



# Security Council

Seventy-eighth year

**9500**<sup>th</sup> meeting

Monday, 11 December 2023, 10 a.m.

New York

*Provisional*

---

*President:* Mr. Montalvo Sosa. . . . . (Ecuador)

*Members:*

Albania . . . . .	Ms. Dautllari
Brazil . . . . .	Mr. Moretti
China . . . . .	Mr. Dai Bing
France . . . . .	Mr. De Rivière
Gabon . . . . .	Mrs. Kambangoye Ankassa
Ghana . . . . .	Ms. Oppong-Ntiri
Japan . . . . .	Mr. Iriya
Malta . . . . .	Mr. Camilleri
Mozambique . . . . .	Mr. Bambissa
Russian Federation. . . . .	Ms. Evstigneeva
Switzerland . . . . .	Mrs. Baeriswyl
United Arab Emirates . . . . .	Mrs. Alhefeiti
United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland . .	Mr. Kariuki
United States of America. . . . .	Mr. Wood

## Agenda

The situation concerning the Democratic Republic of the Congo

Report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (S/2023/932)

---

This record contains the text of speeches delivered in English and of the translation of speeches delivered in other languages. The final text will be printed in the *Official Records of the Security Council*. *Corrections* should be submitted to the original languages only. They should be incorporated in a copy of the record and sent under the signature of a member of the delegation concerned to the Chief of the Verbatim Reporting Service, room AB-0601 (verbatimrecords@un.org). Corrected records will be reissued electronically on the Official Document System of the United Nations (<http://documents.un.org>).



*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**

#### **Report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (S/2023/932)**

**The President** (*spoke in Spanish*): 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 the following briefers to participate in this meeting: Ms. Bintou Keita, Special Representative of the Secretary-General in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Head of the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo; and Ms. Sandrine Lusamba, National Coordinator of Solidarité Féminine pour la Paix, to participate in this meeting.

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

I wish to draw the attention of Council members to document S/2023/932, which contains the report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

I now give the floor to Ms. Keita.

**Ms. Keita** (*spoke in French*): At the outset, I would like to thank you, Mr. President, for this opportunity to brief the Security Council on the situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo on the eve of the renewal of the mandate of the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO). I also welcome the presence of His Excellency Mr. Zenon Ngay Mukongo, representing the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and Ms. Sandrine Lusamba, National Coordinator of Solidarité Féminine pour la Paix, representing civil society, as well as the representative of Rwanda.

Today we are at a turning point in the relations between the United Nations and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, as well as an important moment for the country itself. The Democratic Republic of the Congo is in the middle of an election period, nine days away from presidential and legislative elections — national and provincial as well as local. It is also calling for an accelerated, orderly and responsible withdrawal of MONUSCO, for which a special report of the Secretary-General and a joint disengagement plan with recommendations have been sent to the Council. The eastern part of the country, in particular the provinces of Ituri and North Kivu, is also still facing a security and humanitarian crisis that is extremely difficult for the people living there, in addition to persistent regional tensions. All of those factors must be taken into consideration in order to enable us to redefine our partnership.

*(spoke in English)*

The report before the Council (S/2023/932) provides an update on the situation on the ground, which has been marked by steady progress in the electoral process. It also highlights the continued and escalating insecurity in the eastern part of the country, which is particularly related to the renewed Mouvement du 23 mars (M-23) crisis but also to the emergence of new pockets of insecurity in other parts of the country, notably the greater Katanga region, as well as Mai-Ndombe and Tshopo provinces. Unfortunately the situation in North Kivu has further deteriorated since the publication of the report. The regional tensions between the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Rwanda have further escalated, heightening the risk of a direct military confrontation that could also draw in Burundi.

According to the Independent National Electoral Commission (CENI), the preparations for the elections are making good progress, despite significant logistical, financial and security challenges. As requested by CENI, and consistent with its mandate, MONUSCO has provided logistical support in the provinces where it is still operating. Fifty tons of electoral material have so far been transported to various locations in Ituri and North and South Kivu. The validation of 26 presidential candidates, including two female candidates, by CENI and the Constitutional Court is a tangible sign of inclusivity that should be appreciated and commended. Nevertheless, the opposition and civil society continue to be seriously concerned about the publication of the

voter rolls, which had not yet been done at all polling stations by 5 December as the law requires. The quality of voter cards, the difficulty of obtaining duplicates throughout the country and insufficient communication on voting procedures for those whose cards are defective or who find that they are not on the voter lists all fuel mistrust among electoral stakeholders. National electoral observation missions have also raised concerns about their accreditation, without which they will be unable to ensure proper coverage of the polls. I call on CENI to do everything it can to urgently address those issues.

While the electoral campaign began relatively peacefully, with most presidential candidates able to tour the country, violent clashes between supporters of rival political parties are occurring in many provinces. Women political leaders and candidates have continued to experience intimidation and physical and verbal misogynistic attacks aimed at discouraging their full and active participation in the public arena. MONUSCO, together with United Nations agencies, funds and programmes and other partners, has continued to support female and youth candidates, observers and party witnesses, with the aim of increasing the participation of women and young people in the electoral process.

I am alarmed by the proliferation of mis- and disinformation, as well as hate speech, on- and offline, in the context of the electoral campaign. I call on all stakeholders to refrain from such practices and urge the Government to hold those responsible to account. It is also deeply regrettable that more than 1.5 million Congolese citizens living in the conflict-affected territories of Masisi and Rutshuru in North Kivu province, as well as Kwamouth in Mai-Ndombe province, will not be able to vote in December, in addition to internally displaced persons (IDPs) living in IDP sites.

*(spoke in French)*

The security, humanitarian and human rights situation has unfortunately deteriorated in southern North Kivu province, particularly following the resumption in October of hostilities between the Congolese armed forces and the M-23, and the M-23 offensive in Masisi territory following the start of the withdrawal of the East African Community force troops. Tensions between the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Rwanda also remain very high, as does the risk of a military escalation between the two countries, despite

regional and international efforts to ease tensions. In that regard, I congratulate the Government on officially banning all relations between the Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (FARDC) and the Forces démocratiques de libération du Rwanda. The expansion of the joint Operation Shujaa, between the FARDC and Ugandan armed forces in the north of the province, has put the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF) armed group under pressure without, however, being able to prevent new attacks on civilians.

In Ituri, insecurity is primarily fuelled by the Coopérative pour le développement du Congo, Zaire, the Force de résistance patriotique de l'Ituri and the Front patriotique et intégrationniste du Congo armed groups, as well as ADF. Djugu and Irumu continue to be the main hotbeds of insecurity. Coordinated operations by the FARDC and MONUSCO have been able to repel several attacks on civilians, but the lack of resources to ensure State authority in the province remains extreme.

To protect civilians, MONUSCO and the FARDC carried out six joint operations in Ituri and North Kivu in the last quarter. Operation Springbok, in particular, was launched in November to secure the towns of Goma and Sake and, thus far, is proving to be an effective deterrent against attempts by the Mouvement du 23 mars (M-23) to advance towards these two towns.

