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Provisional

President: Mr. Almahmoud/Mrs. Nusseibeh (United Arab Emirates)

Members:

Albania	Ms. Dautllari
Brazil	Mr. De Almeida Filho
China	Mr. Dai Bing
Ecuador	Mr. Pérez Loose
France	Mr. De Rivière
Gabon	Mr. Biang
Ghana	Ms. Barnor
Japan	Mr. Ishikane
Malta	Mr. Camilleri
Mozambique	Mr. Afonso
Russian Federation	Ms. Evstigneeva
Switzerland	Mrs. Baeriswyl
United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland . .	Mr. Eckersley
United States of America	Mr. Wood

Agenda

The situation concerning the Democratic Republic of the Congo

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The meeting was called to order at 10 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation concerning the Democratic Republic of the Congo

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

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite Ms. Martha Ama Akyaa Pobee, Assistant Secretary-General for Africa in the Departments of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs and Peace Operations, to participate in this meeting.

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

I now give the floor to Ms. Pobee.

Ms. Pobee (*spoke in French*): Allow me to begin by thanking the members of the Security Council for the opportunity to present the report of the Secretary-General on the situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. I also welcome the Permanent Representative of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Permanent Representative of Rwanda.

(spoke in English)

Over the past three months, the security situation in eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo has continued to deteriorate in Ituri and North Kivu, despite a lull in armed clashes between the Mouvement du 23 mars (M-23) and the Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (FARDC). Thus far, the ceasefire between the M-23 and the FARDC has relatively held and contributed to some security gains. The relative calm in Rutshuru territory, for example, has enabled more than 45,000 people from the Bishusha group to return to their homes.

However, the withdrawal of the M-23 from the occupied areas has been piecemeal, tactical and political. The M-23 still controls a large part of the Masisi and Rutshuru territories, as well as the movement of people and goods in those areas. Moreover, its offensive repositioning in recent weeks has raised fears that hostilities could flare up again at any moment. The M-23 continues to create insecurity, reportedly killing at least 47 civilians in North Kivu over the recent period.

In that context, we welcome the continued efforts of regional leaders to prevail on the concerned parties to implement the decisions of the Luanda road map and the Nairobi process. We reiterate the readiness of the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) to assist the Congolese authorities with the pre-cantonment and disarmament of the M-23. To that end, I am pleased to note that, last week, MONUSCO and Congolese authorities undertook a reconnaissance mission at the Rumangabo base to assess the conditions for the pre-cantonment of the M-23. For those efforts to bear fruit, it is urgent that the M-23 withdraw completely from the occupied territories, lay down their arms unconditionally and join the Demobilization, Disarmament, Community Recovery and Stabilization Programme.

The relative security gains in North Kivu are unfortunately fragile and overshadowed by the deteriorating situation in Ituri. That province has suffered from the security vacuum created by the redeployment of the FARDC to North Kivu. More than 600 people were killed by armed groups during the reporting period. The *Coopérative pour le développement du Congo* (CODECO), the Zaire militia and the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF) are the main perpetrators of those atrocities. A particularly heinous example was the CODECO militia attack on the Lala internally displaced persons site on the night of 11 to 12 May. More than 40 displaced people were killed and 800 shelters were burned. I reiterate our condemnation of that atrocious attack on civilians who had already endured significant hardship.

Despite the joint operations of the FARDC and the Uganda People's Defence Forces, the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF) has extended its area of influence to an unprecedented level and remains a serious threat to the security and stability of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. At the same time, the persistent activities of armed groups in South Kivu for the control of mining sites, in particular Mayi-Mayi militias, reminds us that it is imperative to resolve the root causes of the conflict in eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo for peace to be restored.

We urge all armed groups to cease hostilities and call for a redeployment of national security forces, particularly in Ituri, to restore State authority in that area. The population, especially the most vulnerable, cannot remain without the protection of the Congolese State. The consequences of that absence are deeply worrisome.

In response to the persistent insecurity in eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo, MONUSCO continues to do its utmost to deliver on its mandate to protect civilians. In Beni, Bunia, Bukavu and Goma, workshops supported by the Mission have served to ease tensions and build local capacities to better respond to security challenges, including disinformation.

In parallel, the Mission has provided direct physical protection to the civilian population, notably through protection by projection. To date, between 50,000 and 70,000 displaced people are under the direct physical protection of MONUSCO in Roe site, located in Djugu territory in the province of Ituri. The Mission has repelled CODECO attacks against civilians on numerous occasions. The joint operations between the FARDC and MONUSCO's Force Intervention Brigade have also actively contributed to the fight against the ADF. These joint operations have concretely resulted in the protection of a hospital in Oicha and the dismantling of several ADF training camps.

Beyond the protection of civilian efforts, humanitarian interventions are still highly needed. Insecurity in the eastern part of the Democratic Republic has continued to fuel a long-standing humanitarian crisis that is often overlooked by the international community. Approximately 6.3 million people have been displaced in the country, and, since March 2022, more than 2.8 million people have newly fled their homes in Ituri, North Kivu and South Kivu provinces, due to insecurity. Currently, 28 per cent of the population in North Kivu and 39 per cent in Ituri are displaced.

That situation has been further aggravated by inflation, epidemics and natural disasters, including the floods experienced last month in Kahele territory of South Kivu, which killed over 470 people, with thousands missing and thousands more otherwise affected. At the same time, almost 26 million people, more than a quarter of the population, are facing food insecurity in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

We are particularly concerned about the growing number of women and girls who have been subjected to gender-based violence and sexual exploitation. Gender-based violence has increased by 23 per cent nationwide, and by 73 per cent in North Kivu province alone, compared to the same period last year. These violations are linked to the proliferation of armed groups in areas where displaced people are hosted and to frequent

breaches of the civilian and humanitarian character of these displacement sites. Furthermore, the surge in sexual violence against children has also increased and is particularly horrifying.

A significant scale-up of services to prevent and respond to sexual violence in and around displacement sites, as well as to ensure better access to food, water and safe sanitation facilities, is urgently required. We therefore call on the Congolese authorities to take stronger action, including the provision of additional sites, to assist and protect displaced people, and for better security in the sites and in the fight against impunity.

The humanitarian response falls far short of the unprecedented level of needs. We applaud the activation of a system-wide scale-up of the response in eastern part of the Democratic Republic for an initial period of three months. We encourage the Congolese State, which has the prime responsibility and duty to protect its citizens, to facilitate and support this enhanced response. We appeal once again to the donor community to contribute to the 2023 humanitarian response plan, which as of 18 June was funded at 28 per cent.

In addition to the security and humanitarian challenges in eastern part of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, pockets of instability have resurfaced in the western and southern parts of the country. Violence has persisted in the provinces of Mai-Ndombe, Kwilu and Kwango, and it has spread to Maluku in the Kinshasa province. This violence has resulted in the death of at least 67 people in the last three months. Tensions and violence have also been reported in Kindu, Tshopo and Katanga. We urge the authorities to hold the perpetrators of violence to account and take measures to strengthen social cohesion to preserve the gains made towards stability in these areas.

The human rights situation also remains worrisome. We are particularly alarmed at the restriction of civic space and the increase in hate speech. We are also concerned by reports of a rise in violence against women political leaders and activists. I urge the authorities, civil society and political actors to work to promote a peaceful, tolerant and inclusive civic space, particularly in the run-up to the December 2023 elections. In that regard, I welcome the measures announced by the Independent National Electoral Commission to reopen voter registration in Kwamouth. I hope that appropriate measures will also be taken to ensure registration for all Congolese in the eastern provinces.

In accordance with its mandate, MONUSCO has been providing logistical support to the Electoral Commission and training for police officers who will be responsible for security during the elections. The United Nations more broadly is also providing technical assistance for the electoral process through the United Nations Development Programme election-support programme. We encourage Member States to support this programme, which is still largely underfunded at the moment. Efforts to prevent electoral violence must also be reinforced, and the support of the Peacebuilding Fund is important in that regard.

Those efforts can bear fruit only if all stakeholders are genuinely committed to the electoral process. In that regard, the independent audit of the electoral register was an opportunity to strengthen the transparency and credibility of the electoral process. The quality of the electoral process depends on the trust of the stakeholders, and this must be cultivated through greater transparency and inclusive consultation. A successful electoral process that renews the legitimacy of the country's institutions is also critical, ultimately, to improving the security situation.

With regard to the transition, the visit of the Under-Secretary-General for Peace Operations, Mr. Jean-Pierre Lacroix, to the Democratic Republic of the Congo in early June, came at an opportune time to support the consultations. We noted the will of the Congolese authorities to accelerate the transition, and we encouraged the finalization of the revised transition plan, now structured around four priority benchmarks.

