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Seventy-seventh year

Provisional

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<i>President:</i>	Mr. Roscoe	(United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland)
<i>Members:</i>	Albania	Ms. Dautllari
	Brazil	Mr. De Oliveira Freitas
	China	Mr. Zhang Jun
	France	Mrs. Broadhurst Estival
	Gabon	Mrs. Ngyema Ndong
	Ghana	Mr. Agyeman
	India	Mr. Ravindran
	Ireland	Ms. Byrne Nason
	Kenya	Mr. Kimani
	Mexico	Mr. Gómez Robledo Verduzco
	Norway	Ms. Heimerback
	Russian Federation	Ms. Evstigneeva
	United Arab Emirates	Mrs. Alhefeiti
	United States of America	Mr. Mills

Agenda

The situation in the Great Lakes region

Report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework for the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Region (S/2022/276)

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

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in the Great Lakes region

Report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework for the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Region (S/2022/276)

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 the following briefers to participate in this meeting: Mr. Huang Xia, Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for the Great Lakes Region; His Excellency Mr. João Samuel Caholo, Executive Secretary of the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region; and Mr. Dinesh Mahtani, independent expert on the Great Lakes region.

Mr. Caholo and Mr. Mahtani are joining this meeting via video-teleconference.

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

I wish to draw the attention of Council members to document S/2022/276, which contains the report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework for the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Region.

I now give the floor to Mr. Huang Xia.

Mr. Huang Xia (*spoke in French*): I welcome this opportunity to brief the Security Council on the most recent report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework for the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Region (S/2022/276).

Since I last briefed the Council on 20 October 2021 (see S/PV.8884), the situation in the Great Lakes region has shown an encouraging trend in terms of dialogue, cooperation and integration and, in general, the continued will to tackle the root causes of the instability. The report before the Council today

highlights that trend and provides several illustrative examples. However, that positive trend was disrupted by the security and humanitarian crisis in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo, compounded by the resumption of military activities by the Mouvement du 23 mars (M-23) in the last quarter of the past year, with attacks on several positions of the Forces armées de la République démocratique du Congo (FARDC).

The situation is all the more regrettable since it occurs nearly 10 years after the signing of the 2013 Nairobi Declaration by the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and M-23 insurgents, in which that armed group, defeated militarily, committed itself to no longer taking up arms. As I said before the Peace and Security Council of the African Union during an important meeting on the Great Lakes region several days ago, I would like to reiterate here my solemn appeal to that rebel group to lay down its arms. The people in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo have suffered too much, and the region can ill afford yet another crisis.

Similarly, it is regrettable that the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF) and other local armed groups continue to commit atrocities against civilians. To achieve its sinister ends, the ADF in particular still seems to benefit from a network of recruiters in the region and even beyond, as confirmed by recent arrests during the joint Democratic Republic of the Congo-Uganda operations.

All of that reminds us that peace in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo remains extremely fragile and how much we still need to step up our joint efforts to achieve a region completely free of the horrors of war. I would like to once again express my sincere condolences to the families of the victims of the recent violence in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo and to the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) for the tragic deaths of peacekeepers in the line of duty.

Despite that fragility, I would like to express my conviction that it is still possible to consolidate the significant gains made to date in the region and to move progressively towards a lasting peace. To that end, efforts must be made on at least three levels.

The first level remains the urgent need for increased cooperation on security matters. That is illustrated, inter alia, by the joint operations conducted by the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Uganda;

the memorandum of understanding between Burundi and the Democratic Republic of the Congo to meet the security challenges at their common border; the regular consultations between the heads of the intelligence services of the countries in the region; the establishment of the Contact and Coordination Group on non-military measures; and the efforts under way at the level of the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region to devise a strategy to combat terrorism in the region. That ongoing trend, which is aimed at significantly reducing the nefarious influence of armed groups, should be welcomed and supported.

The second level is based on a direct, standing dialogue at the highest level between the leaders in the region so as to ease tensions and strengthen trust. In that regard, I would like to welcome the progress made in normalizing the relations between Rwanda and Uganda, which were marked, notably, by the reopening of the common border, and the relations between Burundi and Rwanda.

I would like also to congratulate the Heads of State of the region on consolidating that encouraging trend at the tenth summit of the Regional Oversight Mechanism of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework for the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the region, held in Kinshasa on 24 February. I also would like to congratulate President Tshisekedi Tshilombo on the successful outcome of that important high-level meeting, which saw an exceptional level of mobilization. On that occasion, the Heads of State, inter alia, committed themselves to pooling their efforts to an even greater extent so as to tackle more effectively the increasingly numerous and multifarious challenges facing the region. They also reiterated their commitment to the framework agreement as their platform for cooperation.

I would like to also welcome the convergence of views among Heads of State on regional priorities so as to tackle the factors underlying instability and conflict and the fresh impetus that they have provided in that respect.

I would like to pay tribute to the leadership of President Kenyatta, who, on two occasions during the month of April, hosted in Nairobi his counterparts in the region during two important summits to consider the ongoing security challenges in the east of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and come up with specific solutions.

I welcome the fact that the Nairobi conclave held on 21 April promised an approach that is both pragmatic and firm, giving priority to dialogue between the representatives of the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and armed groups, with facilitation provided by Kenya. I would like to also encourage all parties to continue with that open and frank dialogue so as to find a lasting solution to the searing question of insecurity.

The third level of action is continued support by the international community for the region. That mobilization for the region is indispensable since the accomplishments already made merit being safeguarded. I call on the members of the Security Council and of the International Contact Group for the Great Lakes Region, with whom I have regular contacts, to support regional dialogue efforts. The consultation process under way to follow up on the conclave's decisions makes it imperative that there be rapid support for the new strategy for the Disarmament, Demobilization, Community Recovery and Stabilization Programme at the national level, and for the plan of action of the Contact and Coordination Group at the regional level.

I would like also to welcome the close cooperation with my colleague Bintou Keita, Head of MONUSCO, as well as that between our teams at the technical level.

Allow me to list some priority initiatives that I will be dealing with in the upcoming months, in keeping with the action plan of the United Nations Strategy for Peace Consolidation, Conflict Prevention and Conflict Resolution in the Great Lakes Region and the decisions that emanated from the Regional Oversight Mechanism.

First, I will continue, in close cooperation with other institutions that are guarantors of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework, good-offices and diplomatic efforts aimed at improving good-neighbourliness relations among the countries of the region. Then, together with other guarantor institutions and with the support of MONUSCO, I plan to provide all the support necessary to make sure that there is an effective deployment of the operational unit of the Contact and Coordination Group on non-military measures. I invite the Council to support my appeal to mobilize the resources necessary to attain the goals set.

In cooperation with MONUSCO, my Office will also continue providing technical and logistical support to the Nairobi peace process and, if it can help, we will also stand ready to provide our contribution to the

efforts to repatriate the disarmed combatants of M23 and the Forces démocratiques de libération du Rwanda, as was already done in 2018. We would recall that that initiative had had non-negligible results in terms of repatriation.

Similarly, so as to follow up on the earlier recommendations that came out of the Khartoum workshop on natural resources, which took place from 31 August to 2 September 2021, I intend to continue in the upcoming weeks my work together with the Executive Secretariat of the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region to promote enhanced national and regional ownership of the Regional Initiative on Natural Resources. To fill in that missing link in the chain, political advocacy with the countries in the region, as well as diplomatic involvement with the destination countries for smuggled strategic minerals, will be a priority for us in the months to come.

The fifteenth Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development-International Conference on the Great Lakes Region (ICGLR) Forum on Responsible Mineral Supply Chains is planned for next week and represents an opportunity for us to solicit support upstream in the production chain, in particular major companies, for the region's efforts to combat the exploitation of and the illicit trade in high-value mineral resources.

As we continue with efforts to promote the economic empowerment of women as a strategy for peacebuilding, my Office, in partnership with the ICGLR Private Sector Forum, UN-Women and the Economic Commission for Africa, co-facilitated in December 2021 the launching of a women entrepreneurs network in the Great Lakes region, and I intend to engage in an ongoing dialogue with regional institutions on their gender policies and to continue supporting that network to ensure that it can make the most of opportunities for regional integration, in particular the broadening of the East African Community with the bringing in of the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

For as long as the impunity that fuels the cycle of violence and promotes recruitment into armed groups prevails, it will be difficult to rebuild trust between the people and the Government. In that context, my Office will continue to support the efforts of the countries of the region in combating impunity and promoting human rights, in particular the work being done by the Great Lakes Judicial Cooperation Network on high-profile cases of transborder crime.

On that topic, the upcoming meeting of the justice ministers of the region, to be held in June in Kinshasa, will allow us to take stock of the implementation of the Nairobi Declaration on Justice and Good Governance of May 2019 and, certainly, to provide guidance for expediting it.

I would be remiss if I did not thank the Security Council for its ongoing concern for the Great Lakes region. In these uncertain times, where new and old challenges emerge, I would like to call on the Security Council and beyond to reiterate my appeal to the international community to remain mobilized for the Great Lakes region to ensure that all efforts made at all levels can deliver on their promises.

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

I now give the floor to Mr. Caholo.