In South Kivu, although the number of violent incidents has decreased in recent months, pockets of insecurity remain, in particular in the areas of Kalehe, Mwenga, Shabunda, Uvira and Fizi.

I remain concerned about the recent increase in tensions between Rwanda and Burundi, following the engagement of the Burundian forces against the M-23 in Masisi, and call for calm to prevent any escalation.

At the request of the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the mandate of the East African Community regional force has not been extended beyond 8 December, and it has begun its withdrawal. Indeed, more than 500 soldiers from Kenya, South Sudan and Uganda have already left the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Meanwhile, the Southern African Development Community (SADC) is preparing to deploy a new force in the upcoming weeks, the SADC Mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo, which should have an offensive mandate.

These regional efforts are commendable. Nevertheless, they cannot achieve their objectives without the continued and sustained investment of the

Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo in the regional, national and local political conflict resolution processes in the east of the country. That investment must go hand in hand with security sector reform in the country and the implementation of its Disarmament, Demobilization, Community Recovery and Stabilization Programme. MONUSCO, along with the International Organization for Migration and in close cooperation with the provincial structures of the Programme, continues to support community reintegration projects for more than 6,000 beneficiaries in the three provinces in the east.

*(spoke in English)*

Insecurity has compounded the ongoing humanitarian crisis. According to the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, more than 6.3 million people are internally displaced across the country, the vast majority of them, 5.5 million, in the three eastern provinces alone. According to preliminary figures, more than 500,000 people have fled their homes, following renewed hostilities between the M-23 and the Congolese armed forces since early October.

In parallel, outbreaks of cholera and measles have continued to exacerbate the precarious humanitarian situation, with cholera transmission rates being four times higher than the previous year. The incidences of gender-based violence and sexual exploitation have reached alarming levels, with more than 90,000 cases documented since the beginning of the year — 39,000 of those cases were recorded in North Kivu alone. This is totally unacceptable.

As of November, the country's humanitarian response plan for 2023 remained drastically underfunded, with only 35.5 per cent of the required \$2.25 billion raised thus far. I strongly urge donors to provide the resources required to ensure that humanitarian assistance reaches those in need. With the accelerated withdrawal of the Mission, MONUSCO, together with the United Nations country team, is exploring alternative options to ensure continued humanitarian assistance beyond the Mission's presence.

I welcome the presidential statement of 16 October (S/PRST/2023/5), which ushered in a new phase of constructive cooperation with the Government. Following weeks of intensive consultations between the Government and MONUSCO, the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs, Mr. Christophe Lutundula, and I signed a joint disengagement plan on

21 November, which was submitted to the Council on 23 November.

Throughout this process, MONUSCO will need to focus on its core mandated priorities, namely the protection of civilians, disarmament, demobilization and reintegration and security sector reform, which remain critical to creating an enabling environment for sustainable disengagement, together with a surge of political engagement, in coordination with the Office of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for the Great Lakes Region. Subject to the Council's authorization, the Mission also stands ready to support regional forces' operations, in full compliance with the human rights due diligence policy. I call on the members of the Council and the broader international community to ensure that all the necessary support, including financial support, is provided to the United Nations agencies, funds and programmes in order for them to continue their support in relevant areas, to the Congolese authorities and institutions.

In conclusion, let me turn to a profoundly serious issue with the potential to jeopardize all of our efforts in an irreversible way. The misconduct of some of our staff members, be it within the force, police or civilians, is an indelible stain on our work. I wish to reiterate that the Mission, in close coordination with United Nations Headquarters and Member States, is working tirelessly to prevent and improve our response to cases of sexual exploitation and abuse. That includes risk assessment and prevention initiatives, swift investigative action and the timely provision of support to victims.

*(spoke in French)*

Although the challenges in the Democratic Republic of the Congo are many and complex, they are far from being insurmountable. As demonstrated by the current discussions about the general elections, the people of the Democratic Republic of the Congo aspire deeply to transparent and inclusive governance, reform and responsible leaders. Those aspirations and all of the motivations underpinning them have shown their considerable resilience and deserve the full support of the international community. The presidential statement of 16 October has allowed for the restoration of a constructive partnership between the Mission and the Government. The renewal of MONUSCO's mandate must allow us to continue this joint effort in a spirit of mutual respect and trust.

**The President** (*spoke in Spanish*): I thank Ms. Keita for her briefing.

I now give the floor to Ms. Lusamba.

**Ms. Lusamba** (*spoke in French*): I am pleased to be here once again today to share our thoughts on the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO). My name is Sandrine Lusamba, and I am the National Coordinator of the non-governmental organization Solidarité Féminine pour la Paix — an organization in the Democratic Republic of the Congo that advocates for the protection and promotion of women's rights.

Since I last spoke to the Security Council in 2021, the security situation in my country has further deteriorated, despite the presence of MONUSCO Blue Helmets and other national and foreign military forces in the country. The Democratic Republic of the Congo now finds itself at a crossroads. For the first time in about a quarter of a century, we will soon no longer host a United Nations peacekeeping operation. However, apart from a press release announcing that the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and MONUSCO had agreed on a disengagement plan for the Mission, civil society has received little information and is wondering what the plan entails.

The United Nations country team has mapped out the protection activities and capacities of the United Nations agencies that were identified under the MONUSCO mandate. However, the mapping effort was not sufficient in terms of needs analysis, nor did it take into account the contributions and participation of civil society and local, national and international non-governmental organizations (NGOs). The process has not enabled the full, equal and meaningful participation of women and the inclusion of young people, as required by resolution 2594 (2021), regarding the transition processes for United Nations missions, and by the series of resolutions under the women and peace and security agenda that the Council has adopted since 2000.

In the run-up to elections, we are witnessing a further rapid deterioration of the security situation in North Kivu province, where intense fighting has led to the displacement of more than 200,000 people since the beginning of October, as well as in Ituri province, where attacks on civilians and civilian infrastructure have increased. Internally displaced persons (IDPs) sites and schools have also been targeted, with more

than 550,000 people forced to flee since the start of the year.

Gender-based violence is one of the greatest threats in terms of protection and one of the most underresourced areas of the humanitarian response, despite the fact that the international community's commitment to ending that scourge is at the heart of the women and peace and security agenda. The Council has adopted several resolutions on women and peace and security, with a commitment to ensuring a survivor-centred approach when gender-based violence occurs, but that is not happening for women and girls in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Very few survivors of gender-based violence in the country have timely access to medical care or psychosocial support, let alone the ability to seek legal advice or rebuild their livelihoods so that they can be more resilient.

MONUSCO's withdrawal is pushing civil society organizations to consider both the opportunities for transferring certain tasks from MONUSCO and the risks posed by that withdrawal. When it comes to opportunities, we note that certain activities of the MONUSCO civil affairs section could be transferred to local NGOs in accordance with commitments to localizing humanitarian aid. That would require that NGOs receive the resources and support they need to take on those responsibilities sustainably and effectively. For example, NGOs could carry out social cohesion projects that include the organization of inter- and intra-community dialogues and action research. Local NGOs with experience in child protection could take over certain activities from MONUSCO's child-protection section, alongside UNICEF and the United Nations country team. They should have the means and resources to take on greater responsibilities for monitoring, reporting and responding to serious violations against children. MONUSCO's gender section has been an important ally when it comes to combating impunity for gender-based violence. It has recruited medical examiners with expertise in the area to produce forensic evidence in order to improve access to justice for victims. It is essential to ensure that such work continues. Local women's organizations that have expertise in that area and are trusted by survivors are logical partners to take on that role.