The visit also provided an opportunity to highlight the key role of MONUSCO in the protection of civilians and to recall our guiding principles for the transition. In a rapidly evolving national and regional environment, we must stay on course for an orderly, gradual and responsible transition. The departure of MONUSCO is planned, and initial steps are being taken in several areas. However, MONUSCO's withdrawal should not jeopardize the protection of civilians. We must avoid creating security vacuums. The Mission cannot responsibly depart from areas where MONUSCO is the only protection presence.

I recall that the transition of MONUSCO is, in simple terms, the continuation of the Mission's mandated tasks by Congolese authorities. It is up to the Congolese Government to create the conditions for that continuation to be viable for the long term.

The Mission, jointly with the United Nations country team, is, for its part, fully committed to assisting the Congolese authorities in this endeavour. In that regard, MONUSCO and the United Nations country team have engaged proactively with the Government to jointly re-evaluate the joint transition plan, as mandated by the Council.

That commitment is apparent through our unwavering support for the regional peace processes. We salute the commitment of the leaders and facilitators of the processes through their good offices, the regular holding of high-level summits and the decision of Angola to deploy troops to secure M-23 cantonment sites and protect members of the ad hoc verification mechanism. The decision of the Southern African Development Community (SADC) to deploy troops also signals the increasing commitment of regional actors to respond to the Democratic Republic of the Congo's need for peace. In that context, we reiterate the need to ensure that all these regional initiatives are mutually reinforcing and coordinated with MONUSCO.

The quadripartite summit, which will take place tomorrow in Luanda, Angola, under the facilitation of the African Union and with the participation of Heads of State and representatives of SADC, the East African Community, the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region and the Economic Community of Central African States, would provide an opportunity, among other things, to define practical modalities of such coordination. MONUSCO stands ready to continue working in concert with relevant stakeholders in support of those regional initiatives, within the limits of its mandate.

Our commitment to preparing for the transition is also visible in our efforts to support disarmament, demobilization and reintegration and security sector reform. An orderly and responsible transition depends on the ability of the national security forces to deploy and intervene effectively wherever the security situation requires.

As MONUSCO transitions, we are also drawing lessons from the Mission's withdrawal from the Kasais and Tanganyika with regard to support for the deployment of Congolese authorities and resource mobilization. The United Nations country team and the Mission are currently working to mobilize the necessary funding to implement the transition plan for

Tanganyika, which amounts to \$26 million over a two-year period, and I appeal to the donor community for their support.

The Mission has also initiated the formulation of transition plans for North and South Kivu and Ituri. This is a geographical approach designed to align the transition as closely as possible with the realities of each area. I would like to stress, however, that the primary responsibility for ensuring protection, development and social cohesion remains with the Congolese authorities. Major Government projects are under way, such as the military programming law and the development programme for the 145 territories. Those projects must quickly produce results that live up to expectations.

The gradual and geographical withdrawal of MONUSCO must continue, in close collaboration with the Congolese authorities, so as never to create a security vacuum, including by investing in police capacity through a successful reform of the security sector.

(spoke in French)

In conclusion, I would like to reiterate my thanks to all the troop- and police-contributing countries and their personnel and to the Mission's national and international civilian personnel. I salute their ongoing efforts to support the national and provincial authorities and the defence and security forces in implementing our mandate.

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

Mr. De Rivièrè (France) *(spoke in French)*: I would like to thank Ms. Pobeè for her briefing.

I wish to focus on three points.

First, efforts to ensure the withdrawal of the Movement du 23 mars (M-23) and to demobilize the armed groups must be accelerated.

France condemns the many abuses committed by the armed groups. The violations of human rights and international humanitarian law, committed, in particular, by the M-23, the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF), the Cooperative for Development of the Congo (CODECO) and the Forces démocratiques de libération du Rwanda (FDLR) must not go unpunished. France calls for the perpetrators of those crimes to be brought to justice. The decision by the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court to examine the acts committed in North Kivu is an important signal.

France also condemns hate speech targeting certain Tutsi communities. France is concerned about the information from the Group of Experts on the Democratic Republic of the Congo confirming that the M-23 is holding on to the positions it conquered in recent months in the east of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. It calls on the group to withdraw. We are also concerned about Rwanda's continued military support for that armed group and by the presence of Rwandan soldiers on Congolese territory. That support must stop. Similarly, the support provided by certain members of the Congolese armed forces to armed groups, such as the FDLR, also must end.

The priority must be to bring the Nairobi and Luanda regional processes to a successful conclusion. The M-23 must be contained. The inter-Congolese consultations must continue in order to disarm and demobilize the Congolese armed groups. States in the region must demobilize and repatriate foreign armed groups. The Security Council is preparing to renew the sanctions regime established by resolution 1533 (2004). France calls for sanctions to be taken against those who continue to obstruct peace and commit abuses.

Secondly, the partnership between the United Nations and the Democratic Republic of the Congo must be adapted to the needs of the population.

To respond to the humanitarian crisis, France calls on the international community to fund the United Nations humanitarian response plan. This year, the European Union has already provided €80 million to meet humanitarian needs and has shipped 260 tons of essential supplies.

The Congolese authorities must also work alongside MONUSCO to protect the internally displaced persons (IDP) camps. This month's despicable attack on the Lala IDP camp by CODECO demonstrates the urgent need to reinforce the security of the population.

It is imperative that the United Nations agencies, funds and programmes step up their action as MONUSCO continues its transition. This applies to the United Nations Development Programme, for stabilization initiatives, UNICEF, to ensure that every child has access to education, and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, to combat trafficking. The support of the Office of Counter-Terrorism must be bolstered in order to respond to a regional threat, as demonstrated by the recent attack carried out by the ADF against a school in Uganda.

The Secretary-General's forthcoming report on the reconfiguration of the United Nations presence in the Democratic Republic of the Congo will have to take all those challenges into account. We are expecting concrete proposals in that regard.

Finally, France is ready to support the Democratic Republic of the Congo in the run-up to the elections in December 2023. My country supports the efforts of the Independent National Electoral Commission to implement that process within the constitutional time frame. France wishes to accompany the country on the path to free elections. We encourage a process that meets the aspirations of the Congolese people.

France calls on all stakeholders to promote inclusion and condemn hate speech. Respect for public freedoms and the establishment of a space for unhindered expression will contribute to a peaceful election. A return to stability in the Democratic Republic of the Congo will require the commitment of all. We pledge our support on the road to peace.

Mr. Dai Bing (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): I thank Assistant Secretary-General Pobee for her briefing. I welcome the Permanent Representatives of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Rwanda to this meeting.

China has consistently supported the Democratic Republic of the Congo in its efforts to maintain peace and stability and to promote development and revitalization. In May, President Tshisekedi Tshilombo was invited to visit China, injecting new impetus for China-Democratic Republic of the Congo cooperation. Currently, the Democratic Republic of the Congo is at a critical juncture in its political and peace processes. The international community should provide greater support and assistance.

I wish to emphasize the following points.

First, China strongly condemns the armed groups and their recent attacks on the internally displaced persons camps and schools at the border with Uganda. We are concerned about the persistent threat posed by armed groups to the stability in the eastern the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

In May, Secretary-General Guterres, together with regional and national leaders, attended a summit in the Great Lakes region and called for the armed groups to cease hostilities. China urges the armed groups to immediately cease their violent activities, withdraw

from the occupied areas and join the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration process. We commend the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Uganda and Burundi for their joint operations to address common threats. We note the efforts being made by the East African Community, the Southern African Development Community and Angola to maintain the security of the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo and hope that the relevant regional operations will be better coordinated so as to effectively prevent the situation from deteriorating further.

Secondly, the Democratic Republic of the Congo's general elections at the end of the year will have a bearing on the country's development and stability. China supports the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo in its efforts to make progress in areas such as electoral legislation and voter registration, and expects all the parties to resolve their differences through dialogue and consultation in order to ensure that the general elections are held smoothly. The Democratic Republic of the Congo still faces many difficulties and challenges in the area of electoral preparation. We call on the international community and the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) to respect the country's sovereignty and ownership and provide more logistical and financial support.

Thirdly, the level of peace and stability in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo is linked to overall security in the Great Lakes region. Last month in Burundi, leaders of the Great Lakes region held a summit marking the tenth anniversary of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework Agreement for the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Great Lakes Region. The meeting forged consensus among the countries of the region on maintaining stability in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo, strengthening common security and deepening regional cooperation, and China appreciates those efforts. We expect those countries to see the meeting as an opportunity, bolster the roles of the Nairobi and Luanda processes, support respect for one another's concerns and resolve differences through dialogue and consultation. China expects Xia Huang, the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for the Great Lakes region, to redouble his efforts in using his diplomatic good offices.