Mr. Caholo: Let me begin by expressing my sincere appreciation to the United Kingdom, and indeed the entire Security Council, for including this very important topic in the programme of work for the month of April 2022. I also extend my gratitude to the United Kingdom through its representative, Ambassador Barbara Woodward, and her team for the able leadership exhibited thus far and for inviting me to address the Council.

It is always an honour to speak to the Security Council. As per the invitation, I am required to present my perspective on the situation in the Great Lakes region. I will therefore provide an update on major developments in the region with regard to the political and security situation. I will conclude by providing some recommendations for the consideration of the Security Council.

The Great Lakes region faces various security challenges, emanating mainly from the activities of negative forces and armed groups operating in parts of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the Central African Republic and the Republic of South Sudan.

On the security front, the Democratic Republic of the Congo is facing a resurgence of attacks by armed groups, rebel forces and Islamist terrorists, who are sowing terror by massacring and abducting civilians and burning villages, among other things, particularly in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo. Those armed groups include militias from the Coopérative pour le développement du Congo, the Force de résistance patriotique d'Ituri, the Allied

Democratic Forces (ADF), the Mayi-Mayi groups and the Movement du 23 mars (M-23).

In a bid to curb growing insecurity, His Excellency Mr. Félix-Antoine Tshisekedi Tshilombo, President of the Democratic Republic of the Congo declared a state of siege on 3 May 2021 over parts of the national territory, including North Kivu and Ituri, in accordance with article 85 of the Constitution of the Republic. The Parliament of the Republic reviews and renews the state of siege every 15 days. The country has thereby made progress in the security sector, and the Forces armées de la République démocratique du Congo have regained control of several villages, with the support of the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

However, it is worth noting that intercommunal violence and increased armed group activities have continued in those areas, which is of great concern to us. The Forces armées de la République démocratique du Congo deployed more troops to Ituri in March 2022. There is an increase in killings with machetes, arrows, small weapons and guns. In addition, attacks on a camp for internally displaced persons in Ituri have increased. That must be condemned, and all actors must be called upon to end the violence and the violations of international humanitarian law.

The resurgence of the M-23 rebel group in North Kivu on Tuesday, 29 March, is an issue of great concern for the region. The rebels attacked military positions in Chanzu and Runyoni, in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo, causing loss of lives and displacement of locals in those villages. On 1 April, the group announced a unilateral ceasefire on the front lines of the Jomba grouping in Rutshuru territory. We call upon the Security Council to support regional efforts and those of the Forces armées de la République démocratique du Congo to protect innocent lives in this part of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The International Conference on the Great Lakes Region (ICGLR) will remain vigilant through its Mineral Tracking and Certification Scheme so as to ensure that those armed groups are not financed by the illegal exploitation of natural resources.

In the Central African Republic, the security situation remains a concern following activities of armed groups in some parts of the northern, north-eastern, eastern, western and central parts of the country. The Mbororo are noted to be assisting the

Unité pour la paix en Centrafrique and the Return, Reclamation and Rehabilitation group and are also trafficking arms within the Central African Republic. Frequent clashes are noted between rival ethnic armed groups who were for or against the implementation of the Khartoum Peace Agreement and the Luanda road map. Through the able leadership of His Excellency Mr. João Manuel Gonçalves Lourenço, President of the Republic of Angola, in his capacity as Chairperson of the ICGLR, the organization hosted three mini-summits on the political and security situation in the Central African Republic on 29 January, 20 April and 16 September 2021. Those high-level meetings resulted in the declaration of a unilateral ceasefire on 15 October 2021 by His Excellency Mr. Faustin Archange Touadera, President of the Central African Republic, in accordance with the joint road map adopted at the end of 16 September mini-summit.

Despite the declaration of the ceasefire, there continue to be violations of the joint road map, and cases of violence in the country are still being reported. We continue to urge the warring parties to respect the implementation of the joint road map and support the technical team comprising the Republic of Angola the Central African Republic and the Republic of Rwanda on the follow-up of the implementation process of the joint road map on the Central African Republic. We again call upon the Security Council to remain vigilant and to be seized of the matter.

The situation in South Sudan remains volatile. In March, there were reports of escalating tensions and clashes between the South Sudan People's Defence Forces and the Sudan People's Liberation Movement-Army in Opposition in the Upper Nile state counties, in full violation of the 2018 Revitalized Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in the Republic of South Sudan. Furthermore, elements of the National Salvation Front, commonly known as NAS, continue to perpetrate atrocities against civilians and carry out attacks on the positions of the South Sudan People's Defence Forces, in violation of the 2018 ceasefire agreement. The NAS was involved in killings, abductions, extortions and burning of vehicles along the entire length of the Juba-Yei-Kaya and Juba-Nimule roads. Notwithstanding that, the Government of South Sudan continued to implement the Revitalized Agreement.

We reiterate our call for the Security Council and the entire international community to support the efforts of the Government of the Republic of the

Sudan and the Government of the Republic of Uganda to assist the South Sudanese parties in expediting the implementation the Revitalized Peace Agreement, which was signed in September 2018, and which sought to end the civil war that took place between 2013 and 2018. In addition, we joined the international community in calling for dialogue between the South Sudanese parties in order to bring an end to the strife.

The Republic of the Sudan is in a transitional period after the revolutionary change in December 2018. The revolution put the Sudan on the path of democratic transformation, peace and stability, but the country is still facing challenges in areas of peace and economic development. However, the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region (ICGLR) was happy to witness some achievements, such as the signing of the Juba Peace Agreement on the 3 October 2020 and the hosting and facilitating of the peace negotiations that culminated in the signing of the Revitalized Peace Agreement for South Sudan.

At the moment, the Government of the Sudan is in the process of implementing economic reforms aimed at normalizing relations with the international financial institutions and attracting foreign direct investment. We call upon the Security Council to encourage all Sudanese parties to engage in a political dialogue leading to a consensus with a view to organizing free and transparent elections by the end of the transitional period in conformity with the rule of law and fundamental freedoms.

In addition, we are happy to have witnessed the hosting of the negotiations that ended with the signing of the Khartoum Agreement between the parties to the conflict in the Central African Republic in February 2019. Further and more importantly, allow me to reiterate the request of His Excellency Mr. João Manuel Gonçalves Lourenço, President of the Republic of Angola and Chairperson of the ICGLR, for the Security Council to urgently reconsider the arms embargo, which continues to impinge on the defence and security forces' ability to safeguard the territorial integrity of the Central African Republic and restore and maintain law and order in the country. Political stability and economic development can only be brought about with improvements in the defence, security and humanitarian situation in the country.

In general, the Great Lakes region continues to face threats from the terrorism and mercenary-fighter

phenomenon emanating from global and regional terrorist groups that continue to recruit, radicalize, plan and execute attacks. Terrorism remains a security concern attributed to the activities of the ADF in the eastern part of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the Al-Shabaab terror group in Kenya and the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria in the Sudan. We call upon the Council to work closely with the leaders of the Great Lakes region to seal and secure the external borders of the region.

The Republic of Angola and the Republic of Kenya are scheduled to hold general elections in August 2022. While competitive elections are a hallmark of democracy, elections in the region have always been a flashpoint for conflict and violence. The causes and triggers of violence in the region are many and overlapping. We urge the Security Council to intensify calls for violence-free elections and peaceful coexistence of the peoples of the region.

As I conclude, I am grateful to the Security Council for continuing to place the situation in the Great Lakes region on its agenda, which allows the Council to remain seized with and apply itself to matters concerning the region. As the representative of the ICGLR, I would like to reiterate and underscore the capacity of the leaders of the region to reach compromises that can lead to further peace, stability and sustainable development in the region. The recent mini-summit on the security situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, convened on 21 April 2022 and attended by the Heads of State and Government of the Republic of Kenya, the Republic of Burundi, the Republic of Rwanda, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Republic of Uganda is a very commendable initiative. We call upon the Security Council to support the resolutions emanating thereof

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

I now give the floor to Mr. Mahtani.

Mr. Mahtani: Mr. President, I thank you for giving me this opportunity to speak to the Security Council today. I am also honoured to be able to do so in front of attending representatives from the Great Lakes and East African regions, whose authorities I have engaged with in some depth over the last 20 years. The following comments are based on insights gathered during this period, as well as from fresh interviews I have conducted in the Great Lakes, East and Southern Africa over the last 18 months.

We come together today in the wake of concerning developments in the Great Lakes. In recent weeks, the Mouvement du 23 mars (M-23), which fled the eastern part of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and surrendered into the hands of Ugandan and Rwandan authorities in 2013, has re-emerged in the Democratic Republic's North Kivu province, raising the spectre once again of a regional security crisis. The Allied Democratic Forces (ADF), also resurgent since 2013, and responsible for targeted and indiscriminate massacres against civilians also in North Kivu, has in the meantime found a new ally, the Islamic State, whose celebration of the ADF suicide attacks in Kampala last year in turn prompted Uganda's military to deploy into North Kivu with Kinshasa's approval.