Of course, there are also many risks associated with MONUSCO's withdrawal. They include, first, a decline in the protection of civilians and of IDP sites, particularly in areas not accessible to the Forces

armées de la République Démocratique du Congo and the police.

The second will be the absence of monitoring and reporting on human rights by the United Nations Joint Human Rights Office in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. That will also have a negative impact on the early-warning system, with a lack of the verified data on gender-based violence that the United Nations system uses to report on human rights in the country and more generally to monitor violations of women's rights. We are also concerned about the possibility that human rights defenders and peacebuilders, particularly women leaders in such positions, may also face increased harassment and other protection-related threats.

Thirdly, we foresee an increase in unemployment because a large part of MONUSCO's civilian workforce from the local community will lose their jobs.

Fourthly, the withdrawal will mean the closure of Radio Okapi, which serves as an essential independent community platform for spreading messages free of charge and without distinction, as well as for participating in efforts to combat gender-based violence. In view of all of this, I would like to make the following recommendations.

First, in line with the call by the Secretary-General, women should be at the centre of the work of MONUSCO and the United Nations country team. Women should lead decision-making in all areas, including on the humanitarian front, and especially when decisions are made on where to direct resources and energy, so that the response focuses on the most marginalized and vulnerable groups.

Secondly, MONUSCO and the United Nations country team should work with local and national NGOs to develop specific indicators to measure the protection and promotion of women's human rights, including in the areas of gender-based violence, attacks on women human rights defenders, sexual and reproductive rights and the meaningful participation of women. The indicators should be used to determine whether the security situation is improving or not and to guide early-warning efforts.

Thirdly, the Security Council should demand that the Government and all other actors integrate a human rights-based and survivor-centred approach throughout humanitarian action in order to fulfil their obligations under international humanitarian law and further

ensure that efforts to address the climate crisis and manage natural resources are gender-sensitive.

Finally, the international donor community should not let the people of the Democratic Republic of the Congo down. The Government must be supported so that it can fulfil its protection responsibilities, the humanitarian response plan must be fully funded and women-led and women's rights organizations must have access to sufficient resources and predictable funding.

**The President** (*spoke in Spanish*): I thank Ms. Lusamba for her briefing.

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

**Mr. De Rivière** (France) (*spoke in French*): I would like to thank the Special Representative of the Secretary-General and reiterate that she has France's full support.

I would like to make three points.

First, the international community must continue to support the Democratic Republic of the Congo in organizing elections. France notes the progress made in the electoral process and the efforts of the Independent National Electoral Commission in organizing credible elections on schedule. It encourages all stakeholders to redouble their efforts to ensure peaceful elections.

Security and respect for civil liberties will be crucial. We call on all parties to refrain from violence and hate speech. Deliberate actions aimed at destabilizing the Democratic Republic of the Congo in the run-up to the elections or disrupting the process would be unacceptable.

France is concerned about the tensions in the east of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The Mouvement du 23 mars (M-23) must cease its offensive, withdraw and demonstrate restraint. Rwanda must end its support for the M-23 and withdraw its soldiers from Congolese territory. The Forces armées de la République démocratique du Congo must cease all collaboration with the Forces démocratiques de libération du Rwanda, as they have undertaken to do. Any military approach will contribute only to escalation. A lasting solution to the crisis can be found only through dialogue and by relaunching the Luanda and Nairobi processes, once the elections are over. France stands ready to work to that end.

Secondly, France welcomes the efforts made by the Congolese authorities and the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) to finalize the Mission's joint disengagement plan.

In presidential statement S/PRST/2023/5, adopted in October, the Council committed to deciding by the end of 2023 on the future of the Mission and its withdrawal. The disengagement plan is in line with those requirements and indicates that the protection of civilians must remain the priority. France welcomes the plan's responsible approach.

The Democratic Republic of the Congo authorities have already taken steps to recruit and train soldiers and police. We encourage them to spare no effort to ensure that the transition does not create a security vacuum.

France fully supports the principle of an evaluation at the end of each stage of the transition plan.

It is for those reasons — and this is my third point — that France has proposed to Council members a draft resolution that unambiguously implements the disengagement plan. That draft resolution is in line with the work conducted in recent months. It includes the disengagement plan, in particular the withdrawal from South Kivu on 30 April. It provides for an appropriate adjustment in the troop ceilings and calls for a new joint report of the Congolese authorities and MONUSCO at the end of that first phase. It gives all stakeholders sufficient visibility to organize and prepare for the other phases.

We can make the withdrawal of MONUSCO a success. Many responsibilities will gradually be transferred to the authorities of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The entire United Nations system and its partners will have to support their efforts. France will play its part and continue to stand by the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

**Ms. Opong-Ntiri** (Ghana): I have the honour to deliver this statement on behalf of the three African members of the Security Council (A3).

First of all, we would like to commend Special Representative of the Secretary-General Bintou Keita for her remarkable work in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, as well as for her comprehensive briefing today which has shed light on the situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the activities of the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission

in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) in that regard. We thank Ms. Sandrine Lusamba for her briefing and welcome the presence of the Permanent Representative of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, as well as of the Chargé d'Affaires of Rwanda.

Our intervention will focus on three main areas, namely, the political, security and humanitarian situations.

On the political front, the A3 notes the launch of the electoral campaign on 19 November in view of the general elections scheduled for 20 December.

With 44 million voters, we welcome the Government's commitment to organizing presidential and local elections in a particularly difficult security context. Despite the logistical and security challenges, the effective holding of those elections is expected by the Congolese population, which aspires to free, transparent and peaceful elections.

We call on all political actors, including the opposition and civil society, to engage constructively in strengthening social cohesion, national unity and dialogue in order to prevent post-electoral tensions. We encourage the Independent National Electoral Commission to take confidence-building measures and maintain dialogue with all political actors so that the results of the elections are accepted by all. In that regard, the support provided by MONUSCO is highly appreciated. We further encourage the Congolese authorities to spare no efforts in ensuring that good neighbourliness and regional stability also remain a priority before, during and after the elections.

At the regional level, the A3 reiterates its support for a political resolution of the security crisis affecting the east of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. We reaffirm our support to regional processes which are credible African political solutions to end the crisis. To that end, it is urgent to implement the priority actions contained in the Nairobi and Luanda agreements, with a view to the cessation of hostilities, the immediate withdrawal of the Mouvement du 23 mars (M-23) from occupied areas, the repatriation of all foreign armed groups and foreigners and respect by local armed groups for the Disarmament, Demobilization, Community Recovery and Stabilization Programme.

We welcome the commitment of the African Union to support the stabilization of the Democratic Republic of the Congo by ensuring the coordination and harmonization of regional peace initiatives, in

particular through the organization of the quadripartite summit of the Chiefs of Defence Staff, composed of the East African Community, the Economic Community of Central African States, the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region and the Southern African Development Community, with the participation of the United Nations, on 6 October in Addis Ababa.