China supports Special Representative Keita and MONUSCO in their work in areas such as maintaining the stability of the eastern Democratic Republic of the

Congo, protecting civilians and supporting the electoral process. The relations between the Mission and the host country have been a significant issue for some time now. China encourages MONUSCO to strengthen its communication with the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, maintain mutual trust and cooperation and ensure that it fulfils its mandate smoothly and effectively. MONUSCO has recently had multiple exchanges with the Government regarding the transition plan. The Security Council should give due regard to the needs of the Government and its people, factor in the latest developments in the eastern part of the country and formulate MONUSCO's mandate and future transitional arrangements in a rational, science-based manner. In that regard, China looks forward to the Secretary-General's report to the Council next month and to his pragmatic and reasonable proposal.

Ms. Dautllari (Albania): I would like to begin by thanking Assistant Secretary-General Pobee for her briefing, and I welcome the Permanent Representative of the Democratic Republic of the Congo to today's meeting. Let me make some observations on the reporting period.

First, the temporary conclusion of voter registration was a significant milestone in the electoral process, despite the inability to conduct the exercise all over the country. Nevertheless, Albania takes note of the concerns regarding the process of updating the voter's register. We encourage the authorities to address those concerns in an inclusive and transparent manner.

Secondly, Albania welcomes the regional efforts to advance peace processes in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo. The twenty-first extraordinary summit of the Heads of State of the East African Community (EAC) provided only temporary rather than sustainable assurances. We welcome the decision of the Southern African Development Community troika to deploy part of its standby force. We also welcome Angola's leadership in deploying troops to protect the staff of the ad hoc verification mechanism and secure the sites from the Mouvement du 23 mars (M-23), as well as the assistance provided by the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) in that process. Albania has repeatedly emphasized the crucial need for enhanced coordination and synergies between the Congolese armed forces, MONUSCO, the EAC regional force and the ad hoc verification mechanism. Despite all the efforts, Kinshasa and Kigali seem to remain hostage to their respective concerns, suffocating the

chances of a rapprochement. Only brave and sincere dialogue can produce lasting compromises. In that vein, the withdrawal of the M-23 from the occupied areas should be completed, in line with the decisions of the Luanda communiqué.

Thirdly, turning to the security and humanitarian situation in the east, Albania is alarmed by the dramatic surge in violence in Ituri and North Kivu, perpetrated mainly by the Coopérative pour le développement du Congo (CODECO) and the Allied Democratic Forces, which have expanded their territorial activities and deadly attacks on civilians. We condemn in the strongest terms CODECO's attack on the Lala internally displaced persons camp in Ituri and express our condolences to the Government and the people of the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

It is sad to see that the natural resources of the Democratic Republic of the Congo have been a driver of conflict rather than a pole of shared development. Albania reiterates its call to all Congolese and foreign armed groups to end the spiral of violence that has plagued the country and to rejoin the Demobilization, Disarmament, Community Recovery and Stabilization Programme. At the same time, the recent bill establishing a military reserve force should be cautiously reviewed in order to prevent any undermining of the gains achieved under the Nairobi process.

The trials and convictions of several individuals for war crimes, crimes against humanity and other serious human rights violations have been encouraging, and we appreciate the support provided to the Government by MONUSCO and the United Nations Joint Human Rights Office in that fight.

Lastly, in the context of the ongoing discussions on the revised transition plan for MONUSCO, I want to reaffirm our strong support for the Mission and its undisputed contribution to protecting civilians. In that context, it will be important to have a gradual exit in order to prevent any security vacuum.

Mr. Eckersley (United Kingdom): I thank Assistant Secretary-General Pobee for her briefing and welcome the Ambassadors of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Rwanda to the Chamber.

The United Kingdom remains deeply concerned about the ongoing and intensified violence in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. As we have heard, the situation in Ituri is the worst it has been

since 2017, with the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF) continuing to expand geographically. In North Kivu alone, 2.3 million people have been displaced by the Mouvement du 23 mars (M-23) and the ADF, and there is evidence that the M-23 and the Forces armées de la République démocratique du Congo (FARDC) are preparing for a military offensive. Conflict-related sexual violence is already at an unprecedented level in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo. We are also concerned about the increasing proliferation of weapons within communities and the dangers that it poses long-term. We share the Secretary-General's concern about the possible integration of armed groups into the Congolese military, which we believe should be a red line. We continue to call on all the parties to deliver on their commitments agreed through the Nairobi and Luanda political processes. We believe those processes provide the best opportunity to achieve lasting peace. We encourage the region to ensure that those processes do not stall completely, and in that regard, we take note of the ongoing quadripartite meeting in Luanda.

Against that backdrop, the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) continues to do vital work. We welcomed the recent joint MONUSCO-FARDC operations that deterred an ADF attack on a hospital and dismantled a major ADF camp. On a daily basis, MONUSCO provides protection for hundreds of thousands of civilians and enables the provision of life-saving humanitarian support in the eastern part of the country. In doing so, it not only supports the Congolese people but also the Government and the security forces of Democratic Republic of the Congo, which would otherwise struggle to protect civilians and facilitate humanitarian assistance. We must therefore consider carefully the implications for the civilian population in the context of the Government's request for MONUSCO to withdraw. While the United Nations and international partners can play a supporting role, the Government must be willing and able to assume its responsibilities to the civilian population. We should learn lessons from previous peacekeeping closures and make sure that we do not repeat mistakes in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

We welcome MONUSCO's progress on provincial strategies and agree with a geographic approach to the transition. The United Kingdom is fully committed to supporting a conditions-based withdrawal of MONUSCO, guided by key benchmarks of the joint transition plan.

We therefore encourage the Government to continue engaging in serious dialogue with MONUSCO to agree on a process that enables a responsible and sustainable reconfiguration of the United Nations presence in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. We look forward to receiving the Secretary-General's report on that next month.

In conclusion, I want to pay tribute to Special Representative of the Secretary-General Keita and MONUSCO for their tireless efforts to help the Government and the people of the Democratic Republic of the Congo achieve the peace and stability that are so desperately needed.

Mrs. Baeriswyl (Switzerland) (*spoke in French*): I would like to thank the Assistant Secretary-General for Africa in the Departments of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs and Peace Operations, Martha Ama Akyaa Pobee, for her briefing. I also welcome the participation of the representatives of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Rwanda in today's meeting.

I would like to share the testimony of a resident of the village of Arr, in Ituri. "Our children had a good school, but during the conflict everything was destroyed". Those words illustrate the devastating consequences of the security crisis in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo, including for future generations. They represent an urgent call to all parties to engage in a sincere dialogue and to put the protection of civilians at the heart of all their efforts. With that in mind, I would like to raise three points.

First, international humanitarian law and human rights and the fight against impunity are essential to lasting peace. The reprehensible attack allegedly perpetrated by elements of the *Coopérative pour le développement du Congo* at a site for displaced persons in Ituri is a sombre reminder of the lack of protection of civilians. The fight against impunity, including impunity for sexual violence — we heard the shocking statistics from the Assistant Secretary-General just now — is a powerful way to prevent future violations. We therefore call on the Government to strengthen investigations and mobile courts in order to prevent and respond to armed attacks on civilians. Switzerland will continue to cooperate with the Congolese authorities and the African Union in the area of the prevention of violence.

Secondly, a sincere and inclusive dialogue is needed to advance the political processes. At the national level, that dialogue has to be established between the

Congolese authorities, the political opposition and civil society. That is particularly important in the context of the preparations for elections, as tensions are already being felt. Corrective measures should be taken in that regard in areas where voter registration has been hampered by insecurity.

At the regional level, dialogue among the States of the region remains key to the success of the Luanda and Nairobi processes. We welcome the quadripartite summit to be held tomorrow in Luanda under the auspices of the African Union. Those efforts illustrate the importance of mutually reinforcing regional peace initiatives.

Lastly, an inclusive dialogue must inform the exchanges between Kinshasa, the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) and the United Nations country team within the framework of the transition plan. Considering the more than 20 years that the Mission has been in the country, it will be crucial to preserve the gains that the Government has made with the support of the Mission. To that end, a common understanding of the next steps involved in the transition is essential, in particular with regard to the minimum security conditions required for the Mission to make a responsible and sustainable exit.

Thirdly, a return to stability and security is key to sustainable development and prosperity. Violence against civilians, attacks on civilian infrastructure and schools and the illegal exploitation of natural resources impede development. We call on the Government to step up its efforts to stabilize the country, including through the restoration of State authority, good governance and security-sector reform. In that regard, we support the Secretary-General's call for ensuring that the draft law establishing an army reserve corps does not lead to the de facto integration of armed groups into the country's armed forces. Efforts by the authorities to strengthen their security capacities must comply with human rights and international humanitarian law.

Switzerland hears the Congolese authorities' call for accelerating MONUSCO's transition. However, the testimony of the resident of the village of Arr illustrates the need for the Congolese Government to redouble its efforts to strengthen the protection of civilians during this period. Switzerland will continue to work closely with the Congolese authorities, the United Nations and the local communities to ensure a peaceful transition, leading to a peaceful society and sustainable development in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Mr. Wood (United States of America): I thank Assistant Secretary-General Pobe for her briefing.