In the past, insecurity in the Great Lakes was largely confined to the region itself. Conflict there, however, is today increasingly interconnected with dynamics in other parts of the continent. It is now known for example, that a number of Mozambican insurgents came to train in ADF camps just as the insurgency in Cabo Delgado began to emerge in 2017. They travelled by land from Mozambique to the eastern part of the Democratic Republic of the Congo through Tanzania and Burundi, crossing into the Democratic Republic's South Kivu province before making their way to North Kivu. There, in the ADF camps, they learned battlefield tactics, passing this knowledge and training on to their fellow insurgents when they returned to Mozambique. Around that time, radical youth from Kenya and Tanzania, including those who were once the East African foot soldiers of Somalia's Al-Shabaab militant group, also began to flee security crackdowns at home in East Africa, migrating west towards the ADF camps in eastern Congo, with many others moving south from East Africa to join the insurgency in Mozambique, which is also claimed by Islamic State as its affiliate.

These East Africans who have turned up in Congo and Mozambique are just some of the young men whom the Islamic State may be looking to support with continued financing, with money transfers originating from abroad, including, as has been discovered, from South Africa. Radicalized even further by their battlefield experience from their time in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Mozambique, they are likely to be a threat to security in their home countries should they ever return. It is no wonder therefore that East African Governments are worried. Not only do they have Al-Shabaab, an Al-Qaida affiliate, to deal with,

but Islamic State is also likely building up its presence on their soil.

In this context, the insecurity in the eastern part of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, fuelled by the presence of dozens of local and foreign armed groups scattered from the province of Ituri all the way down to Tanganyika province, takes on new meaning. Besides pursuing their own agendas in grabbing territory, plundering local natural resources, attacking security forces and terrorizing civilians, these armed groups are now also the agents and collaborators of criminals and jihadists looking to bolster their influence in the eastern part of the Democratic Republic. The foreign recruits who come in to join the ADF, for example, are often trafficked by different criminal and armed groups who move them through their own territory before they get to ADF camps.

Partly for those reasons, the Governments of the Great Lakes and East Africa have now agreed to line up shoulder to shoulder and possibly launch joint military operations against armed groups in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The idea of a joint force, agreed by regional leaders in Kenya's capital Nairobi, can at least be interpreted as a robust expression by the Democratic Republic of the Congo and its neighbours to finally bring security to the Democratic Republic of the Congo's troubled east, and in so doing also suppress the playing field for jihadists. Confidence in military solutions is high after Rwanda's intervention in Mozambique significantly dented the insurgency there. Uganda's intervention against the ADF has meanwhile scattered the armed group from its bases. But in both theatres, in Mozambique and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, military victory is far from achieved.

More military operations in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, in the form of the proposed joint force, are now on the table. Those pose significant risks. For starters, many armed groups that the regional Governments propose attacking in eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo have at times been proxies for those very same regional Governments against each other. Trust between two of the Democratic Republic of the Congo's neighbours in the Great Lakes has been shaky in recent years, and despite signs of a recent warming of ties between them, it is unclear whether those nascent signs of solidarity can be sustained if the parties are thrust back into a situation in eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo where they are not fully confident of each other's motivations. Officials in

those two countries have regularly voiced their belief to me in private that their counterparts across the border are in fact involved in supporting either the M-23 or the ADF.

Besides that regional trust deficit, there are also serious challenges to the implementation of any such proposed force. How would a joint force of East African States, including Uganda, sit alongside Uganda's existing mission in North Kivu? How would it also sit aside the Force Intervention Brigade of the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, which is partly also comprised of Kenyan troops? They have command issues there that need to be considered. Even if all those forces could apply the necessary and coordinated pressure on Congolese armed groups and push them towards surrender, in a context of ongoing negotiations and dialogue elsewhere, does the Democratic Republic of the Congo's national institution for disarmament have sufficient resources to implement a smooth demobilization and reintegration of the different armed factions back into society? What should happen to foreign armed group members who surrender or are taken captive?

While the use of force should eventually constitute an important component in any exercise to neutralize armed groups in eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo, it is crucial that all interested parties first work together to help implement the Democratic Republic of the Congo's strategy on the demobilization of armed groups and rebuild and consolidate trust among the Democratic Republic of the Congo's neighbours themselves. Without those ingredients, foreign military intervention might simply create a cascade of second-order problems on the ground, which Kinshasa's authorities might struggle to cope with. Dismantling armed and terrorist groups might in the meantime be better achieved by the region enhancing intelligence sharing and policing partnerships in order to better control borders and interdict recruitment networks and the circulation of combatants, illicit finances and material supplies.

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

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

Mrs. Broadhurst Estival (France) (*spoke in French*): I would like to begin by thanking the Special

Envoy of the Secretary-General for the Great Lakes for his briefing, as well as all other briefers.

I would like to focus on three points.

First, I would like to recall the importance of dialogue among the States of the region to address the security threats that the briefers referred to. The fact that the Mouvement du 23 mars (M-23) has taken up arms again is a serious risk, which could destabilize the region. The region is already plagued by attacks against civilians and security forces by a number of armed groups.

France takes note of the decisions of the States of the region during the Nairobi meetings and renews its support for efforts to increase regional dialogue.

France will continue to support the Congolese authorities in their efforts to strengthen stability in the east of the Democratic Republic of Congo. It is important that any regional military initiative take into account the actions and mandate of the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The Mission has suffered heavy losses, but the safety of its peacekeepers must be ensured and prioritized.

The repatriation of former combatants, in particular M-23 combatants, must resume, as was mentioned. In the Democratic Republic of Congo, the disarmament-demobilization-reintegration programme must be implemented as soon as possible, especially at the provincial level.

As Mr. Mahtani noted, the terrorist threat is growing in the region. France encourages the Office of Counter-Terrorism to strengthen the capacities of the States of the region. The strengthening of cooperation and information-sharing mechanisms within the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region (ICGLR) and the Southern African Development Community must be a priority.

That brings me to my second point: the importance of continuing to address the root causes of all those conflicts.

The tenth Summit of the Regional Oversight Mechanism reaffirmed the relevance of the Addis Ababa Framework agreement. The commitments made must be translated into action. I am thinking in particular about reducing tension through political and diplomatic channels.

Regional cooperation must promote proper management of natural resources. The Executive Secretary of the ICGLR reminded us that the ministers of mines have continued their work to strengthen the traceability and certification of resources. The recommendations of the Khartoum regional workshop must be implemented.

We must focus our attention on the people. Equal rights for women and parity in political life are priority objectives. France welcomes the establishment of the Great Lakes Women Entrepreneurs Network, which was also mentioned.

The protection of human rights will also contribute to the stability in the region. In Burundi, progress has been made and those initial steps, and the need for them to continue have led the European Union to lift the financial restrictions on Burundi. We will continue to support the country through ongoing political dialogue via the European Union.

Thirdly, all the objectives of the United Nations regional strategy must be pursued. I would mention health issues in particular. The Ebola virus has just resurfaced in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, while the coronavirus disease continues to be rampant. France supports the development of a regional strategy to respond to the socioeconomic impact of epidemics.

I also wish to mention justice. The conference on judicial cooperation scheduled to take place in Kinshasa next month must extend the commitments of the Nairobi Declaration on Justice and Good Governance. The European Union will continue to support the fight against impunity and promote reconciliation. In Bugesera, Rwanda, the European Union is providing €2.5 million to promote understanding between former offenders and survivors.

Finally, a high-level meeting on financing sustainable peace is being held today. France calls on the Peacebuilding Fund to provide further support to the Great Lakes States and the implementation of the regional strategy.

Challenges persist, but the countries of the region are not alone. France will continue to wholeheartedly support them and the efforts of the Special Envoy.

Mr. De Oliveira Freitas (Brazil): First, let me convey the gratitude of the Brazilian delegation to all the briefers for the insights they shared with the Security Council today.

We have followed the most recent developments in the region attentively, and we wish to make a few remarks on the security situation and on a number of aspects of the peace process, as follows.

Security remains a matter of great concern to us. The threat posed by armed groups to the countries of the Great Lakes region is still tangible, as the tragic events of 5 April in Ituri, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, have demonstrated. In that particular regard, I wish to reiterate our condemnation of such an ominous act, as well as of any attacks and provocations against the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. In addition to the risks posed for the lives of peacekeepers, the armed groups' activities, which unfortunately seem to be on the rise, have a destabilizing effect on local communities from various perspectives, ranging from human rights to economic development. Since those activities often result in sexual violence, the lack of access to humanitarian aid, the recruitment of children in armed conflict and illicit exploitation of natural resources — just to name a few of the troubling realities on the ground — they can jeopardize the ongoing efforts to reach sustained peace.

In order to protect the achievements of the peace process made so far, it is imperative to expedite the implementation of the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration programmes. At the same time, it is necessary to ensure that former combatants, women and young people have access to economic opportunities that provide them with the tools to improve their livelihood conditions in the post-pandemic period. In that vein, I would like to voice our support for the Special Envoy and highlight the contribution of the United Nations Strategy for Peace Consolidation, Conflict Prevention and Conflict Resolution in the Great Lakes Region in bringing coherence and comprehensiveness to peacebuilding initiatives

We also wish to emphasize the importance of local ownership to attaining lasting peace and prosperity in the region. In that regard, we commend the leading and constructive role played by the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region and the Regional Oversight Mechanism of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework for the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Moreover, we commend the leadership provided by Kenya at the Heads of State conclave on the Democratic Republic of the Congo. We hope that their role as facilitators in the dialogue between the armed

groups and the Government in Kinshasa will soon bear fruit. Another positive development that we want to welcome is the admission of the Democratic Republic of the Congo to the East African Community at the end of March, since it opens up yet another avenue to strengthen regional cooperation in the long term.