At this crucial stage of its history, the security situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo remains a source of grave concern for the A3. We are particularly dismayed by the deterioration of the security situation in Ituri and Kivu provinces, owing to the recurrence of attacks by armed groups. Despite joint efforts by the Democratic Republic of the Congo and MONUSCO supported by several countries in the region, eastern Congo remains subject to a cycle of violence perpetrated mainly by armed groups such as the M-23, the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF), the *Coopérative pour le développement du Congo* and the Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda. The attacks by the Islamic State-affiliated ADF, a terrorist group which has increasingly resorted to the use of improvised explosive devices, contribute to the worsening of the cycle of terror in which the Congolese populations live.

In addition, the A3 takes note of the signing, on 21 November, of the disengagement plan and timetable between MONUSCO and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, as well as the Democratic Republic of the Congo's request to reflect the plan in the draft resolution on the renewal of MONUSCO's mandate currently under negotiation. It is imperative to ensure the protection of civilians throughout that process. In that regard and within the context of the implementation of the plan, we encourage the Democratic Republic of the Congo and MONUSCO to continue promoting constructive dialogue so as to ensure a concerted, orderly and responsible withdrawal.

The increase in violence against civilians by armed groups is exacerbating the humanitarian situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. With the highest number of internally displaced people in Africa, the humanitarian crisis in the country is reaching record levels in the absence of adequate funding for the humanitarian response plan.

We urge international donors to mobilize to respond to the immense humanitarian needs.

The A3 acknowledges the remarkable work of humanitarian organizations who, risking their lives, provide continuous support to the people of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Moreover, we pay tribute to all the peacekeepers, the *Forces armées de la République démocratique du Congo* and the civilians who have lost their lives while working for peace in that country. We call on MONUSCO and the Democratic Republic of the Congo to take all necessary measures to ensure that the withdrawal of the Mission does not affect the activity and security of humanitarian workers.

Finally, the A3 acknowledges the invaluable contribution of MONUSCO to the stabilization of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and reaffirms its support to Ms. Bintou Keita and her team. Furthermore, the A3 reiterates its solidarity with the Government and the people of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. We also reaffirm our commitment to respecting the independence, territorial integrity and sovereignty of the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

**Mr. Wood** (United States of America): I thank Special Representative of the Secretary-General Keita for her informative briefing today. I would also like to welcome the representatives of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Rwanda to today's meeting. The United States appreciates the dedication that Special Representative of the Secretary-General Keita, her team and the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo have shown in producing a plan for the gradual and responsible withdrawal of the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) from the country.

We also appreciate the commitment of the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo to assuming responsibility for civilian protection and extending State authority in the provinces where MONUSCO is deployed. The proof, however, will be in the implementation. The Security Council will closely monitor MONUSCO's disengagement, with a focus on the ability of the security forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo to provide stability and security as peacekeepers draw down. We welcome the flexibility built into the plan and stress that the drawdown from each province should be thoroughly and transparently evaluated for any negative impacts on civilian protection and the humanitarian situation. Major gaps will be unacceptable and should prompt an immediate reassessment and a pause in subsequent phases. We



welcome the joint working group's commitment to review progress on the implementation of the plan every three months and request that those assessments be shared with the Security Council.

As in other peacekeeping transitions, MONUSCO's drawdown will be challenging. The Democratic Republic of the Congo faces a looming financial cliff when transitioning from assessed to voluntary contributions amid growing humanitarian and development needs. The United States Agency for International Development and the Department of State allocated more than \$956 million in humanitarian aid and bilateral assistance to the Democratic Republic of the Congo in fiscal year 2022, not including our support to MONUSCO. We call on the international community to mobilize additional resources now to bolster the work of United Nations agencies, funds and programmes in preparation for MONUSCO's departure. MONUSCO's drawdown also demands a new vision for security and non-security solutions to the 30-year crisis of the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo. Regional organizations and security forces are playing an important role, but, in order to provide support, the international community needs greater clarity on their mandates, operational requirements and human rights frameworks. The deployment of regional forces must be accompanied by renewed engagement in political processes.

The speed at which Rwanda and the Democratic Republic of the Congo approached the brink of war in recent weeks was alarming. We welcome the commitments that both Governments have made towards de-escalation, but more must be done to reduce tensions and prevent miscalculations. We once again call on Rwanda to end its support for the Mouvement du 23 mars and withdraw from the territory of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. We urge all actors to recommit to the Nairobi and Luanda processes and take advantage of new space for dialogue following elections in the Democratic Republic of the Congo later this month. We are encouraged by the preparations of the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, which MONUSCO has supported, for free and fair elections on 20 December.

The increase in registered female candidates is commendable, although their participation remains low. The fact that many have faced threats of violence is deplorable. We urge political actors and civilians alike to refrain from hate speech and divisive rhetoric, which

could lead to violence. All Congolese should be able to cast their votes without fearing for their safety and must be able to view results at the polling station and online in a timely fashion. We regret that elections will not take place in Rutshuru and Masisi, owing to insecurity.

Finally, this reporting period brought to light deeply concerning allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse in MONUSCO. The United States is fully committed to the United Nations zero-tolerance policy on sexual exploitation and abuse. We urge Member States to join us as we engage with MONUSCO and the Secretariat to ensure that peacekeepers and Mission personnel are held accountable for conduct and discipline, as well as performance.

**Mr. Moretti (Brazil):** I thank Special Representative of the Secretary-General Bintou Keita for her briefing. I also thank Ms. Sandrine Lusamba for bringing to the Council her perspectives on the fragile situation in the eastern provinces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. I welcome the delegations of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Rwanda to this meeting.

Brazil welcomes the most recent report of the Secretary-General (S/2023/932), which provides updates on the situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and on the transition process of the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO).

This is a crucial moment for the people of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and it deserves our careful attention. We remain concerned about the deteriorating security situation in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo. Incidents of ceasefire violations between the Mouvement du 23 mars and the Forces armées de la République démocratique du Congo and heightened tensions constitute a step back in the efforts to stabilize the situation. We call on all parties to the conflict and the neighbouring countries to re-engage in the political processes, notably the Luanda and Nairobi processes, to find a long-term solution that ensures sustainable peace in the region. We also reiterate our calls for all armed groups to lay down their arms and for all external support to illegal armed groups to cease immediately. My delegation is appalled by the continued humanitarian impact of the conflict and by the surge in reported conflict-related sexual violence. We reiterate the need for unimpeded humanitarian access in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the full protection of camps for internally displaced persons, especially for women and girls. It is

unacceptable that vulnerable people face violence and exploitation in places where they were supposed to find protection and support.