The importance of the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) to the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the broader region is clear. That is why the United States is concerned about the increasing calls by the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo for the Mission to withdraw following the elections planned for December. As we have said many times, MONUSCO cannot and should not stay in the Democratic Republic of the Congo indefinitely. But there is broad consensus that the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo will not have met the benchmarks it agreed to as the minimum conditions for MONUSCO's drawdown by the end of 2023. A precipitous withdrawal of MONUSCO would likely leave a security vacuum that State authorities will be unable to fill, with devastating effects for the region's most vulnerable populations. Without MONUSCO, we will probably see more activity by the *Coopérative pour le développement du Congo* and the Islamic State in Iraq and the Sham-Democratic Republic of the Congo, two armed groups that carried out shocking and brazen massacres at an internally displaced persons camp and school earlier this month.

The humanitarian crisis is also worsening due to the continued violence, resulting in 1 million internally displaced persons, an appalling escalation in gender-based violence, including conflict-related sexual violence, and immense human suffering. In order to address that pressing and urgent situation, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Great Lakes region need political will, a commitment to dialogue and a willingness to make hard decisions and pursue much-needed reform. They also need MONUSCO.

Fortunately, the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo has taken some important steps that will help achieve lasting peace. We welcome its report to the Security Council on weapons and ammunition management, which will provide valuable insight into the Government's capacities and enable the international community to assist in the prevention of small arms trafficking and diversion. In May, a military tribunal in South Kivu province sentenced a commander of an armed group to life imprisonment for war crimes and crimes against humanity, including the crime of forced pregnancy. The forced pregnancy conviction is the first time a national court has convicted

anyone of such an offence. The United Nations Joint Human Rights Office provided financial and technical support to the investigation and prosecution. This exemplifies how the United Nations, MONUSCO and the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo can work together to bring justice to victims and accountability to perpetrators. Those important human rights and rule-of-law initiatives should continue for as long as the Mission is in place.

But there is still work to be done and progress to be made, especially in the security sector. We are concerned about the collaboration of the armed forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo with non-State armed groups in the east, including the Forces démocratiques de libération du Rwanda, which is under United Nations sanctions. As we have done numerous times, we again call on the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo to fully professionalize its security forces and work to end such cooperation. The United States is also concerned about the army reserve corps legislation of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, which could enable members of armed groups to become part of the Forces armées de la République démocratique du Congo and hamper disarmament, demobilization and reintegration efforts. We urge the Democratic Republic of the Congo to ensure that the reserve corps is carefully vetted and subject to the Demobilization, Disarmament, Community Recovery and Stabilization Programme. We also call on the Government to ensure accountability.

The Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo has discouraged and denounced hateful rhetoric, but I want to emphasize how important it is to call out hate speech vilifying Rwandophone communities and peacekeepers alike. Such speech has led to arbitrary killings, mob violence and harassment. Of course, the Democratic Republic of the Congo is not solely responsible for addressing those challenges. Rwanda's continued direct support to the Mouvement du 23 mars (M-23), which is also under United Nations sanctions, is a violation of Security Council resolutions and must stop. I urge other members of the Council to press the Government of Rwanda to withdraw its troops from the Democratic Republic of the Congo and cease support to the M-23 immediately. As that support to the M-23 demonstrates, this is a regional crisis, and it requires regional solutions that address the root causes of conflict. The United States supports the mediation efforts led by Angola, Kenya and the East African Community, and calls on them to coordinate and de-conflict their operations with MONUSCO.

We are committed to ensuring that MONUSCO can deliver on its mandate to protect civilians and assist the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo in strengthening key governance, justice and security institutions. In order for the Mission to succeed, it deserves the support of the Security Council and the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The people of the Democratic Republic of the Congo deserve peace. The United States stands with them in their pursuit of a better future.

Mr. Biang (Gabon) (*spoke in French*): I have the honour to deliver this statement on behalf of the three African members of the Security Council (A3), namely, Ghana, Mozambique and my country, Gabon.

I thank Assistant Secretary-General Martha Pobe for her comprehensive briefing and welcome her contribution and that of the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) to peace and stability in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. I also welcome the participation in this meeting of the representatives of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Rwanda.

Our statement today will focus on the political, security and humanitarian situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Ghana, Mozambique and Gabon stand side by side with the Democratic Republic of the Congo as it continues its long and difficult journey towards lasting peace.

The Democratic Republic of the Congo is facing enormous political, economic and security challenges, but it has nevertheless remained committed to the established electoral processes and related time frames. We welcome the conclusion of the voter registration process and the external verification of the electoral register, which took place in April and May, respectively. We are encouraged by the growing role of women in electoral procedures and look forward to their continued involvement in both the political and economic arenas. We welcome all initiatives aimed at strengthening the role of women in conflict prevention and resolution.

As the date of the elections in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, which are eagerly awaited by the population, draws near, the A3 reiterates the need for all the country's political actors to pursue the path of peace, tolerance and social cohesion, in order to prevent political tensions from degenerating into widespread electoral violence.

The A3 remains deeply concerned by the catastrophic security situation in the eastern provinces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, due to the unspeakable violence of armed groups, such as the Mouvement du 23 mars, the Da'esh-affiliated Allied Democratic Forces (ADF) and the Coopérative pour le développement du Congo (CODECO), being perpetrated against civilian and civilian infrastructure. Only two weeks ago, the Council adopted press statement SC/15319 on the attack perpetrated by CODECO against the camp for displaced persons in Lala in Djugu territory, which left at least 47 civilians dead. The A3 condemns in the strongest possible terms the attacks on displaced persons camps. For us, attacks against those populations, who are already experiencing the horrors of forced displacement on a daily basis, are the height of inhumanity. We therefore call on all local armed groups to adhere to the Disarmament, Demobilization, Community Recovery and Stabilization Programme, and we demand the complete withdrawal of foreign armed groups from Congolese territory.

The spread of terrorism and violent extremism poses a serious threat to the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the region as a whole. As the ideological alignment between the ADF and Da'esh continues to develop into a toxic and deadly alliance, the A3 recalls the need to recalibrate the current global peace and security architecture to make it more resilient in the face of modern terrorist threats. In that respect, we echo the Secretary-General's call for a new generation of peace enforcement missions and counter-terrorist operations, led by regional forces, and with guaranteed, predictable funding. The African Union is the Council's clear partner in that endeavour.

We welcome the convening of the twenty-first Extraordinary Summit of the East African Community, on 31 May in Bujumbura, which extended the mandate of the East African Community regional force. The A3 aligns itself with the decisions of that Summit, including the decision to strengthen coordination and synergies between the Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, MONUSCO, the East African Community regional force, the ad hoc verification mechanism and other military actors on the ground. We also welcome the decision by the Southern African Development Community to contribute to peace efforts in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, by deploying part of its standby force to eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo.

With regard to MONUSCO's transition, Ghana, Mozambique and Gabon reiterate the need for an orderly United Nations drawdown, in consultation with the Congolese authorities. The A3 welcomes the progress made by the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo in implementing the benchmarks set out in the joint transition plan, including the strengthening of its arms and ammunition management system.

The Democratic Republic of the Congo has vast reserves of natural resources, some of which represent the future of modern technology and global development. However, we continue to witness a major paradox, in which people are languishing in poverty despite abundant natural resources. The A3 encourages the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the countries in the region to continue strengthening domestic control, monitoring and verification mechanisms in line with regional certification mechanisms to ensure that the Democratic Republic of the Congo's mineral wealth contributes to its prosperity and development.

Behind the figures and statistics on the humanitarian situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, there are men and women, children and young boys and girls living in deplorable conditions, traumatized by physical violence and beset by emotional disorders brought about from the atrocities they have suffered and the sexual violence and the killings of their loved ones by armed groups. We recall that the Congolese authorities have two responsibilities: first, to protect the lives of people affected by conflict and, secondly, to provide them with adequate psychosocial support, as part of the 2023 humanitarian response plan launched together with the United Nations.

In that regard, the A3 urges the Democratic Republic of the Congo's international and regional donors and partners to continue their contributions to the 2023 humanitarian response plan. The A3 also encourages the Government to continue its cooperation and partnership with all humanitarian actors to ensure that they can operate without impediment. We recall the link between climate change and security in Central Africa, and we stress the fact that the humanitarian situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo is worsened by the effects of climate change. The 400 deaths caused by the flooding in South Kivu are a clear example of that.