Finally, we call upon all States in the region to persevere in the path of an inclusive political dialogue. No durable solution can be found without the meaningful participation of all stakeholders, including women.

Ms. Dautllari (Albania): I thank the briefers for their comprehensive presentations. I would also like to welcome our colleagues from the countries of the Great Lakes region who are joining us today. I will focus my statement on three main points.

First, on political cooperation and its positive trends in the region, Albania has followed the diplomatic efforts to normalize relations and strengthen cooperation among the countries of the Great Lakes region, and some of the achievements that we have recently seen are positive steps in that regard, most recently at the Nairobi conclave.

I should also note that Albania supports Special Envoy Huang Xia in his good offices in promoting dialogue. Regional cooperation must always encompass all countries involved. No one should be excluded.

Secondly, regarding the situation on the ground, despite the ongoing rapprochement among States, the root causes of the conflicts are too complex to be considered healed, and the challenges too far from being over. As we heard, the security situation remains volatile, especially when it comes to connections with international terrorist groups. That requires enhanced regional attention.

Albania is deeply concerned about the consequences of the dire security environment for the most vulnerable, as well as about the human rights and international humanitarian law violations. We call for all stakeholders to in particular commit themselves to protecting women and children from sexual violence and abuses, as well as to guaranteeing safety and unhindered access for humanitarian partners in their efforts to provide some relief to the population.

Thirdly, on the need for a comprehensive strategy that provides lasting solutions, no military settlement can alone address the security challenges in the region. Our efforts should also be focused on the needs of

the local populations beyond security and territorial control. To tackle the persistent arc of conflict, it is of the outmost importance that we extinguish the fire that keeps burning, first and foremost the illegal exploitation and trafficking of natural resources. That has a multiplier effect on the instability.

We welcome the fact that the ministers in charge of mines have reviewed the recommendations made in Khartoum. However, it is imperative that those recommendations be swiftly implemented. Natural resources can, and must be, a force for change. In that vein, Albania believes that all offenders must be held accountable.

Human rights and international humanitarian law safeguards are a prerequisite to lasting peace. Albania considers transitional justice an important tool for building trust and reconciliation. We therefore encourage all parties to make significant progress in the implementation of the 2019 Nairobi Declaration on Justice and Good Governance. We hope that the Kinshasa ministerial conference in May will produce concrete results in that direction.

Albania echoes the call of the Secretary-General for the need to repatriate disarmed foreign combatants, particularly those of the Mouvement du 23 mars, and to consolidate national and regional disarmament, demobilization and reintegration programmes. We also welcome the launch of the operational cell of the Contact and Coordination Group on non-military measures.

Lastly, Albania believes that the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework for the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Region is still a catalyst for peace, and we salute the steps taken by the Heads of States during the Kinshasa tenth summit.

Mr. Kimani (Kenya): I have the pleasure to deliver this statement on behalf of the three African members of the Security Council (A3), namely, Gabon, Ghana and Kenya. We thank the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for the Great Lakes Region, the Executive Secretary of the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region and Mr. Dinesh Mahtani for their briefings.

The A3 remains deeply concerned about the dire security situation in parts of the Great Lakes region, particularly eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo. We strongly condemn the hostile activities and deadly attacks by armed and militant groups, including the

Allied Democratic Forces and the resurgent Mouvement du 23 mars.

We are glad to note that, counter to that negative trend, there is a growing spirit of collaboration and integration under way in the region, which promises a breakthrough in the long search for peace and security. In particular, we point the Council's attention to the Democratic Republic of the Congo formally joining the East African Community. The Community will now encompass a population of 300 million, and its seven member States are continuing to undertake one of the world's most extensive exercises in the integration of trade, investment and the free movement of people and, ultimately, towards political federation.

As members of the Council know well, economic development is key to minimizing the risks of conflict, and structured regional political cooperation is essential to overcoming common security threats. The armed groups in the region continue to exact a heavy toll on civilian safety and security, while undermining economic development.

In the spirit of regional cooperation and camaraderie, we recently witnessed the successful outcomes of the second regional Heads of State conclave on the Democratic Republic of the Congo in Nairobi on 21 April. The conclave was convened by President Uhuru Kenyatta in his capacity as the Chair of the East African Community. Its far-reaching decisions are articulated in the communiqué issued shortly after the meeting.

We wish to emphasize, for the attention of the Council and with regard to its own existing mandates in the region, the decisions made by the leaders that will impact the peace and security of the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo. Like other members of the Council, we believe that sustained regional stabilization is to a considerable degree determined by the success of efforts to stabilize that area.

The conclave agreed on a two-track initiative to help bring security and stability to the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo: first, commence a political process, under the leadership of President Uhuru Kenyatta, to facilitate consultations to be undertaken between the Democratic Republic of the Congo and local armed groups in the Democratic Republic of the Congo; and, secondly, accelerate the establishment of a regional force to help contain and, where necessary,

fight the negative forces under the leadership of the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

To facilitate the implementation of the political and military/security enforcement tracks, the leaders also directed the following.

First, all armed groups in the Democratic Republic of the Congo must participate unconditionally in the political process to resolve their grievances.

Secondly, the failure to do so would mean that all Congolese armed groups would be considered as negative forces and handled militarily by the region.

Thirdly, all foreign armed groups in the Democratic Republic of the Congo must disarm and return unconditionally and immediately to their respective countries of origin.

Fourthly, the failure to do so would mean that those groups would be considered as negative forces and handled militarily by the region.

We call upon the Security Council and the United Nations system to support that bold regional initiative. Political will has always been, and will continue to be, the key ingredient in resolving the protracted conflicts and large-scale violence in the Great Lakes region. There are few situations that have lasted as long and been as difficult to solve as the chronic insecurity of eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo.

We appreciate the strong support expressed by the Secretary-General. Joined to the Security Council's matching support and driven by regional will, in line with the leadership and aims of the countries of the Great Lakes region, much can be achieved.

Beyond that promising progress regarding the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the A3 calls for further progress in strengthening and implementing regional networks and frameworks that will contribute to a more secure Great Lakes region. We further call for support for context-relevant disarmament, demobilization and reintegration programmes that include the disengagement and reintegration of former fighters of groups that utilize terrorist ideologies and methods in their operations.

The A3 urges closer cooperation between United Nations missions, International Conference on the Great Lakes Region (ICGLR) organs and the good offices of the Special Envoy in seeking to effectively combat armed-group activities.

Moving on to the economic situation, the A3 notes that poverty is a root cause and effect of conflict in that region. It is unfortunate that the people of the region have not benefited from the abundance of natural resources in their countries. The illegal exploitation, competition and export of those resources, including by international actors and armed groups, must be addressed to transform those resources from a curse into a blessing.

The countries of the region should implement their commitments under the ICGLR Regional Initiative against the illegal exploitation of and trade in natural resources, which include establishing internal systems of control, monitoring and verification to eradicate the illicit mineral trade.

The A3 recognizes the valuable role of the Peacebuilding Commission, alongside its key partners, particularly international financial institutions and the Peacebuilding Fund, in supporting cross-border cooperation in the region. We therefore welcome the written advisory from the Peacebuilding Commission and urge the Council to provide support in the identified areas of work, including the implementation of the United Nations Strategy for Peace Consolidation, Conflict Prevention and Conflict Resolution in the Great Lakes Region.

In conclusion, we commend the efforts of the Special Envoy and his able team in promoting peace and security in the region through his good offices, advocacy, preventive diplomacy and capacity-building activities, which are beneficial to the countries of the region.

Mr. Zhang Jun (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): I would like to begin by thanking the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for the Great Lakes region, Mr. Huang Xia; Executive Secretary João Samuel Caholo; and Mr. Dinesh Mahtani for their respective briefings. I welcome the presence of the Permanent Representatives of Burundi, Rwanda and the Democratic Republic of the Congo at today's meeting and look forward to listening to their statements. I also listened attentively to the statement made by the Permanent Representative of Kenya on behalf of the three African countries that are members of the Security Council; we should value their views on this matter.

The recent period has seen frequent diplomatic engagements among the countries of the region, the consolidation of mutual political trust and deepened

regional cooperation, giving rise to a new outlook for the region. At the same time, the security situation on the ground remains highly fragile. The surge in violence perpetrated by armed groups in eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo is worrying, and the chronic obstacles to the region's peace and development need to be further addressed. The implementation of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework for the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Region remains key to achieving lasting peace and stability there. Today I would like to highlight the following points.

First, it is key to maintain the political momentum of dialogue and reconciliation. The settlement of regional issues requires enhanced mutual trust, solidarity and cooperation among countries of the region. China is pleased to see the progress made in the normalization of relations between Rwanda and Uganda as well as between Burundi and Rwanda.

We welcome the commitment of regional leaders at the tenth summit of the Regional Oversight Mechanism of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework to increase diplomatic engagement, promote friendly relations and defuse tensions through political and diplomatic channels. When dealing with complex and sensitive issues such as cross-border security and natural resources, upholding the aforementioned principles has special significance and will contribute to greater mutual political trust.

The international community should respect the leadership of countries and organizations of the region and support their efforts to resolve differences independently through dialogue and consultation and maintain the momentum of improving relations in the region.