The transition of MONUSCO takes place in a very challenging and complex environment. As we prepare to renew the Mission's mandate, taking into consideration the disengagement plan agreed between the United Nations and the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the focus must be on the responsible transfer of tasks. Brazil reiterates that MONUSCO's departure should be done responsibly, avoiding potential risks of creating more violence and human rights abuses against the population. The State's capabilities and authority must be strengthened to ensure the protection of civilians. The transition and withdrawal must be well coordinated with national and provincial authorities, neighbouring countries and other relevant stakeholders. As the forces of the Southern African Development Community prepare to engage in North Kivu, we expect them to act in full cooperation with MONUSCO. Regarding the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration process in and the security sector reform in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Brazil believes that MONUSCO's support must continue until the very end of the Mission, as they are essential pieces of the transition process.

Despite the challenges pointed out in the Secretary-General's report regarding the upcoming general elections, we are confident that the people of the Democratic Republic of the Congo will be able to overcome polarization and pervasive hate speech. It is the primary responsibility of key political players to ensure that the upcoming elections will be an opportunity for making real progress towards sustained peace and development for all Congolese.

**Mr. Dai Bing** (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): I thank Special Representative of the Secretary-General Keita for her briefing. China will continue to support her work and the work of the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO). I also listened closely to the briefing by Ms. Sandrine Lusamba. I welcome the presence of the Permanent Representatives of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Rwanda at this meeting.

As Special Representative of the Secretary-General Keita has pointed out, the Democratic Republic of the Congo is at a critical stage in advancing the political process and maintaining security and stability. A

peaceful, stable and developing Democratic Republic of the Congo is in the shared interests of the countries of the region and the international community.

I would like to underscore the following points.

First, the general elections in the Democratic Republic of the Congo are fast approaching. China appreciates the tremendous efforts made by the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Independent National Electoral Commission in preparation for the elections. China is confident that the Government and the people of the Democratic Republic of the Congo are able to hold peaceful elections that will give new impetus to achieving long-term stability for the country. The general elections are a domestic affair of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The international community should fully respect its sovereignty and ownership, encourage all parties in the region to settle their differences through dialogue and consultation and avoid interfering in the country's internal affairs.

Secondly, the security situation in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo remains serious, marked by continued attacks by armed groups such as the Mouvement du 23 mars (M-23) and resulting in casualties and displacement. China supports the Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and MONUSCO in carrying out joint operations, and urges the M-23 and other armed groups to immediately cease hostilities and violence and withdraw from the territories they are occupying. The situation in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo bears on the overall security of the region. The international community should support the Nairobi and Luanda processes and the countries concerned in resolving their differences through dialogue and consultation. China encourages Mr. Huang Xia, the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for the Great Lakes Region, and Special Representative Keita to provide greater support to the regional political process and to foster synergies. China supports the regional organizations carrying out peacekeeping operations and hopes that countries in the region will strengthen their coordination with the Democratic Republic of the Congo in order to safeguard the region's common security.

Thirdly, China welcomed the signing of the comprehensive disengagement plan by the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and MONUSCO agreeing on MONUSCO's phased drawdown and withdrawal. The Security Council is

now discussing a draft resolution on the renewal of MONUSCO's mandate. China hopes that the Council will follow the disengagement plan, prioritize the views of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and determine sound transitional arrangements for MONUSCO. The upcoming transition should include an organized handover of tasks to the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo that is conducive to the maintenance of security and stability in the region in the areas that the Mission is withdrawing from, as well as ensuring MONUSCO's safe and orderly drawdown and guaranteeing the safety of United Nations peacekeepers and assets.

**Mr. Iriya** (Japan): I would like to express my gratitude to Special Representative of the Secretary-General Keita and Ms. Lusamba, National Coordinator of Solidarité Féminine pour la Paix et le Développement Intégral, for their briefings. I welcome the participation of the representatives of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Rwanda.

The Democratic Republic of the Congo is going through a significant transition with formidable challenges. With the general election imminent and the start of the withdrawal of the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) in sight, I would like to highlight three points today, starting with security.

We are gravely concerned about the worsening security situation and the deterioration of human security in the eastern provinces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The violation of the ceasefire agreement between the Mouvement du 23 mars and the Congolese armed forces is having far-reaching, devastating effects on people's lives. The reported newly created coalition of armed groups fighting in support of the Congolese armed forces has further compounded the hostilities and the violence, triggering a massive flow of internally displaced persons. I want to stress once again that support of any kind to armed groups only exacerbates insecurity and regional tensions and must cease immediately. All Congolese and foreign armed groups should unconditionally lay down their arms and engage in the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR) process. Community-based reintegration efforts through dialogue, along with employment opportunities, are key to increased participation in the DDR process, which Japan also supports through the United Nations

Office for Project Services and the United Nations Development Programme. We welcome the initiative of MONUSCO and the International Organization for Migration in that regard.

My second point is about MONUSCO's planned exit strategy. A gradual, responsible and sustainable withdrawal requires close and constructive cooperation among all stakeholders, guided by strong ownership on the part of the host country. Ensuring the adequate protection of civilians must always be front and centre in our collective endeavours. In that regard, the timely deployment of national security forces, synchronized with the planned withdrawal of MONUSCO troops, is essential to preventing any security vacuum on the ground. Furthermore, the protection of United Nations personnel, facilities, installations and equipment must be ensured throughout the withdrawal process. We remain deeply concerned about the high number of human rights violations, including sexual violence. The ongoing whole-of-United-Nations-system efforts to help build State-owned early-warning and response systems within communities should be further promoted to create an environment conducive to MONUSCO's sustainable withdrawal.

Finally, the forthcoming elections represent an opportunity to win the people's confidence and build unity that must be taken advantage of. Strengthening social cohesion is fundamental to sustainable stability, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo therefore needs free, fair, inclusive, peaceful and transparent elections more than ever. The reports of election-related violence, as well as a reduction in the civic and political space, are worrisome signs, and all stakeholders should work to put a stop to them.

Japan remains committed to the sovereignty, independence, unity and territorial integrity of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and we are determined to continue working with MONUSCO and all partners for sustainable peace and stability in the region.

**Mr. Camilleri** (Malta): I thank Special Representative of the Secretary-General Keita and Ms. Lusamba for their insightful briefings today. I also welcome the representatives of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Rwanda to today's meeting.

The Democratic Republic of the Congo is at a critical juncture. The tensions with Rwanda remain alarming, and the use of proxies increases the risk of open

conflict. Armed groups continue to commit atrocities and terrorise civilians. The increasing humanitarian needs are reaching levels that are simply impossible to address. Intercommunal sexual and gender-based violence is increasing widely even outside the eastern provinces. The heightened tensions in the build-up to the incoming elections are also worrisome. Transparent, inclusive and fair electoral processes are essential to ensuring a stable Government for the country's future.

Within that sobering context, the Security Council is negotiating the renewal of the mandate of the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO). I would like to thank France for leading the current negotiations, carefully considering both the Secretary-General's assessment and the disengagement plan. In an effort to build on those important documents, Malta will contribute to the negotiations by focusing on the protection of children in armed conflict.