In conclusion, the A3 reiterates that a political solution remains the most viable means of restoring peace in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. For

that reason, we continue to fully support the ongoing Luanda and Nairobi processes and the planned revitalization of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework Agreement for the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Great Lakes Region, and we reaffirm our commitment to the independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. We also welcome the efforts of MONUSCO and international partners in promoting peace and security in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Mr. Ishikane (Japan): I would like to express my gratitude to Assistant Secretary-General Pobee for her briefing, and I welcome the participation of the representatives of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Rwanda.

We continue to observe with deep concern brutal human rights violations and abuses, including gender-based violence and the consequent humanitarian crises caused by numerous armed groups, which are increasing their activities particularly these days. The recent attack on the internally displaced persons camp in Ituri province attributed to the members of the *Coopérative pour le Développement du Congo* (CODECO) is one such appalling incident, and we once again condemn that heinous act in the strongest terms. The United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) remains an anchor for international efforts to stabilize the increasingly volatile environment, and Japan continues to fully support its role.

In July, the Council is expected to receive the Secretary-General's report on the options for MONUSCO's reconfiguration and the future role of the United Nations in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. We all share a recognition of the importance of close and constructive cooperation among all the stakeholders to make the transition smooth, responsible and sustainable. Keeping that in mind, I would like to highlight the following points relating to MONUSCO's strategic priorities today.

First of all, achieving a cessation of hostilities and the protection of civilians are both of utmost importance. Support of any kind to armed groups exacerbates the already worsening situation in the region, and it must stop immediately. While various security entities, including East African Community regional forces, are on the ground, national security forces bear the primary responsibility for protecting civilians. All security

efforts should be well coordinated under the leadership of the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

The further implementation of the national Disarmament, Demobilization, Community Recovery, and Stabilization Programme is vital to achieving a sustainable peace. There is an urgent need for progress in Government-led security sector reform. The presence of accessible, reliable and professional police is a cornerstone of social order and stability in any foreseeable transition. Japan has been a long-term partner for institution-building in this sector. Programmes to help establish community policing by the Japan International Cooperation Agency, in collaboration with the International Organization for Migration and the Peacebuilding Fund, have reached Tanganyika province, from which MONUSCO withdrew last year.

Secondly, the already-started national and local elections process should become an opportunity to lay out a common future for all rather than further divide populations. The election of able local leaders who can garner people's confidence is a prerequisite for better local governance and sustainable peace. This is even more true in the eastern part of the Democratic Republic of the Congo due to its chronic instability. While the preparation for elections accelerates, obstructions of legitimate political campaigns and incitement must be avoided. In partnership with the United Nations Development Programme, Japan plays its part to support the Government's efforts to conduct free, fair and safe elections in an inclusive manner by providing capacity-building and related equipment.

Finally, we must remain vigilant against ongoing human security crises. The worsening security environment in the eastern part of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, triggered by the activities of armed groups, has caused a massive outflow of refugees into neighbouring countries. We need an integrated regional approach to address this humanitarian challenge. In that regard, we welcome the tripartite meeting in May between the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Rwanda and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees to discuss related issues. To support such efforts, Japan has been implementing projects responding to such basic human needs as water, food and shelter, in addition to health services in those neighbouring countries.

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

Ms. Evstigneeva (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): We wish to thank the Assistant Secretary-General for Africa, Ms. Martha Pobe. We note the participation in today's meeting of the Permanent Representatives of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Rwanda.

We wish to begin our statement with an expression of condolences to the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the families of its residents who perished as a result of the floods and landslides that took place in May. We wish all a speedy recovery to those who have suffered.

I turn now specifically to the situation in the country. We note the persistently high security threat levels in the eastern part of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. In our view, the most dangerous challenges are the protracted hostilities between the Congolese Government forces and the Mouvement du 23 mars group in the North Kivu province, the fraught relations between Kinshasa and Kigali, and the activities of the Islamist Allied Democratic Forces (ADF), which increasingly resorting to terrorist methods. We emphatically condemn what took place on 16 June by ADF fighters, namely, the attack targeting a school in Uganda. This was a vile terrorist attack giving rise to 43 casualties, most of whom were school-age children, which is further evidence of the fact that security and stability in the east of the Democratic Republic of the Congo reflects the interests of all States in the Great Lakes region. We extend our deepest condolences to the families of the dead and to the Government of Uganda. We hope that the perpetrators of this abhorrent crime will be found and punished.

We are troubled by the activities of other armed groups rampant on the territory of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, including the Cooperative pour le développement du Congo, the Résistance pour un État de droit au Burundi, the Mayi-Mayi and the Forces démocratiques de libération du Rwanda, which have no plans to abandon violent methods, continue to reinforce their positions in a number of eastern parts of the country, participate in the looting of its natural resources and terrorize civilian populations. We are concerned by factors that have been compounding the

armed conflict, including the worsening humanitarian crisis, the growing number of internally displaced persons and refugees, human rights violations and the day-to-day suffering of civilian populations.

The figures speak for themselves. But behind these figures are specific histories of specific individuals. We believe that of principled significance are the efforts of States of the region through the Nairobi and Luanda negotiations processes. We welcome the involvement of the South African Development Community (SADC) in resolving the conflict in the eastern part of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, in line with the decision taken during the SADC summit in Windhoek on 8 May.

We believe it is important to continue to pool the complementary efforts initiatives towards regional assistance. The priority in that regard is to achieve an end to hostilities and a comprehensive and inclusive dialogue. There is an important need to pursue efforts to implement in full the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework for the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Region, dated 2013. We applaud the focus of the African Union and countries in the region on revitalizing this document.

We support the initiatives of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for the Great Lakes Region, Mr. Huang Xia, including efforts to establish inter-State dialogue to dispel tensions in the region. Clearly, military methods alone cannot result in long-term normalization in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Great Lakes region. Only a political solution will result in a comprehensive cessation of hostilities and establish real conditions for sustained stabilization.

We support the efforts of United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and its leadership. We believe that the presence of the Mission in the conflict zone remains a key stabilizing factor. In order to more effectively shape efforts for the protection of the Congolese population, we look forward to greater coordination between the Forces armées de la République démocratique du Congo and the Mission, as well as those of regional and national forces on the ground.

We expect by July of this year, pursuant to resolution 2666 (2022), a proposal from the Secretary-General on the reconfiguration of the Mission in the light of the work carried out jointly with Kinshasa to review the plan for the phased withdrawal of the Blue Helmets

from the country. As for implementation of the plan, we believe that it is necessary, first and foremost, to take into account developments of the situation on the ground, as well as to operate in a phased and responsible way. At the same time, we wish to emphasize that responsibility for the fate of the country ultimately lies with the Congolese people themselves, and a key objective thereof is the establishment of a security sector that can independently ensure control and order throughout the entire country.

In that regard, we support the decision of the Security Council to lift the arms embargo against the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The Russian position was and remains consistent both for the Democratic Republic of the Congo and for other similar situations. Security Council sanctions should always reflect the real situation on the ground and facilitate stabilization of such situations. By no means should these sanctions create obstacles to national security forces. Restrictions need to be regularly reviewed and modified until they are fully lifted. It is unacceptable to supplement Security Council sanctions measures with illegitimate unilateral measures.

In conclusion, I wish to welcome the ongoing efforts of the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo in preparation for the general elections in December and wish it every success in organizing the vote.

On our part, we reiterate our commitment to facilitating the stabilization of the situation in the eastern the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Great Lakes region by promoting dialogue and constructive cooperation among regional States. We look forward to interacting closely with the relevant institutions and representatives of the United Nations system.

Mr. Pérez Loose (Ecuador) (*spoke in Spanish*): At the outset, I would like to thank Ms. Martha Pobe, Assistant Secretary-General for Africa, for her informative briefing, and I acknowledge the presence of the representatives of the Permanent Missions of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Rwanda in today's meeting.

Our visit to the Democratic Republic of the Congo in March allowed us to see first-hand and identify the needs and challenges that the country still faces in achieving peace and development through the process of political and economic reconstruction. We also witnessed the tremendous work carried out by the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in

the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) and the various United Nations agencies on the ground amid a humanitarian and security crisis, especially on the eastern border of the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

We acknowledge the efforts made in preparation for the elections, especially the finalization of the voter registration, carried out by the Independent National Electoral Commission. We hope that this process will continue in a transparent and inclusive manner, always taking into account the discrepancies of the opposition and including the voices of women and civil society. We also call for respect for civic space and the freedom of expression, opinion and assembly. We underline that the protection of human rights defenders, journalists and civil society must be paramount at all times, but especially in the pre-electoral period.

Ecuador is concerned about the security situation, especially in the east, despite regional efforts to advance the peace process. In that regard, we condemn the attack on the Lala internally displaced persons camp, in Ituri province. The protection of the vulnerable civilian population must be a priority.

The acts of violence committed by the Cooperative for Development of the Congo, the Allied Democratic Forces, the Zaire, the Movement du 23 mars (M-23), the Mayi-Mayi, the Forces démocratiques de libération du Rwanda and other armed groups in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo, especially in Ituri and Kivu, have claimed the lives of hundreds of civilians, including women and children.