Secondly, it is vital to jointly maintain regional peace and security. Both history and current realities have shown that the countries of the Great Lakes region are interdependent and inseparable in terms of security. In the current situation, security risks in eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo are spreading to neighbouring countries. That development merits our attention. All countries should adopt a common, comprehensive cooperative and sustainable security concept and respect one another's sovereignty and territorial integrity.

Last week, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Kenya, Burundi, Uganda and Rwanda held a regional summit in Nairobi, demonstrating the resolve of

countries of the region to jointly tackle common security challenges and help launch the political process in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. China is encouraged by those developments.

We echo the Secretary-General's call and urge armed groups in the Democratic Republic of the Congo to participate unconditionally in the political process. We hope that the establishment of a regional force will help to achieve regional peace.

Thirdly, it is important to increase attention to and investment in non-military solutions. To eliminate the root causes of conflict in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Great Lakes region, military means will not work. A comprehensive approach is needed. The key is to help lift local communities out of poverty and prevent conflicts driven by destitution. That is also the core purpose of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework.

When combating the illegal exploitation and trafficking of Natural Resources, law-enforcement measures are needed. While cracking down on illegal activities, the countries of the region should also promote legal trade, develop a regional industry belt and supply chain and make natural resources a highlight of regional cooperation.

The relevant sanctions measures of the Security Council must not be misused, let alone become a tool for suppressing other political and commercial players. China looks forward to the expeditious implementation of the outcomes of the high-level workshop on natural resources in Khartoum and hopes that the Great Lakes Investment and Trade Conference can provide more opportunities for regional development.

The disarmament, demobilization and reintegration programmes of countries of the region should focus on providing livelihoods for ex-combatants in order to break the vicious circle of profit-driven violence.

Fourthly, synergy must be created to support the countries of the region in addressing challenges. At present, increasing challenges in the global food, energy and financial sectors, as well as the sluggish economic recovery, have affected the Great Lakes region in complex ways. That situation is taking the steam out of regional responses to development, humanitarian, refugee and pandemic issues. China will continue to help the Democratic Republic of the Congo to transform its resource endowment into development

advantages. We call on the international community to increase support for the countries of the region and promote pragmatic cooperation in priority areas such as poverty, reduction, food security, financing for development and industrialization so as to achieve win-win results and common development.

We hope that the United Nations agencies in the region will create synergies in the implementation of the new strategy and action plan for the Great Lakes region. Mobilized resources from various avenues can help the countries of the region to achieve tangible improvements in people's well-being. China will provide support to the Special Envoy's Office through the China-United Nations Peace and Development Fund and other channels and will continue to strengthen bilateral and multilateral cooperation with the countries and organizations of the region to support peace, security and development efforts.

Ms. Byrne Nason (Ireland): I would like to thank Special Envoy Xia for his briefing. I would also like to thank Executive Secretary Caholo and Mr. Dinesh Mahtani.

I would like to focus today on two areas — the importance of regional cooperation and the challenges that must be addressed if peace and prosperity is to be delivered to the Great Lakes region.

The Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework for the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Region remains central to a lasting and sustainable peace in the Great Lakes. The resumption of meetings of the Regional Oversight Mechanism in February is a significant and welcome development. The reaffirmation by signatory countries of the goals of the Framework and its ongoing implementation is also very welcome.

Special Envoy Xia's briefing outlines encouraging examples of steps being taken to normalize relations through diplomatic outreach and dialogue. Ireland welcomes progress in that regard.

The Democratic Republic of the Congo's accession to the East African Community is an important step in terms of greater regional economic integration and cooperation. Ireland knows first-hand the benefits of regional partnership and cooperation in building peace and prosperity, and we hope that membership in the East African Community will not only lead to stronger

economic ties, but will also support the development of shared prosperity and lasting peace.

Last week's conclave on the Democratic Republic of the Congo in Nairobi is further evidence of the commitment of countries of the region to work together to promote regional peace and security. Future engagement by the United Nations, the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region (ICGLR), the East African Community and other stakeholders can further support that initiative.

Stability in the region depends, of course, on stability in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo. Yet the security situation there remains fragile and there has been an increase in the activities of armed groups, including attacks on civilians. This is of serious concern.

We note the ongoing joint military operations by the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Uganda. Those operations should be conducted in line with obligations under international law, including international humanitarian and international human rights law, and should ensure the protection of civilians. It is also important that there be effective communication and coordination with the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

The challenges facing the region cannot be addressed solely by military means. A coherent approach in addressing root causes and drivers of conflict is vital. We believe that the meaningful participation of women across peacebuilding efforts is essential, and it is positive to see commitment to the women and peace and security agenda. The adoption of a regional plan of action on resolution 1325 (2000) is an important development. Now we must ensure that this is resourced and implemented.

We all know that the illegal exploitation of minerals and natural resources remains a significant driver of instability, and we commend the ICGLR for its continued work in this area and the approval by ministers of ICGLR member States of recommendations from the high-level regional workshop on natural resources in the Great Lakes region.

We heard during last week's Arria Formula meeting, hosted by Ireland, that — tragically — 2022 is forecast to be the most food-insecure year on record, with conflict being a major driver. The link between

conflict and hunger is evident in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, which is projected to see the highest number of people face acute food insecurity globally. We urge all parties to ensure the safety and security of humanitarian personnel and unhindered access to humanitarian assistance.

Renewed efforts are needed to put an end to the suffering of vulnerable populations. Ireland welcomes efforts to develop a regional strategy on durable solutions for displaced people. We remain concerned about the significant increase in documented human rights violations and abuses and call on all countries in the Great Lakes region to pursue accountability for the perpetrators of such acts.

Finally, Ireland appreciates the progress being made on the implementation of the United Nations regional strategy and its action plan, which has an important complementary role to play in supporting implementation of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework. We therefore echo the Secretary-General's call for sustained support to its implementation.

Mr. Ravindran (India): Let me begin by thanking Special Envoy Huang Xia for his update on developments in the Great Lakes region. I also thank Ambassador Caholo and Mr. Dinesh Mahtani for their briefings and welcome the presence of the representatives of Burundi, Rwanda and the Democratic Republic of the Congo today among us.

It is evident from today's briefings that there have been positive developments in the Great Lakes region since the previous briefing to the Security Council (see S/PV.8884). The countries of the region have continued to engage regularly in both bilateral and multilateral formats, including at the highest levels, in order to strengthen relations and address outstanding issues of common concern. Those developments need further encouragement from the international community. The historical challenges that continue to hinder progress need solutions rooted in the region and owned by the countries of the region. All of us need to work with them together, in line with their national priorities.

One of the key developments was the convening of the tenth Summit of the Regional Oversight Mechanism on 24 February. We commend the resolve of the region's leaders to fulfilling the commitments to the Framework Agreement, particularly to implement a comprehensive approach towards eliminating the threat of armed groups through both military and non-military measures.

We also welcome the communiqué of the second Heads of State conclave on the Democratic Republic of the Congo, which convened in Nairobi on 21 April and adopted a two-track approach of security enforcement and political process for securing lasting peace. We hope that the consultative dialogue process envisaged will take place with all armed groups, and we call on all armed groups to disarm and comply with the conditions laid down for dialogue. We take positive note of the initiatives of Heads of State of the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region (ICGLR) on the joint road map for peace in the Central African Republic and encourage the Government of the Central African Republic to pursue their efforts in that regard.

While there has been some commendable progress on the political track, the security situation in the Great Lakes region remains volatile. The activities of armed groups such as the Allied Democratic Forces and signs of resurgence of the Movement du 23 mars are a cause for concern and must be dealt with firmly. The violence perpetrated by armed groups continues to perpetuate an environment of insecurity, causing the loss of innocent lives, displacement, loss of livelihood and a sense of despondence among the local people. Statistics from recent briefings to the Security Council are alarming — cases of sexual violence have doubled in the past two years in the Central African Republic, and approximately 16.3 million internally displaced persons (IDPs) were registered in the region, with the Democratic Republic of the Congo alone recording some 6.7 million. It would be unrealistic to expect a voluntary return of those IDPs to their homes when acts of violence continue to dominate.

India is concerned about the growing terrorist attacks in the region, particularly in Uganda and the Democratic Republic of the Congo in the past few months. We strongly condemn those terrorist attacks and express condolences to the families of those who were killed. The linkages of armed groups in the region to terror groups outside the region must be continuously monitored and nipped in the bud. Concerns about those linkages were also underscored in the communiqué of the Regional Oversight Mechanism of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework for the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Region meeting. The ongoing global fight against terrorism cannot and should not be compromised for narrow political gains.

India welcomes the setting up of the operational cell of the Contact and Coordination Group in Goma by the countries of the region. We hope that this will be a helpful coordination point. The coordination of the Contact and Coordination Group with the Democratic Republic of the Congo's recently validated Disarmament, Demobilization, Community Recovery and Stabilization Programme will be important. India encourages close collaboration between the Contact and Coordination Group and the Great Lakes Judicial Cooperation Network for ensuring accountability for cross-border crimes committed by armed groups.