Two years in, we recently convened with the Task Force on Monitoring and Reporting of the Democratic Republic of the Congo to address specific issues related to the Mission's withdrawal and its potential impact on children. The figures are shocking. The grave violations reported very much underestimate the real numbers, owing to a lack of access to certain areas and untracked violations, among other things. The reported number of casualties so far indicates that 2023 may become the deadliest year for children since the monitoring and reporting mechanism was established in 2005. Children are also facing increased risks. During this electoral period, children are being associated with or voluntarily joining political and electoral demonstrations, which potentially exposes them to violence and repression. We thank MONUSCO and UNICEF for their work in ensuring that political parties sign a charter against the use of children for political or electoral purposes. At the same time, the perceived tolerance of patriotic armed groups mobilized to fight the *Mouvement du 23 mars* has led to a surge in child recruitment.

Implementing a responsible withdrawal for MONUSCO means protecting the most vulnerable. Malta advocates for a sufficient residual civilian presence in regions that the military will be leaving, allowing time for knowledge transfer, training and capacity-building. We must preserve the gains achieved so far. Together with the Congolese authorities, MONUSCO and UNICEF have done commendable work, which among other achievements has led to the

verification of new cases of the recruitment and use of children by the Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo between 2021 and 2023.

Regarding the issue of women and peace and security, we are encouraged by the strong presence of female candidates in the upcoming elections. We encourage additional measures to promote and facilitate women's full, equal, meaningful and safe participation in the political process. We also ask the United Nations to consult regularly with women's civil society organizations and ensure that comprehensive gender analysis and technical gender expertise are included throughout the transition. We commend the adoption of a law on the protection of and reparations for victims of conflict-related sexual violence.

In conclusion, Malta is determined to ensure collective measures to mitigate the impact of the transition and remains ready to engage with fellow Council members to adopt the renewal of MONUSCO's mandate by consensus.

**Mr. Kariuki** (United Kingdom): Let me begin by thanking Special Representative of the Secretary-General Keita and Ms. Lusamba for briefing us today. I welcome the participation of the representatives of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Rwanda in this meeting.

The United Kingdom reiterates its full support for the work carried out by the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) and Special Representative Keita in challenging circumstances. I would like to make three points in response to what we have heard today.

First, the United Kingdom commends the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and MONUSCO for their collaboration on the force disengagement plan, which includes, where appropriate, the transfer of tasks to the United Nations country team and other international partners. We welcome the Government's commitment to a gradual, responsive, responsible and sustainable withdrawal process.

Secondly, with the departure of MONUSCO, the Democratic Republic of the Congo must assume its responsibilities to protect the civilian population. We urge the Government to step up preparations in that regard, and we encourage MONUSCO to continue its capacity-building efforts with the Government to ensure a smooth transition. Intensifying violence, changing movements of regional forces on the ground,

soaring numbers of victims of conflict-related sexual violence, particularly in internally displaced persons camps in eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo, and the deteriorating humanitarian situation highlight the urgency of getting that process right.

Thirdly, we continue to urge all parties to show restraint and engage in dialogue, given the real risk of miscalculation and the horrendous cost of further escalation. In particular, we urge all parties to recommit to the Nairobi and Luanda regional peacebuilding processes, which are the best road maps towards a peaceful Democratic Republic of the Congo. We commend the contribution of the East African Community and the East African Community regional force.

Dialogue, not violence, is the way to achieve lasting peace. We urge all parties and countries in the region to fulfil commitments to revitalize those political processes and to deliver tangible action to address shared security challenges, improve humanitarian access and reduce violence.

Finally, we look forward to peaceful, credible and inclusive elections on 20 December, which will provide a chance to anchor democracy in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The United Kingdom looks forward to working with the new Government.

**Mrs. Alhefeiti** (United Arab Emirates) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I thank the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Ms. Keita, for her comprehensive briefing. We appreciate her efforts and those of her team to support peace in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. I also welcome the participation of the representatives of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Rwanda in this meeting.

We convene today at a very critical moment for the Democratic Republic of the Congo. In nearly a week's time, the people of the Democratic Republic of the Congo will be heading to the polls to participate in an electoral process that we hope would help shape the future of the country in line with their aspirations. In that context, we encourage the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) and the United Nations country team to continue providing the support needed to ensure the success of the electoral process. It is also important to ensure the full, equal and meaningful participation of women in all phases of the

electoral process, as their role is pivotal in society for building and consolidating peace.

In the context of today's discussion, I would like to emphasize four issues.

First, the protection of civilians must remain a top priority. Their continued exposure to attacks by armed groups is very worrisome, especially in North Kivu, where there is growing violence stemming from the violation of the ceasefire between the Mouvement du 23 mars (M-23) and the army of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. In that context, we reiterate our condemnation of acts of violence committed by armed groups, including M-23, upon whom we call to recommit to the ceasefire and to what was agreed upon in the Luanda communiqué, issued in November 2022. We also call once again on all other armed groups to lay down their arms, to permanently and unconditionally cease their hostilities and to seriously engage in the disarmament process.

We reaffirm the United Arab Emirates' firm commitment to supporting the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. We also stress the need to protect women and girls from acts of violence, especially sexual violence, which has reached unprecedented levels. As United Nations agencies indicate, insecurity in the east of the country has led to a significant increase in sexual violence incidents since March 2022. Therefore, addressing those worrisome situations in a sustainable manner requires an integrated approach that strengthens the capacities of the relevant institutions to respond to and protect from sexual violence.

Secondly, it is important to continue dialogue and constructive communication between the Democratic Republic of the Congo and regional actors, especially in neighbouring countries. The security and stability of the Democratic Republic of the Congo relies on the security and stability of the region. We must also ensure that local, regional and international partners continue their efforts to prevent and de-escalate tensions whenever they arise. That requires strengthened communication and coordination among various actors in that respect. During the current transitional phase, namely, the withdrawal of the East African Community regional force and planning for the deployment of the Southern African Development Community force, as well as the accelerated gradual withdrawal of MONUSCO, it is important not to leave any vacuum that armed groups might exploit to undermine peace efforts. There is

therefore a need for enhanced coordination between the withdrawing forces and the incoming ones.

Thirdly, the deteriorating humanitarian situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo requires a collaborative response from both the Government and the international community. Focus should be on meeting immediate needs while also planning for a long-term improvement of the humanitarian situation. According to the International Organization for Migration, the number of internally displaced people has risen to unprecedented levels in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. There are currently 7 million displaced persons, most of whom fled owing to the intensification of conflict in North Kivu. In that regard, we stress the need to continue making efforts to reach all those in need. Although the expansion of the operational capabilities of humanitarian organizations' emergency systems has enabled them to reach 3 million people, there are still some serious obstacles preventing that aid from reaching more than 2 million people who are still in need of support.

Fourthly, regarding the Council's current deliberations on the future of MONUSCO, we emphasize the need to prioritize the aspirations of the people of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. In that context, we appreciate the efforts of Special Representative Keita with her team and their cooperation with the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo to develop a plan to gradually accelerate MONUSCO's withdrawal.

Lastly, it is important to reach a comprehensive approach to address the various challenges in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, including those related to climate change and conflict prevention, while responding to urgent needs on the ground. Those are fundamental issues that ensure the stability of the Democratic Republic of the Congo in the long term. We reaffirm the United Arab Emirates' commitment to constructively engage with Council members during the negotiations on MONUSCO's mandate to ensure that the Council provides adequate support to the Democratic Republic of the Congo in line with the country's priorities.