In that regard, we agree with the Secretary-General's report on children and armed conflict on the urgent need to implement the national action plan, the objective of which is to reduce sexual violence and the recruitment and use of boys and girls by armed groups. The implementation and fulfilment of the decisions of the Luanda and Nairobi process are critical to achieve a peace process in the region. The armed groups, especially the M-23, must leave the occupied areas. In that regard, we stress the need for Rwanda to direct its efforts towards collaborating in the joint fight to combat those risks. We hope that the outcome of the high-level meeting in Angola will enable the implementation of the agreed measures.

The violence continues to exacerbate the humanitarian crisis in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. With 26.4 million people acutely food insecure

and 6.3 million displaced, the international community's contribution is required to address the needs of the civilian population.

The coordinated actions of MONUSCO — together with humanitarian organizations — in conflict areas controlled by M-23 must be able to access assistance, in strict compliance with international law and international humanitarian law.

We call for an end to disinformation and misinformation campaigns, which affect MONUSCO's work. We applaud the initiatives that have been carried out by the Mission, especially the training that has strengthened the justice systems in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. We highlight, for example, the identification of local women peace ambassadors that empowers them within their communities, while raising awareness and conducting training on conflict prevention, misinformation, conflict resolution and prevention of domestic violence.

Ecuador is attentive to the next steps for the transition of MONUSCO and its responsible withdrawal. We hope that the Government and the Mission will establish a plan with the objective of maintaining the results that have been achieved so far with a view to bolstering the institutionalization of peace, the protection of civilians and the conditions for reconciliation, such as judicial bodies and their consolidation, among others. In that regard, we commend the signing of the memorandum of understanding with the International Criminal Court during the Prosecutor's visit to the country.

From our meetings with the authorities and civil society representatives, we recognize the commitment of leading the country to the building of a new way of life, with lasting peace. The region and the international community have a key role to play in that regard, and they can count on Ecuador's help.

Mr. Camilleri (Malta): I too thank Assistant Secretary-General Pobee for her insightful remarks today and welcome the Ambassadors of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Rwanda.

We find ourselves at a crucial point in the history of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The appalling brutal attacks against the population perpetrated by armed groups, such as the Cooperative for Development of the Congo attack on the Lala internally displaced persons camp and the deadly Allied Democratic Forces attack on a school near the Democratic Republic of

the Congo border in western Uganda are deplorable, and provide a harrowing reality to the people of the region. While we extend our deepest condolences to the families of the victims, we emphasize the need for all armed groups to lay down their weapons and urge parties to refrain from actions that can block the path to peace and stability.

The upcoming general elections present a unique opportunity. In that regard, we take note of the temporary conclusion of voter registration and commend the attention given to gender parity. While we acknowledge that registration may have faced security challenges in certain regions, we encourage authorities to respect, protect and promote the right to peaceful assembly or association, freedom of opinion and expression. Those are essential components of democracy and are indispensable to the full enjoyment of all human rights.

We are concerned about developments on the recent law establishing the military defence force, as it has the potential to undermine the efforts of both the Nairobi process and the Disarmament, Demobilization, Community Recovery and Stabilization Programme. We underline the importance of aligning legislation with international standards, with the technical support of the relevant United Nations entities.

We commend the United Nations Joint Human Rights Office for its support to the Government in combating impunity. We recognize the recent conviction for crimes against humanity by the Military Tribunal of Uvira, in South Kivu, which sets an important legal precedent. The Joint Human Rights Office, in collaboration with the force mobility and security provision of the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO), enables field investigations and mobile courts, which serve as strongholds against impunity.

We welcome the significant regional, political and military efforts being undertaken. We hope that confidence-building measures will prevail over hate speech in public discourse. We urge for immediate de-escalation and restraint between the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Rwanda and encourage the utilization of regional verification mechanisms to defuse tensions.

The figures for human rights violations and abuses are alarming. They include widespread sexual and gender-based violence, sexual exploitation and

abuse, the recruitment and use of children and attacks on schools, which have recently tripled. According to reports, the situation in the eastern provinces, particularly Ituri, is worse than ever. In view of that, we underline the need for a survivor-centred and gender-responsive approach in preventing and responding to those forms of violence and abuse, taking into account the specific needs of all vulnerable groups, without any discrimination. With 25 per cent of its population currently facing acute food insecurity, the Democratic Republic of the Congo has some of the highest numbers of food-insecure people in the world. As we prepare to engage in the transition of MONUSCO, we advocate for a tailored approach that prioritizes the protection of civilians. However, we cannot afford a security vacuum. We firmly believe that protecting civilians, including children, preventing sexual violence in conflict and ensuring accountability should remain front and centre. With the aim of supporting stabilization in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the European Union is currently implementing a set of actions amounting to a total of €17 million under the Global Europe rapid response mechanism.

Achieving peace and security in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo hinges on addressing the underlying causes of conflict, in addition to the support provided by regional initiatives. The abundant natural resources of the Democratic Republic of the Congo's fertile land should serve as a catalyst for ensuring the country's welfare and for the commitment by the Democratic Republic of the Congo authorities to expanding State authority, promoting accountability and implementing transitional justice measures, which should remain at the core of our efforts.

Mr. De Almeida Filho (Brazil): I thank Assistant Secretary-General Martha Pobe for her comprehensive briefing and welcome the representatives of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Rwanda to today's meeting.

When the Security Council last met to discuss the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) and the situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (see S/PV.9298), we had recently returned from our visit to the country. There we heard time and again from the authorities and civil society about the impact of the conflict on the population. We witnessed the plight of internally displaced people and heard directly from them about how their lives had been disrupted.

Of the dozens of illegal armed groups that are operating in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo, the one that was mentioned most often was the Mouvement du 23 mars (M-23). While it is not large in terms of personnel, the M-23 has a disproportionate impact because it is highly organized and well-equipped. It has therefore been encouraging to see a marked reduction in the hostilities between the M-23 and the armed forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo in the past few months. We hope that the M-23 will lay down its arms and fully comply with the Luanda communiqué of 23 November 2022. We commend the mediation efforts of the Democratic Republic of the Congo's neighbours within the framework of the Nairobi and Luanda processes, which deserve the full support of the international community.

Unfortunately, just when the violence from the M-23 seems to be abating, there has been a horrifying surge in attacks by other illegal armed groups. Brazil condemns in the strongest terms the attack on an internally displaced persons camp in Ituri province on 12 June. There is no justification for attacks on civilians. We reiterate the Council's call for all armed groups to lay down their arms and disband. All external support to illegal armed groups in the Democratic Republic of the Congo must stop. Brazil has also vehemently condemned the attack on 16 June perpetrated by the Allied Democratic Forces on a school in Uganda. That attack is yet another reminder, if reminders were still needed, of the regional dimension of the conflict in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Great Lakes region.

We take note of the full deployment of the East African Community (EAC) regional force and the imminent deployment of Angolan troops, which will help enforce the M-23's cantonment, as well as the decision of the Southern African Development Community (SADC) to send its own contingent. We also take note of the EAC's decision to create a civilian head of mission in order to enhance political contacts in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The presence of foreign contingents must be accompanied by greater coordination between the Forces armées de la République démocratique du Congo and MONUSCO in order to maximize their contributions to the security of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. We look forward to the results of the quadripartite summit that will take place tomorrow in Luanda between the Economic Community of Central African States, the EAC, the

International Conference on Great Lakes Region and SADC. We hope that meeting, organized under the auspices of the African Union with the participation of the United Nations, will improve the coordination among subregional bodies to address the crisis in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo.

We are encouraged by the significant reduction in anti-MONUSCO sentiment on social networks. The Mission's efforts are certainly playing a part in that, but other factors may be at play, such as the M-23 ceasefire and the perception of society that MONUSCO has played an important role in the protection of civilians against the increasing violence by other armed groups. It is a reminder that strategic communications continue to be an important tool for increasing the Mission's effectiveness in fulfilling its mandate.

During the past three decades in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, MONUSCO — and its predecessor, the United Nations Organization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo — has played an invaluable role in ensuring peace and security in that country. Yet we are fully aware that the Mission cannot and should not last forever. In that regard, we take note of the request of the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo that the Mission accelerate its departure. We also take note of the continuing dialogue between MONUSCO and representatives of the Government in the joint working group on the transition, as well Under-Secretary-General Lacroix's recent visit to Kinshasa to discuss the issue. If the Mission were to depart without meeting the benchmarks of the transition plan it would inflict even more hardship on people in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo. The transition must be well coordinated with the national and local authorities, as well as with the regional and other external forces present in the country, and the role of the United Nations country team in that regard should be enhanced.