Illegal exploitation, trafficking and illicit trade of natural resources has exacerbated the armed conflict in the Great Lakes region. While noting the ongoing regional efforts, we reiterate the importance of improving traceability and certification processes for natural resources, especially gold, given its linkages with financing armed groups. We also endorse the call for an exhaustive evaluation of the ICGLR Regional Initiative on Natural Resources in each country, as well as the integration of recommendations of the high-level workshop on natural resources in Khartoum last year into the national and regional mineral strategic plans of ICGLR members.

We have no doubt that the full and equal participation of women in peace and development is the foundation of sustainable peacebuilding in the Great Lakes region. We welcome such efforts aimed at enhancing the participation of women and youth in political processes and peacebuilding.

India has close bilateral relationships with all countries in the Great Lakes region, driven by several decades of people-to-people contact and the presence of a large Indian diaspora that is contributing positively to socioeconomic development. Our engagement covers a whole range of sectors, including health, education, agro-processing, infrastructure projects and capacity-building. As part of our overall efforts to combat the coronavirus-disease-vaccine shortages in the region, India has provided more than 7 million vaccines to date, and our peacekeepers in the region are at the forefront of supporting post-conflict reconstruction. India remains steadfast in its commitment to supporting and partnering with the countries in the Great Lakes region in their quest for peace, development and prosperity.

Mrs. Alhefeiti (United Arab Emirates) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I thank Mr. Huang Xia,

Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for the Great Lakes Region, for his detailed briefing and express my country's appreciation for his efforts aimed at supporting peace in the region. I also thank Mr. Caholo for providing us with valuable information. We also listened to Mr. Mahtani's briefing and welcome the participation of representatives of Rwanda, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Burundi at today's meeting.

Since the last briefing to the Council on the Great Lakes (see S/PV.8884), the region has witnessed several positive developments, especially with regard to strengthened diplomatic relations among the countries of the region. This dynamic can be seen, for example, in the reopening of the border between Rwanda and Uganda last January and, more generally, through increased stability along the borders of countries of the Great Lakes region. The United Arab Emirates commends the efforts made by the leaders of the States members of the East African Community (EAC) aimed at supporting peace and stability in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the region as a whole, including their recent initiatives to strengthen constructive dialogue to address ongoing challenges.

We also agree that the implementation of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework for the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Region is essential and indispensable, as stated in the most recent presidential statement on the Great Lakes region (S/PRST/2021/19), which was adopted last October and facilitated by Kenya. However, this implementation should be accompanied by support for initiatives that provide for exchanging views and building upon a common regional vision for peace, in line with the needs and aspirations of the peoples of the region. For instance, the convening in Kinshasa of the Summit on the Regional Monitoring Mechanism for the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework is an example of such encouraging initiatives which endorse the United Nations Strategy for Peace Consolidation, Conflict Prevention and Conflict Resolution in the Great Lakes Region.

The economic empowerment of the countries of the region and the strengthening of trade relations remain key factors in consolidating peace. We commend the efforts of the Special Envoy to stimulate economic growth and combat poverty in the region. The efforts of the members of the Economic Community of Central African States and the admission of the Democratic

Republic of the Congo to the EAC are important steps that will work to enhance economic integration among the countries of the region and serve the interests of its peoples in development and prosperity.

Given women's active role in building peaceful, prosperous and resilient societies in the face of various challenges, we emphasize the importance of ensuring the full, equal and meaningful participation of women on all social, economic, and political tracks, while also providing them with the protection they need. The recent launch of the Great Lakes Women Entrepreneurs Network is a tangible example of the region's commitment to achieving these goals.

As the Secretary-General has noted, achieving stability in the region in the long term requires addressing the root causes of conflicts, ending the violence perpetrated by armed groups and resolving humanitarian crises, while also allowing the peoples of the region to take the initiative in achieving their desired peace and prosperity. We stress that addressing violence against civilians and humanitarian workers, especially in the eastern part of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, requires a collective, internationally supported response from the countries of the region.

In conclusion, the United Arab Emirates stresses our commitment to supporting the efforts of the United Nations and all regional partners, as well as those aimed at building confidence and consolidating peace so as to chart a new path for prosperity and stability in the region.

Mr. Mills (United States of America): I thank Special Envoy Xia for his informative briefing and for joining us today. I also want to thank our other briefers for their very helpful and useful briefings.

The United States continues to support the United Nations regional strategy for the Great Lakes. We encourage Special Envoy Xia to act as swiftly as he can on the regional strategy by using the good offices of the United Nations in partnership with regional leaders to achieve concrete progress on the objectives of the strategy's action plan, as well as of the Framework agreement.

We welcome the regional cooperation evidenced by the tenth summit of the Regional Monitoring Mechanism and now urge full implementation. We also welcome other efforts to strengthen regional security through new bilateral agreements and the mini-summit

on peace and security in the Great Lakes region. We encourage the Special Envoy to make progress on addressing the conflict and corruption risks associated with the region's minerals trade, including engaging with international investors, the trade unions that represent miners and mine workers, and traders.

The United States recognizes the steps that the region is taking towards regional economic integration. We therefore note favourably the admission of the Democratic Republic of the Congo into the East African Community. We are encouraged by recent subregional efforts, such as the creation of a contact and coordination group to address armed groups in the eastern part of the Democratic Republic of the Congo through non-military measures.

Of course, as we have heard, there remain great challenges that we as the international community, the United Nations system and the Great Lakes region must collectively address. In the light of that, we are very concerned about the continuing intercommunal violence and the increase in armed-group activity, particularly by the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria — Democratic Republic of the Congo (ISIS-DRC), also known as the Allied Democratic Forces, the Coopérative pour le développement du Congo (CODECO), the Mouvement du 23 mars and numerous local armed groups.

We remain committed to working with other States Members of the United Nations to make robust use of the Security Council's 1533 (2004) sanctions regime. We reinforce the need for accountability to end impunity for those who fuel conflict in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the broader Great Lakes region.

Cooperation between the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) and the Office of the Special Envoy for the Great Lakes Region remains very important in identifying and implementing political solutions that will stem the flow of armed elements, arms and natural resources that are threatening the peace and stability of the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

The United States strongly condemns all attacks upon civilians, including the 1 February attack on the Plaine Savo internally displaced persons camp, where CODECO assailants slaughtered more than 60 people, mostly women and children, before MONUSCO intervened jointly with the Forces armées de la République démocratique du Congo (FARDC) to repel

the assault. We also lament the reported killing of at least 32 soldiers from the FARDC.

The United States calls on all actors to end violence and any violations of international humanitarian law and human rights abuses. We strongly condemn all attacks on humanitarian workers.

In conclusion, the United States welcomes MONUSCO's continued efforts, in coordination with the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, to protect civilians from armed groups in the eastern part of the country and to disrupt the illicit networks fuelling their violent campaigns against civilian populations. The United States underscores the importance of the full implementation of the resolution 2612 (2021), noting that the entire MONUSCO force, including the Force Intervention Brigade, must take a dynamic and proactive approach to protecting civilians, especially as armed groups like ISIS-DRC and CODECO ramp up their attacks on vulnerable groups.

Ms. Heimerback (Norway): I also want to thank Special Envoy Xia for his informative briefing and Mr. Caholo and Mr. Mahtani for their valuable input. Let me also express our deepest condolences to the families of the recent fallen peacekeepers in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. This underscores that the safety of our Blue Helmets must be ensured at all times.

The deteriorating security and humanitarian situation in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo is deeply concerning and is resulting in large-scale displacement. Reports also show an increase in cross-border incidents and in the overall activity of armed groups. This is happening despite the current state of siege in Ituri and North Kivu provinces in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Additionally, reported incidents of grave human rights violations and abuses, conducted by non-State and State actors, are also on the rise. A common denominator behind these negative developments is rivalry related to natural resources.

To reduce the threat to civilians, including children, we must address the root causes of conflict. Military measures must be accompanied by concerted political dialogue, peacebuilding efforts and projects to promote economic and social development, both in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and in the Great Lakes region as a whole. We urge all relevant stakeholders to combat the illicit exploitation of

natural resources, promote sustainable approaches to disarmament, demobilization and reintegration, and further enhance regional cooperation.

Women's involvement is essential to promoting sustainable peace in the region. We therefore welcome the work of regional actors, including the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region (ICGLR) and the Advisory Board for Women, Peace and Security. Their work is crucial to ensuring women's full, equal and meaningful participation in peace and political processes. The adoption of the regional plan of action on the implementation of resolution 1325 (2000)—aligned to the regional strategy and the revised ICGLR regional gender policy—are also important steps forward.

Implementation, follow-up, and continued consultations will be essential in the coming months. Norway will continue to support these efforts through our ongoing cooperation with the Office of the Special Envoy.

Norway also welcomes efforts to strengthen regional cooperation, and acknowledges the positive trend of building confidence and good neighbourly relations among the countries of the region. The tenth Summit of the Regional Oversight Mechanism in Kinshasa last month was an important step. It is also positive that the Democratic Republic of the Congo has become a member of the East African Community, and we welcome the ongoing talks in Nairobi between the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and armed groups in the eastern Congo.

In February, the International Contact Group for the Great Lakes region discussed regional developments, as well as the United Nations regional strategy. The next step is to use these platforms to enable action. We urge all stakeholders to do their utmost to ensure the implementation of the action plan endorsed by the Council last year.

Instability has for too long defined the lives of the people of the Great Lakes region. Sustainable peace must be ensured to give people the future they deserve. Norway stands ready to work with all actors to that end.