**Ms. Evstigneeva** (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): We wish to thank the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Ms. Bintou Keita, for her briefing. We also listened attentively to the statement delivered by Ms. Sandrine Lusamba. We welcome the participation of the representatives of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Rwanda in today's meeting.

We express serious concern about the violation of the ceasefire between the Forces armées de la République démocratique du Congo and the Mouvement du 23 mars. The resumption of hostilities primarily affects the civilian population, causing suffering for ordinary people. We are already seeing another wave of internal displacement in the country. According to various estimates, the total number of internally displaced persons in the Democratic Republic of the Congo has reached a record high of 7 million people. That is a colossal figure. At the same time, the United Nations humanitarian response plan for 2023 remains chronically underfunded, with only 37.5 per cent of the necessary funds mobilized.

A continuation of the military conflict in the eastern Congolese provinces will clearly only lead to further deterioration in the humanitarian situation. We are also concerned about the growing instability in the west of the country, particularly Mai-Ndombe province. We call on all the illegal armed groups operating in the Democratic Republic of the Congo to renounce violent tactics, lay down their arms and participate in the Disarmament, Demobilization, Community Recovery and Stabilization Programme without preconditions.

We have taken note of Kinshasa's decision to terminate the mandate of the East African Community regional force. At the same time, we hope to see work continuing on the political track of the Nairobi process, a key element of which is dialogue between the Congolese Government and the groups that are willing to renounce violence. It is political solutions alone that can lead to a comprehensive cessation of hostilities and the creation of genuine conditions for sustained stabilization. We attach fundamental importance to achieving concrete results through the Luanda process and call for intensifying regional mediation with a view to reducing the tensions between Kinshasa and Kigali. We also believe it is essential to continue pooling complementary efforts and initiatives to ensure regional assistance. We note the imminent deployment of a contingent of the Southern African Development Community to the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo. It will be important to ensure the necessary level of coordination with the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) and to identify effective modalities for joint efforts to stabilize the situation. We agree with enabling the Mission to provide specific support to the regional forces.

We support the efforts of MONUSCO and its leadership. The Mission's presence in the conflict zone is an important stabilizing factor, and we therefore believe it is vital for its withdrawal to be guided primarily by rational considerations, take into account the evolution of the situation on the ground and take place gradually and responsibly. We note that such an approach is integral to the drawdown plan for MONUSCO recently signed by the Congolese authorities and the Mission's leadership. The plan's provisions should be reflected in the renewal of the Mission's mandate, which the members of the Security Council are currently working to adopt.

Like many other members of the Security Council, we call for a thorough investigation into the serious disciplinary violations committed by peacekeepers in order to identify and punish those responsible, including in cases where Mission personnel have been accused of sexual offences. However, as is provided for in the Organization's norms and rules, any measures taken should be coordinated directly with the troop-contributing countries whose military personnel are charged with the offences. The United Nations has developed mechanisms for combating sexual abuse, and we should focus on leveraging the various existing measures. We oppose any opportunistic initiatives that are based on notions of collective punishment for individual misconduct that entails personal accountability.

We look forward to receiving comprehensive information as soon as possible from the authorities of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the United Nations on the progress of the investigation into the tragedy involving the downing of a MONUSCO helicopter in the east of the country in March 2022. We all remember that eight peacekeepers were killed in the crash, including our compatriot Alexei Mizyura, a senior member of the Russian military observer team. The perpetrators must be found and brought to justice.

In conclusion, I would like to wish the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo every success in organizing the general elections to be held on 20 December. As a permanent member of the Security Council, Russia will continue to do everything necessary to help resolve the crisis in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo, including at this crucial stage when the withdrawal of MONUSCO is beginning.

**Mrs. Baeriswyl** (Switzerland) (*spoke in French*): I too would like to thank Special Representative of the Secretary-General Bintou Keita and Ms. Sandrine

Lusamba for their briefings and their efforts. I also welcome the participation in today's meeting of representatives of States in the region.

During a recent visit to the Democratic Republic of the Congo by a delegation from my country's foreign ministry, we met Pétronille Vaweka, a long-standing representative of Congolese civil society who told us that

“[d]espite the continuing conflict and suffering in the east, I believe firmly that we can build peace. That is why I am still standing here”.

I would therefore like to reaffirm to the Congolese people Switzerland's commitment to promoting lasting peace in the country. In that regard, I want to make three points.

First, the withdrawal of the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) must be carried out responsibly and in stages. Switzerland welcomes the cooperation between the Congolese authorities and the Mission in drawing up the disengagement plan. We acknowledge the Democratic Republic of the Congo's call for a gradual withdrawal of the Mission and therefore welcome the Government's commitment to ensuring that the withdrawal is carried out responsibly and in phases. That means giving priority to the protection of civilians and ensuring an inclusive and cooperative process, including with civil society. In the context of the deployment of regional forces in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, it is essential that any support provided by MONUSCO be in strict compliance with the United Nations Human Rights Due Diligence Policy. The regional forces should apply the African Union's compliance framework and include the protection of civilians in their mandate. Finally, with the Mission's withdrawal from South Kivu set for 2024, we encourage the Democratic Republic of the Congo to strengthen the rule of law and the security sector and the implementation of the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration process for armed groups.

Secondly, existing political initiatives must be strengthened to put an end to the clashes and build a lasting peace. At the regional level, Switzerland calls on all parties to exercise restraint and de-escalate tensions. Sincere, in-depth dialogue, in particular between the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Rwanda, is urgently needed to put an end to the cycle of violence. To that end, all support for armed groups, in particular the Mouvement du 23 mars (M-23) and the Forces

démocratiques de libération du Rwanda (FDLR), must stop immediately. In that regard, Switzerland takes note of the Congolese Government's decision to forbid its officers from having any contact with the FDLR.

At a national level, the Democratic Republic of the Congo must make every effort to guarantee civic space for its people, particularly in the context of the elections. It is crucial for the Congolese people to be able to express their will freely and without fear of reprisals. Meanwhile, all the candidates have a responsibility to ensure that the electoral process is peaceful and free of hate speech. We regret that people living in certain territories, notably Masisi and Rutshuru, have been deprived of the opportunity to participate in the electoral process.

Thirdly, all parties must respect international humanitarian law and human rights. The increased fighting in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo since October is worrisome. The growing attacks in North Kivu and Ituri by armed groups, particularly Wazalendo, the M-23, the Allied Democratic Forces and the Coopérative pour le développement du Congo, are having a devastating impact on the civilian population. At a time when the number of victims of violations of international law is rising dramatically, insecurity is hampering people's access to humanitarian aid. Those violations of international law must stop immediately and be investigated.

The Security Council visited the Democratic Republic of the Congo this year to engage in dialogue with the Congolese authorities and promote mutual understanding. The Democratic Republic of the Congo's continued cooperation and dialogue with the United Nations remains essential. As the Council prepares to renew MONUSCO's mandate, ensuring a constructive and transparent relationship between the Council and the Democratic Republic of the Congo will be crucial to a successful disengagement process.

