain, resulting in a humanitarian situation that requires urgent action and an outcome.

In that regard, the deployment of the East African Community (EAC) regional force in North and South Kivu alongside the MONUSCO force and the Forces armées de la République démocratique du Congo in recent months will significantly help to restore peace and security, thereby alleviating the terrible suffering of the civilian population in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo, particularly among women, children and the elderly.

While many challenges remain in putting an end to the ongoing hostilities and attacks by the Mouvement

du 23 mars (M-23) and effectively implementing the Luanda and Nairobi directives, some positive results can be reported.

First is the round of inter-Congolese dialogue, launched under the mediation of the East African Community, and which should continue with the international community's full support.

Secondly, there was the recent announcement of the deployment of 500 Angolan troops in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Thirdly, there were field visits, particularly by the Security Council and the Peace and Security Council of the African Union, to the Democratic Republic of the Congo, which were highly appreciated.

Fourthly, a coordination meeting of the joint mechanism for the implementation of the ceasefire and the withdrawal of the M-23 was held on 2 March under the chairmanship of His Excellency the President of the Republic of Burundi and current Chairperson of the EAC.

Fifthly, and lastly, a meeting of the Chiefs of General Staff of the EAC armed forces took place in Bujumbura on 23 and 24 March.

Owing to the complementary nature of the mandates of MONUSCO and the EAC regional force, I would now like to make some observations.

First, there is an urgent need to resolutely reactivate all the previous decisions taken at the Nairobi, Luanda and Bujumbura summits, but which have still not been respected.

Secondly, it is necessary to ensure that the regional force, the MONUSCO force and the armed forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo work constructively

with the new Angolan contingent in order to avoid several command centres.

Thirdly, there is an urgent need for the United Nations and the African Union to provide financial and logistical support to the East African Community regional force.

Fourthly, there is a need to strengthen the coordination mechanism established by the Bujumbura meetings among the Chiefs of General Staff of the armies of the regional force, in which MONUSCO participates.

Fifthly, there is also a need to strengthen the communication and intelligence systems among all forces in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo.

In conclusion, as the political agendas expected in the Democratic Republic of the Congo at the end of this year call for the substantial support of the regional force and the coordination mechanisms, I would like to reaffirm Burundi's and the EAC's commitment to, and support for, the Nairobi, Luanda and Bujumbura processes, which are complementary and crucial to MONUSCO implementing its mandate.

The President: The Council has before it the text of a statement by the President on behalf of the Council on the subject of today's meeting. I thank Council members for their valuable contributions to the statement.

In accordance with the understanding reached among the members of the Council, I shall take it that the members of the Security Council agree to the statement, which will be issued as a document of the Security Council under the symbol S/PRST/2023/3.

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 12.15 p.m.