We take note of the efforts being made to prepare for the December elections. It is very important that the people of the Democratic Republic of the Congo feel represented by their political institutions. We hope that the elections take place in an orderly and timely manner. May they establish a new milestone on the path of the people of the Democratic Republic of the Congo towards a more stable and prosperous future.

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

I would like to join others in thanking Assistant Secretary-General Pobee for her informative briefing, and I also welcome the participation of the representatives of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Rwanda in today's meeting. Ms. Pobee's insights depict ever-evolving security and humanitarian challenges on the ground, and there is clearly no straightforward solution to those problems. But today we have acknowledged the urgency of the situation and the need to work towards creating the conditions for long-term stability in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. I would like to make two points to that effect.

First, the protection of civilians must remain at the centre of all peace efforts. It is essential to remember that international humanitarian law is unequivocal on the obligations of all the parties to a conflict regarding the protection of civilians. The United Arab Emirates reiterates its condemnation of the actions of the Mouvement du 23 mars (M-23) and other armed groups. We are particularly appalled by the recent heinous attack on a school in Uganda by the Allied Democratic Forces that left 41 dead. The armed groups, including the M-23, must lay down their weapons and cease their hostilities permanently and unconditionally. Efforts to ensure their withdrawal must be redoubled.

We also condemn all forms of hate speech that fuel hostility and discrimination and divide communities. In resolution 2686 (2023), the Council recognized that hate speech and related forms of intolerance can help to drive conflict, and that eradicating them requires a whole-of-society and whole-of-Government approach. Putting an end to violence at the intercommunal level, before it escalates, demands resources and effective mediation initiatives. The United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) and other international partners have a critical role to play in supporting those efforts and ensuring that they have local buy-in. MONUSCO, in particular, should regularly consult civilian populations and civil society about their protection needs and incorporate their input into its protection activities. We also encourage it to empower local actors to condemn hate speech and the stigmatization of communities.

It will also be important to include a strategy for the protection of civilians in the upcoming plan for the drawdown of MONUSCO, with a particular emphasis on the protection of sites for internally displaced persons (IDPs). We strongly condemn the recent attacks by the Coopérative pour le développement du Congo on IDP camps. The camps are often the only safe

haven for civilians in a vulnerable situation and must be protected with the full force of the international community's ability.

Secondly, we cannot turn a blind eye to the suffering of the people of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, particularly those in the east of the country. The Democratic Republic of the Congo is facing a triple crisis — dramatic increases in sexual violence, food insecurity and health and climate risks. Each of them aggravates an already dire humanitarian context and has even prompted a United Nations system-wide humanitarian scale-up. Last month in North Kivu, Médecins Sans Frontières reported that nearly 50 people per day were seeking medical treatment in just one clinic following a sexual assault. Sexual violence in IDP camps around Goma renders daily activities a constant risk for women and girls. Meanwhile, food insecurity is rapidly increasing. In some localities, up to 65 per cent of the population are going hungry. Humanitarian support must be scaled up significantly, as the plan remains underfunded. The work being done by Congolese and international humanitarian workers on behalf of the people of the Democratic Republic of the Congo is essential and should be supported.

Despite the current security situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, peace is not only possible but attainable. Dialogue and diplomacy are the foundation of a secure, stable and prosperous Democratic Republic of the Congo. For that to happen, inclusive dialogue will be key to better addressing issues such as the instrumentalization of inter-ethnic incitement and conflict at the community level. That is particularly timely as the country prepares to hold national elections later this year.

Regional diplomatic efforts are paramount. The United Arab Emirates supports all initiatives aimed at ending the conflict in the east, including the Nairobi process, the Luanda process and other regional efforts, including the outcomes of the quadripartite process that is happening this week. All of those key processes seek to support the Democratic Republic of the Congo in its quest for peace and stability, but coordination and unity of purpose among them will also be essential. The United Arab Emirates is unwavering in its support for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. We reaffirm our commitment to aiding it on its path towards peace and stability.

I now resume my functions as President of the Council.

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

Mr. Nzongola-Ntalaja (Democratic Republic of the Congo) (*spoke in French*): At the outset, I would like to congratulate you, Madam President, on your country's presidency of the Security Council for the month of June, and to thank you for convening today's meeting on the situation in the Democratic Republic of Congo. I also thank Secretary-General António Guterres for his commitment to the cause of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. And I want to warmly greet all the Council members here today, including the three representatives of the African continent in this organ.

My delegation has taken note of the report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO), about which we were just briefed by Ms. Martha Ama Akyaa Pobee, Assistant Secretary-General for Africa in the Departments of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs and Peace Operations. I would like to make some comments on the issues mentioned in the report and the various concerns raised by the members of the Council.

The political situation in my country, as the report highlights, has been mainly preoccupied with the continuation of the electoral process and the regional and international efforts to resolve the crisis in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo. With regard to the elections, it should be noted that on 15 June His Excellency President Félix-Antoine Tshisekedi Tshilombo put into effect legislation on the distribution of seats for the elections. Furthermore, the Independent National Electoral Commission (CENI), which completed the voter registration process on 25 April, will deploy from 26 June to 10 July to places such as Kwamouth to register people who had not been registered because of the conflict. We also hope that people in the territories of Masisi and Rutshuru will be registered in the coming months. As I said, those areas had not been put on the electoral rolls because of insecurity. CENI will continue its untiring work in accordance with my Government's expressed desire for transparent, inclusive and credible elections.

With regard to the security situation in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo, my delegation would again like to draw the Council's attention to

the activism and growing threats from the Rwanda proxy Mouvement du 23 mars (M-23)/Rwanda Defence Force (RDF), the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF) terrorists affiliated to Da'esh and the Coopérative pour le développement du Congo (CODECO). In addition to the massacres and multiple violations of international humanitarian law and human rights law that they inflict on civilians on a daily basis, those terrorist groups are increasingly targeting camps for displaced persons. That is unacceptable. Violating the integrity of those camps is a crime against humanity.

Moreover, terrorist groups are operating in the forests and protected areas of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, which they exploit and scour. In doing so, they are playing an active role in deforestation and therefore in reducing the capacity of the Congolese forests, which are essential to the survival of humankind in the face of the challenges of climate change. Lastly, it is possible that in their quest for funding, the terrorist groups that are illegally exploiting our mineral resources may one day gain access to the abundant strategic and dangerous materials such as uranium that are found in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. For those three reasons, we ask the Council to join the Democratic Republic of the Congo in condemning and unequivocally sanctioning these hostile armed and terrorist groups with a firmer hand. Suggesting that the Democratic Republic of the Congo negotiate with such entities is almost indecent.

Our partners should stop thinking that what is happening in our country is merely a Congolese issue. In one way or another, if we do not act collectively to eliminate those groups and address the root causes of the conflict directly, we will all pay the price of the developments in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo. The Council should not forget that the conflict that has ravaged the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo for more than 25 years and has led to more than 10 million deaths did not originate in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. It was exported and subsequently transplanted into Congolese soil.

Returning to the subject of the M-23/RDF movement, it is fickle. It has never respected agreements. Regarding the Luanda agreement of November 2022, which some speakers have mentioned, it has so far not been abided by. The M-23 continues to occupy vast swathes of territory in the Congo and to kill people without any response from the forces capable of preventing them from doing so.

At the regional level, political, security and diplomatic efforts continue to solidify around the Nairobi and Luanda processes and the announcement of the deployment of the Southern African Development Community (SADC). The tenth Extraordinary Summit of Heads of State and Government of the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region (ICGLR), held on 3 June, reaffirmed the importance of implementing the Luanda joint road map, adopted in November 2022 and modified in Addis Ababa in February 2023. The Summit specifically reminded the M-23 of its obligation to withdraw from the areas under its occupation in the lead-up to its preliminary cantonment in Rumangabo before its relocation to Maniema. Two other major meetings are planned. Preparations began last Friday, 23 June, for the African Union quadripartite summit of the East African Community, the Economic Community of Central African States, the ICGLR and SADC, scheduled for 27 June in Luanda, on the security situation in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo. The meeting will cover coordination among all the forces deployed there to prevent any overlap of their peacekeeping efforts in the eastern part of the country. The Nairobi meeting on discussions on the cantonment of the M-23 is scheduled for 30 June.

In that context, the operationalization of the Disarmament, Demobilization, Community Recovery and Stabilization Programme warrants support, as it is one of the pillars of the peacebuilding process. We would like to take this opportunity to call on partners to step up funding for the Programme.

Before concluding this part of our statement on regional dynamics, we would like to set the record straight with regard to some recent allegations.