Mr. Gómez Robledo Verduzco (Mexico) (*spoke in Spanish*): My delegations thanks today's briefers: the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General, the Executive Secretary of the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region, and the civil society representative, Mr. Mahtani.

At the outset, I highlight the very important diplomatic work that continues to be carried out at the regional level. One example of that are the commitments undertaken at the tenth Summit of the Regional Oversight Mechanism of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework for the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Region, which took place in Kinshasa in February. We encourage the intensification of these exchanges with the aim of promoting good-neighbourliness and cooperation.

In the field of economic integration, Mexico welcomes the admission of the Democratic Republic of the Congo in the East African Community. This is a significant step for the creation of socioeconomic opportunities and the development of the region. Similarly, the efforts of that organization to promote peace and stability in the Democratic Republic of the Congo are encouraging, especially given the deterioration of security in that country. We welcome initiatives on both those tracks, in particular in view of the deterioration of the security situation in the country.

Secondly, I note with concern the increased activity of armed groups, such as the Allied Democratic Forces, the *Coopérative pour le développement du Congo* and the *Mouvement du 23 mars*, in the eastern provinces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, in addition to cross-border incursions and incidents. We condemn the violence that has occurred in recent weeks, in particular the attack on personnel of the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, in which a member of the Mission was killed. We must always remember that deliberate attacks on peacekeeping personnel constitute war crimes, which is why we underline the need to investigate this situation, as well as the crash of a helicopter in the Rutshuru region that caused the death of eight people.

Despite extraordinary measures, such as the state of siege that will soon be one year old, the increase in violence demonstrates yet again that there are no purely military solutions. We reiterate the importance of addressing the root causes of violence, including hate speech that generates intercommunity tensions. We also call for prioritizing the implementation of disarmament, demobilization and reintegration programmes in the region and other non-military measures that favour the creation of economic opportunities for the population and build trust.

Thirdly, in terms of accountability, we highlight the actions taken to strengthen judicial cooperation among the countries of the region. We hope that these efforts will prioritize the fight against impunity for crimes such as the exploitation and illicit trafficking of natural resources, as well as the irresponsible transfer of small and light weapons. Both phenomena materially sustain the cycles of violence and represent yet another obstacle to the development of the region.

Fourthly, we highlight the importance of the full, equal and meaningful participation of women in conflict prevention processes in the region, as well as in the creation of opportunities for economic development. The launch of the Great Lakes Women Entrepreneurs Network is a positive step that should be maintained and replicated.

Finally, we reiterate our support for the work of the Special Envoy for the implementation of the action plan for the Great Lakes, as well as for the work of the International Conference of the Great Lakes Region and other subregional organizations that work together to face common challenges.

Ms. Evstigneeva (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): We thank Mr. Huang Xia, Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for the Great Lakes Region, and Mr. João Samuel Caholo, Executive Secretary of the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region, for their briefings. We listened very attentively to the briefing provided by Mr. Dinesh Mahtani.

We welcome the presence among us the representatives of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and other countries of the region.

It is clear that the dire situation in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo is still having a major impact on the situation in the Great Lakes region. Unfortunately, despite the joint military operations undertaken by Congolese and Ugandan army units and the efforts of the peacekeepers of the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, we are seeing increased activity in the eastern part of the country by illegal armed groups.

Yet another tragic illustration of that scenario were the events of 29 March, when a helicopter deployed by the United Nations Mission was downed by the fighters, with Russian military observer Lieutenant Colonel Alexei Mizura on board. We offer our heartfelt

condolences to the families and loved ones of all the peacekeepers killed. A thorough and transparent investigation into the circumstances surrounding the crash must be conducted, including through the Secretariat, and to ensure that those responsible are brought to justice.

We note with concern the information about the links between some illegal armed groups operating in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and terrorist organizations. We reiterate our commitment to combating international terrorism in all its forms and manifestations.

However, we continue to believe that long-term normalization in the Democratic Republic of the Congo cannot be achieved through military measures alone. Efforts need to be made to ensure the full implementation of the 2013 Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework for the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Region. Every effort must also be made to improve the socioeconomic situation in the region, effectively implement disarmament, demobilization and reintegration programmes for former combatants and promote national reconciliation processes.

The illegal exploitation of natural resources, which are used by militants to finance their activities and strengthen their combat capabilities, also remains an urgent issue.

In general, we have a positive assessment of the momentum for dialogue among States of the Great Lakes region and their readiness to develop practical cooperation to stabilize the situation in the region. We welcome the peacekeeping role played by leaders of States of the Great Lakes region, as well as by subregional organizations, such as the Southern African Development Community and the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region. We hope that the meeting of Heads of State and Government of the Regional Oversight Mechanism of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework that took place in February will foster subregional cooperation and expedite the peace process. We also note the recent summit in Nairobi, where States of the region were able to reach some important agreements.

We fully support efforts of the United Nations to promote the United Nations Strategy for Peace Consolidation, Conflict Prevention and Conflict Resolution in the Great Lakes Region, as well as United Nations work on the action plan for its implementation.

For our part, we stand ready to promote stabilization in the Great Lakes region by encouraging dialogue and constructive cooperation among the countries of the region. We are committed to meaningful cooperation with the relevant institutions of the United Nations system and its representatives

The President: I shall now make a statement in my capacity as the representative of the United Kingdom.

Let me begin by thanking Special Envoy Huang Xia, Ambassador Caholo and Mr. Mahtani for their briefings today, as well as the Chair of the Peacebuilding Commission for the written advice provided to the Council on the Great Lakes region. I will focus this statement on the security dynamics in the region.

The United Kingdom remains extremely concerned by the fragile security situation in the Great Lakes region, in particular the increased violence as a result of greater activity by armed groups, including the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF), the Coalition des démocrates Congolais, and the Résistance pour un État de droit au Burundi, as well as the re-emergence of the Mouvement du 23 mars (M-23) and the reported links between the ADF and the Islamic State-Central Africa Province. Those are all stark reminders of the need to address the security vacuum in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo.

We also remain concerned about the humanitarian situation in the Great Lakes region, with the large-scale displacement of more than 16 million persons and violations of international humanitarian law and human rights, mainly as a result of violence in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo. We are particularly concerned about the protection of civilians as a result of intercommunal violence in the Democratic Republic of the Congo's Ituri province, including the recent targeting of internally displaced person camps.

The multidimensional challenges facing the Great Lakes region require a multidimensional response. The United Kingdom welcomes the positive trend of enhanced diplomatic outreach and dialogue among countries of the region. That includes steps towards normalization between Rwanda and Uganda and the recent regional Heads of State conclave on the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo, hosted by President Kenyatta in Nairobi.

We call upon countries of the region to intensify those efforts in order to improve regional cooperation

and turn commitments into tangible action to address shared security challenges, improve humanitarian access and reduce violence.

I also call upon Special Envoy Huang Xia and the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region to continue to work in close coordination, including with the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo where relevant, in support of the countries of the region to holistically tackle the threat posed by the M-23 and other armed groups, to foster confidence-building among the States of the region and to enable the implementation of the United Nations action plan for the Great Lakes region.

The final point that I would like to make is on natural resources, whose illegal exploitation is a source of funding for armed groups and a driver of conflict across the Great Lakes region, as we heard across the Council today. We strongly support the designation of sanctions against those individuals and entities found responsible for the exploitation of natural resources. We will continue to work with the international community, including through the Committee established pursuant to resolution 1533 (2004) concerning the Democratic Republic of the Congo, to ensure that those individuals and entities are held accountable for their actions.

I now resume my functions as President of the Council.

I give the floor to the representative of Rwanda.

Mr. Gatete (Rwanda): First and foremost, the Republic of Rwanda congratulates the United Kingdom on assuming the presidency of the Security Council for the month of April, and we express our appreciation for it having organized this important briefing.

I thank the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General, Mr. Huang Xia, the Executive Secretary of the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region, Ambassador Samuel Caholo, and the independent expert on the Great Lakes region, Mr. Dinesh Mahtani, for their insightful briefings. I also thank Security Council members for their statements.

Today's briefing is important on many counts.

First, it comes at a time when the Great Lakes region economies and socioeconomic systems are overcoming the consequences of the coronavirus disease pandemic, which exacerbated pre-existing challenges in the region.

On another note, the Great Lakes region is experiencing positive political developments and the normalization of relations among member countries, which is driving the momentum for regional cooperation and greater integration.

This meeting also comes at an opportune moment when the Democratic Republic of the Congo recently joined the East African Community, which is another milestone towards achieving security in the region.

Rwanda is encouraged by the measures taken during the second regional Heads of State conclave on the Democratic Republic of the Congo, hosted by the Chairperson of the East African Community, His Excellency Mr. Uhuru Kenyatta, President of the Republic of Kenya, on 21 April 2021, three weeks after the Democratic Republic of the Congo officially joined the Community.

Rwanda welcomes the outcome of that meeting, which includes a political process that involves domestic armed groups in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the disarmament and repatriation of all foreign armed groups. That initiative, which has been supported by the African Union, is expected to restore peace and stability in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

The successful disarmament, demobilization and reintegration of armed groups are key to creating and maintaining sustainable peace and development in the Great Lakes region. We therefore call upon the Security Council to support such regional efforts, which complement the existing peace and security framework to build sustainable peace in the Great Lakes region.