First, as my delegation has repeatedly said and demonstrated, the simple truth is that the Forces démocratiques de libération de Rwanda (FDLR) pose no real military or security threat to Rwanda. No one can tell me of a single incident in which the FDLR has attacked Rwanda over the past five or 10 years. We have no evidence of that. To this day no one can cite any serious operation carried out by the remnants of that organization against Rwanda. It continues to serve as a pretext for justifying a predatory agenda aimed at exploiting the natural resources of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and realizing Mr. Paul Kagame's dreams of territorial expansion. The Council will recall his recent speech in Benin, during which he spoke of retaking the territories that the Kingdom of Rwanda

had allegedly lost to the Congo, which is entirely false, as I said in my most recent statement to the Council (see S/PV.9307). Stop dreaming. Congolese land is sacrosanct. As President Tshisekedi has said, with the backing of his people, our country will not give up an inch of its national territory.

Secondly, the actual sabotage of the Nairobi and Luanda processes is being jointly orchestrated by the M-23/RDF dyad. It is they that have not been respecting the Luanda agreement — not us. They are the ones that have not respected it. And no one can say that it is we who are sabotaging the negotiations process, because it is not true. It is they that are doing it, as the facts clearly demonstrate. The message and the final communiqué of the 3 June ICGLR meeting, which I just mentioned, revealed that reality.

Thirdly, the statistics concerning the massacres committed and incited by the aggressors and their proxies in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo, with 10 million people killed, provide ample and painful evidence of the threat of the erasure of the civilian Congolese population there. Killing, raping, terrorizing and traumatizing the indigenous populations of the east and driving them off their land into insanitary camps for displaced persons in order to ensure their subsequent slow extermination — that is the sad reality on the ground in the east. It is not some fiction about an imaginary threat of the ethnic cleansing of the members of a particular group in the Congo.

Fourthly, my Government demands a minimum of respect for the civilian populations of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the brave Forces armées de la République démocratique du Congo (FARDC) and their leadership, fighting with their lives to free my country from the aggression.

The humanitarian situation is extremely worrisome. The \$2.25 billion emergency humanitarian aid plan launched in Kinshasa to deal with the crisis has so far received very little funding. As for the partnership with MONUSCO and its withdrawal strategy, my Government is continuing a constructive dialogue with the Mission to reconfigure the transition plan. While we wait for the definitive outcome of those efforts and the Government's official pronouncement on the matter, we must keep in mind on the one hand that MONUSCO's exit is irreversible, and on the other that we must focus on the benchmarks for creating the minimum security conditions necessary for a successful withdrawal.

Before concluding my statement, on behalf of my delegation I would like to make a number of requests of the Council.

First, we ask it to reaffirm the inviolability of the borders of the Democratic Republic of the Congo; second, to support both the Nairobi and Luanda processes and the deployment of SADC; third, to sanction the ADF, the M-23, CODECO and all the other terrorist movements more robustly; fourth, to demand the acceleration of the withdrawal of the RDF troops covered by the M-23 from the areas under their occupation so that they can return to their real country of origin; fifth, to prevent impunity for the repeated attacks on camps for displaced persons and the massacres in Kishishe and Lala in Ituri and other places; sixth, to support the financing campaign for the Disarmament, Demobilization, Community Recovery and Stabilization Programme; and seventh, to adopt sanctions targeting the M-23, the RDF officers who have crossed the border, the Rwandan authorities concerned, the ADF, CODECO and their leaders.

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

Mr. Gatete (Rwanda): I thank you for giving me the floor, Madam President, and I would also like to thank the Assistant Secretary-General for Africa, Ms. Martha Pobebe, for her briefing and the members of the Security Council for their statements.

We would like to express our gratitude for the regional endeavours that have led to a cessation of hostilities in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo. We particularly acknowledge the support of the Member States in the Great Lakes region that have contributed to the implementation of the regional mechanisms involved, as well as the daily efforts of the East African Community regional force on the ground. In view of the positive progress we have seen, we urge the international community to provide support and enhance regional initiatives in order to ensure the complete implementation of those mechanisms. However, we are deeply disappointed by the lack of an official statement from the Council or the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) condemning the ongoing acts of genocide targeting Congolese Tutsi and Rwandophones on a daily basis. We thank those Member States that have condemned hate speech.

As we have heard and as has been reported, the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo has given financial support, weapons and political cover to a number of illegal armed groups, including the genocidal group of the Forces démocratiques de libération du Rwanda (FDLR), which is under United Nations sanctions. It is therefore not surprising that there has been a dramatic surge in violence against civilians. What is surprising is that the Permanent Representative of the Democratic Republic of the Congo finds himself able to state categorically before the members of the Security Council that the FDLR has never attacked Rwanda in the past 10 years, when last year we all witnessed it carry out three attacks together with Democratic Republic of the Congo forces.

In the province of Ituri alone, in the space of less than three months, 643 civilians were killed by armed groups such as the *Coopérative pour le développement du Congo* and the *Allied Democratic Forces*. That is a level of violence not seen since 2017. What is particularly concerning is that those grave human rights violations occurred quite close to the MONUSCO base and to *Forces armées de la République démocratique du Congo* (FARDC) positions. We are also concerned about the apparent silence of MONUSCO and the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo about the genocidal nature of those atrocities.

Last week, on 18 June, the United Nations commemorated the International Day for Countering Hate Speech. During her moving speech, Under-Secretary-General Alice Nderitu, the United Nations Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide, reminded us that genocide does not start with bullets or machetes but with hate speech. The ways in which the authorities in the Democratic Republic of the Congo have given licence to poisonous anti-Rwandophone and anti-Tutsi hate speech, public incitement, mob killings and targeted violence have been detailed in a number of reports of the United Nations and other regional and international organizations. Anti-Rwandophone slogans and hate speech are openly propagated in schools and saturate Congolese social-media platforms on a daily basis. What is even more concerning is that high-level Congolese officials propagate anti-Rwanda sentiment as an expression of patriotism or civic duty to score political points. We call on the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights to investigate those crimes and take appropriate action. Additionally, efforts should be made to strengthen the legal frameworks that address hate speech and ensure accountability for those who engage in such behaviour.

The latest report of the Secretary-General highlights the key active armed groups perpetrating atrocities in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, but inexplicably omits the FDLR, despite the fact that it is the main orchestrator of the instability in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo. The FDLR militia stands out from the more than 120 armed groups operating in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo on three counts — its military expertise, an extensive economic network and the unwavering support it enjoys fighting alongside the Congolese army, the FARDC.

The proliferation of hate speech and anti-Tutsi genocide ideology widely observed in the Democratic Republic of the Congo today reveals the extent of the FDLR's reach. Given the imposition of a number of sanctions and the establishment of various regional agreements, it was expected that members of the FDLR would be disarmed and repatriated to Rwanda to face justice for their role in the 1994 genocide against the Tutsi. Instead, both the FARDC and the FDLR have consistently violated Rwanda's territorial integrity, including through a number of cross-border rocket-firing incidents, incursions into Rwanda by soldiers of the Congolese armed forces and several airspace violations by Congolese fighter jets. The Democratic Republic of the Congo's choice to integrate the FDLR into Government forces rather than repatriating its members sends a strong and clear message to Rwanda, the region and the international community that the Democratic Republic of the Congo is not interested in peace.

Despite being fully aware of the collaboration of the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo with the FDLR, neither MONUSCO nor the Security Council have taken any substantive action. Instead, Rwanda has been made a scapegoat for the insecurity in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo. That unfortunately reflects an unwillingness on the part of the international community to face up to the root causes of the conflict there and to demand true accountability from the Congolese Government, which is responsible for that legacy of failure.

Rwanda remains committed to working within regional mechanisms, particularly the Nairobi and Luanda processes. It is common knowledge that the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo has stalled the implementation of those efforts, including by frustrating the East African Community regional force's ability to execute its mandate.

Nonetheless, the implementation of the Nairobi and Luanda peace processes has been progressing, the East African Community regional force has fully deployed, a ceasefire has been secured and the Mouvement du 23 mars has withdrawn from its previously occupied positions, as agreed. Ideally, those achievements should be followed by the Government's political process aimed at bringing the region close to its peace objectives. However, and not surprisingly, the Democratic Republic of the Congo has not taken a single piece of action in line with the regional peace agreements.

To conclude, the security challenges in our region are complex, but they are soluble. Amplifying the false allegations of the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo while never holding it accountable for allying itself with armed groups that together with the FARDC commit serious human rights abuses against civilians cannot lead to solutions.

Treating the Government as a perpetual victim despite the evidence to the contrary is symbolic of how the dysfunction in the Democratic Republic of the Congo has been encouraged and sustained for decades. As long as Kinshasa backs the genocidal FDLR and other anti-Rwanda elements, Rwanda's defensive and preventive mechanisms will remain in place to guard against violations of our borders and airspace and to counter any spillover into Rwanda to ensure total security for our territory. Rwanda will never allow the FDLR and its backers to cause any harm, directly or indirectly, to Rwanda or its people.

We call on the international community to support the ongoing Luanda and Nairobi peace processes, which constitute our region's best chance for peace and stability.

The meeting rose at noon.