We welcome the Special Envoy's efforts to implement peacebuilding priorities, as specified in the action plan of the regional strategy, based on the principles of ownership, complementarity and partnership. Those actions complement the efforts led by the East African Community.

However, addressing the security situation is not enough. It is imperative that we also strengthen cooperation on economic development in the Great Lakes region. That is already being done through regional investment and the cross-border trade that exists in both the central and the northern corridors of East Africa, which facilitates the smooth movement of goods and people.

Let me conclude by reaffirming Rwanda's unwavering commitment to peace, security and development in our region and beyond.

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

Mr. Maniratanga (Burundi) (*spoke in French*): The delegation of Burundi welcomes the holding of this important meeting and would like to thank the President of the Security Council for the month of April for having convened this meeting.

The delegation of Burundi commends the Independent Expert on the Great Lakes region, Mr. Dinesh Mahtani; Mr. João Samuel Caholo, Executive Secretary of the International Conference on the Great Lakes region; and the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for their briefings. We especially welcome the active involvement of the Special Envoy and his commitment to facilitating cooperation and development in the Great Lakes region.

While welcoming regional cooperation in the area of intelligence and the recommendations that came out of the Bujumbura meeting on national intelligence services, my delegation calls on the international community to become more involved in achieving peace and development in the Great Lakes region.

Regarding paragraphs 13 and 14 of the Secretary-General's report (S/2022/276), the delegation of Burundi refutes the allegations contained in paragraph 13 alluding to the presence of elements of the Burundi National Defence Force and members of Imbonerakure in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

I should like to make three remarks in that respect concerning that paragraph. Burundi did not formally react to that information because it does not deem it advisable to react to any and all provocations and rumours that surface on social networks. Nonetheless, Burundi would like to state most formally that it did not deploy its army in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Burundi welcomes the communiqué issued by the summit of Heads of State of the East African Community and calls on all negative forces, including RED Tabara, to lay down their arms and to repatriate to their countries of origin.

Secondly, the RED Tabara terrorist group, based in the eastern part of the Democratic Republic of the

Congo, which emerged after the failed coup d'état in 2015 in Burundi, has members who wear the uniforms of various armies in our region, obtained in a variety of ways. It cooperates with other terrorist groups, in particular the Allied Democratic Forces, and poses a threat to peace and security not only in Burundi and the Democratic Republic of the Congo but also in the subregion as a whole.

The armed terrorist group RED Tabara has crossed the Congo border several times to conduct terrorist acts in Burundi, including the throwing of grenades at innocent civilians in urban areas, the theft of property and deadly ambushes against the vehicles of defenceless civilian passengers.

Thirdly, as regards young people, it is very surprising to hear talk of their presence in the Imbonerakure in the Democratic Republic of the Congo at a time when Burundi is considered to be a model of the successful integration of youth with a view to their empowerment. We take this opportunity to bring to the attention of the members of the Security Council and the international community that the integration model for Burundian youth, through the cooperatives initiated by the Government of Burundi, is being facilitated by the creation of the Youth Investment Bank and a women's investment bank, which has led to the positive result of a massive urban exodus, with young people leaving cities for villages and creating cooperative development associations, devising projects and benefiting from the funding provided by the Youth Investment Bank.

Young people in Burundi are operating within the framework of development, not within the framework of what is mentioned in paragraph 13 of the report before us today. They are so well supported in this that Burundi has just held a continental dialogue on youth, peace and security, with the participation of Youth Ambassadors for Peace of the African Union, the African Union Commission Special Envoy on Youth and members of the Group of Experts of the African Union Peace and Security Council. The dialogue was endorsed by the Bujumbura Declaration on Youth, Peace and Security. All the young people who participated virtually and in person in that dialogue saw that Burundian youth should be used as a model for all young people in Africa.

We therefore categorically reject the information contained in those paragraphs, which is the result of political manipulation by the opposition in exile.

In conclusion, Burundi will spare no effort to bring about peace and development in the subregion and is actively preparing to take over, in 2023, the rotating presidency of the Regional Oversight Mechanism under the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework for the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Region.

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 should like to thank you, Mr. President, for having invited us to this meeting, and I would also like to thank all members for their comments made here. I have taken note of them, and we will certainly consider them as we take decisions regarding the peace and development strategy in the eastern part of our country.

At the outset, I wish to congratulate you, Sir, on your presidency of the Security Council for April and for having taken the initiative to organize this meeting on the situation in the Great Lakes region in general and on the implementation of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework for the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Region.

I would also like to welcome among us the presence of His Excellency Mr. João Samuel Caholo, Executive Secretary of the International Conference on the Great Lakes region, and Mr. Dinesh Mahtani, Independent Expert on the Great Lakes region. I wish also to extend my thanks to all members of the Security Council, as I said earlier.

My delegation has taken note of the Secretary-General's report on the implementation of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework for the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Region (S/2022/276), just introduced to us by Ambassador Huang Xia, Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for the Great Lakes region, whom I had the honour of meeting two days ago, when we had a very good exchange on what is happening in our region. My delegation welcomes the report before us, but we would like to make a few comments on issues referred to therein and concerns expressed by members of the Security Council.

We need hardly recall the importance of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework for the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Region, which remains an important instrument for bringing

about security, peace and stability as a precursor to the sustainable development of the Great Lakes region.

The President of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, His Excellency Félix-Antoine Tshisekedi Tshilombo, has, since coming to power, worked tirelessly to change the narrative in the Great Lakes region. He has pursued his policy of strengthening good-neighbourliness and cooperation with all the leaders of the region. The holding of the tenth summit of the Regional Monitoring Mechanism of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework for the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Region, on 24 February 2022 in Kinshasa, the participation of the Head of State at various high-level meetings in the region, the signing of numerous bilateral agreements with countries in the region, such as the agreement to cooperate with Uganda in the fight against the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF), illustrate this determination.

The eastern part of the Democratic Republic of the Congo must be brought back to peace. This goal must be achieved. The unspeakable suffering of the population in this part of the country must be brought to an end, as we are talking about a state of affairs that has lasted for more than 25 years. We must put an end to the suffering of this population and give them the chance to improve their living conditions. My delegation invites all signatories, guarantors and multisectoral partners to work consistently to this end, which is beneficial not only for the Democratic Republic of the Congo but also for the entire region. This momentum in the destiny of the Great Lakes region must not be wasted but rather capitalized upon.

My delegation certainly recognizes that much has already been done and that there has been an improvement in the evolution of the situation, as the report before us also highlights, but the major objectives, namely, peace, stability and development, have not yet been achieved. All challenges that delay and jeopardize stability in the region must be identified and addressed.

Owing to time constraints, I will focus my statement on just a few of these challenges. With regard to the actions by armed groups of internal and external origin, my country is concerned at the resurgence of their negative activities. The ADF and their links with terrorist entities at the global level, the *Coopérative pour le développement du Congo* and other armed groups, together with the unacceptable resurgence of attacks by the *Mouvement du 23 mars*, which we were

able to defeat and disarm in 2013, must absolutely be a thing of the past.

To this end, while continuing our efforts aimed at reforming the defence and security sector and the strengthening of the *Forces armées de la République démocratique du Congo*, my country has endorsed the implementation of a comprehensive approach to neutralizing negative forces. This was one of the decisions made at the Nairobi summit. Joint military operations in the context of states of siege and in terms of military cooperation will continue together with non-military measures. The Democratic Republic of the Congo, which is currently in talks in Nairobi with the armed groups, calls on the international community, the Security Council and the region, united in the Contact and Coordination Group, for clear support in forcing the armed groups operating in the east to surrender their weapons and join the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration scheme at both the national and regional levels.

With regard to the illicit exploitation of natural resources and the illegal trafficking of arms and ammunition, the region must continue to act to strengthen the fight against these scourges. The resolutions of the Khartoum conference and the efforts undertaken within the framework of the International Conference of the Great Lakes Region for the certification of minerals are positive steps for my country and for the region.

With regard to the humanitarian challenge, which is also largely the consequence of the aforementioned armed-group activity, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, beyond its partnership with the United Nations under the humanitarian response plan launched on 17 February 2022, remains open to any additional positive regional initiative that could help meet the challenge.

With regard to the challenge of respecting human rights, the Democratic Republic of the Congo would like to reassure the Council that it is continuing to make efforts to achieve this objective. The reforms undertaken in the justice system and the operationalization of transitional justice will certainly help in this pursuit.

As I noted earlier in my statement, while challenges remain, the positive developments in the region and the efforts aimed at rebuilding trust and confidence in the Great Lakes region are worthy of encouragement. That is why my country is asking the United Nations and the

international community to support the efforts of all leaders of the Great Lakes region.

I cannot conclude my remarks without thanking the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for the Great Lakes Region for the sequential implementation of his 2021-2023 action plan for the region, as well as for the efforts he continues to make within his mandate to restore peace throughout the Great Lakes region, and more specifically in my country.

To all the members of the Security Council, I reiterate the gratitude of the people and the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo for their dedication and commitment to the cause of my country and the region.

The President: There are no more names inscribed on the list of speakers. I will now adjourn the meeting so that the Council can continue its discussion on the subject in closed consultations.

The meeting rose at 12.05 p.m.