**Ms. Dautllari** (Albania): I would like to thank Special Representative of the Secretary-General Keita for her outstanding leadership of the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) and Ms. Lusamba for her briefing and for the contribution of civil society in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

The humanitarian toll highlighted in the Secretary-General's report (S/2023/932) is unspeakable, and the activities of armed groups and regional end games

have eroded the very fabric of society, devastating communities and leaving scars that will last for generations. That is why peace in the Democratic Republic of the Congo is not merely an aspiration, but a concrete, urgent need if we also want to see justice delivered.

We reiterate our call for all armed groups to disarm immediately and engage in reintegration initiatives. We are deeply concerned about the dangerous escalation of fighting among armed groups with the Mouvement du 23 mars (M-23), which has failed to comply with the full withdrawal in accordance with the Luanda communiqué. At this point, we would like to appeal to Rwanda and the Democratic Republic of the Congo to de-escalate and engage in the Luanda process to break free from the cycle of distrust and embark on a journey towards sustainable peace defined by cooperation, economic development and shared prosperity. The entire Great Lakes region will benefit from it.

The path of reconciliation may be challenging, but it starts with ending support for the M-23 from Rwanda and its withdrawal from the territory of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, with respect for the territorial integrity of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. At this critical juncture, when the country is preparing for the 20 December elections, it is important to create and maintain an environment of transparency and trust, which is paramount to guaranteeing inclusivity, cohesion and legitimacy. Political intolerance and the restriction of civic space could only cause setbacks. The international community should follow closely and show to the people of the Democratic Republic of the Congo that we stand by them as they write this new chapter of democracy through the upcoming ballot.

As the Security Council discusses the renewal of MONUSCO's mandate, Albania has taken full note of the joint disengagement plan for the Mission and commends the cooperation between the Government and the Mission during that process. We support the commitment to an accelerated yet responsible withdrawal, as long as no gaps are left that could benefit the armed groups.

In conclusion, we reiterate our support for the territorial integrity and sovereignty of the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

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



I thank Ms. Bintou Keita and Ms. Sandrine Lusamba for their briefings, and I welcome the representatives of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Rwanda to this meeting.

My delegation's statement will focus on three areas.

First, Ecuador hopes that the elections that will take place on 20 December will guarantee a free and transparent process towards a new democracy, for which the Independent National Electoral Commission of the Democratic Republic of the Congo must be strengthened. Women and young people must be part of the decision at all levels. Their participation is fundamental in any electoral process, as it helps to generate inclusive, safe and peaceful societies. Therefore, while acknowledging their participation in certain electoral bodies, we also call for that participation to continue to be encouraged in the future. The report we have received (S/2023/932) notes that there are restrictions on civic space, incitement to hatred, threats of violence and the arbitrary detention of members of the opposition and the press. Ecuador therefore reiterates the need to defend freedom of expression, opinion and association, to protect human rights defenders and journalists and to combat hate speech and intolerance.

Secondly, it is worrisome that the situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo continues to deteriorate owing to violence. We are alarmed to hear that there are more than 900 cases of human rights violations, a high percentage of which are perpetrated by armed groups, in particular against women and girls. Such acts must cease, and there must be accountability that allows victims to live in dignity and perpetrators to be brought to justice. Violence increases the need for humanitarian assistance, and the international community's support is crucial to addressing the needs of the 25.4 million people who are facing food insecurity and the more than 450,000 displaced persons in the North Kivu region. We urge the country's authorities to allow access for humanitarian personnel and to ensure their security.

Thirdly, in response to the decision by the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo on the upcoming departure of the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO), we reiterate the importance of ensuring a gradual, orderly and safe transition, upholding human rights and international humanitarian law in all phases. Implementing the decisions of the Luanda and Nairobi processes is

essential to achieving lasting peace in the region. The regional, bilateral and international initiatives must work in a coordinated way for peace, dialogue and political stability, recognizing and continuing the work that MONUSCO has carried out. We also support the recent regional efforts that seek to de-escalate tensions between the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Rwanda.

Finally, my delegation repudiates the acts of sexual exploitation and abuse committed by certain members of MONUSCO. This very serious matter, which we have discussed in the Security Council, must not only be investigated and sanctioned, but also imposes the need to take measures to prevent recurrence and to strengthen assistance to victims.

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. Mukongo** (Democratic Republic of the Congo) (*spoke in French*): I would ask you, Mr. President, to allow me to go into slightly more detail, because this is a matter of vital significance for my delegation at what is, as has been said, a crucial moment.

As the negotiations on the announced withdrawal of the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) enter their final stage, allow me to the pleasure of reiterating to you, Mr. President, on behalf of His Excellency Mr. Félix-Antoine Tshisekedi Tshilombo, President of the Republic and Head of State, on behalf of the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and my entire delegation, and in my own personal capacity, our warmest and most sincere congratulations on your accession to the presidency of the Security Council.

To the Council members, the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo extends, through me, its most cordial greetings, along with those of the people of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, who have been scarred by an unjustified war of aggression that has been imposed on them for more than three decades by a neighbour seeking spheres of influence according to expansionist agendas of a past time. Allow me furthermore, once again on behalf of my Government, to state how much we have appreciated working with the sister republics of Gabon and Ghana throughout their fruitful two-year Council mandate,

which is coming to an end. We extend our gratitude for the diligence with which those two fraternal countries have supported the Democratic Republic of the Congo. I also applaud Ms. Sandrine Lusamba for her briefing.

My delegation would like to take this opportunity to express its sincere gratitude to Secretary-General António Guterres, for his steadfast and remarkable efforts to put an end to the ongoing confrontations, with a view to restoring lasting peace in my country, and to congratulate him on his sustained commitment to a negotiated withdrawal of MONUSCO from the Democratic Republic of Congo.

The memories of the brutal attack on the MONUSCO helicopter by the rebels of the Movement du 23 mars (M-23), on 29 March 2022, are still fresh in our minds. Those attacks claimed the lives of eight United Nations peacekeepers who were on a reconnaissance mission in North Kivu.

I therefore wish to pay tribute to all those valiant peacekeepers, to those men and women who, in the name of the ideals of the Charter of the United Nations, work alongside local communities to advance political solutions, prevent conflicts, protect civilians, strengthen human rights and the rule of law and establish peace, often under difficult and complex circumstances, far from their families and countries. They have made many sacrifices, and some have made the ultimate sacrifice. I pay tribute to the troop-contributing countries and donors. The Government and the people of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, through me, would like to express their gratitude for the efforts and sacrifices made.

Finally, I would like to thank Ms. Bintou Keita for the briefing she has just delivered on the report of the Secretary-General (S/2023/932) of 30 November 2023, entitled "United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo". I would also like to pay tribute to her leadership throughout the discussions that led to the adoption of the disengagement plan on 21 November, which has been discussed throughout this debate.

Before getting to the crux of the matter, I would like to briefly review the history of relations between the Democratic Republic of Congo and MONUSCO, as well as the process that led to the MONUSCO disengagement plan we are discussing today. We recall that when, on 30 November 1999, the Security Council unanimously adopted resolution 1279 (1999), establishing the United

Nations Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUC), the Congolese people, victims of armed aggression from neighbouring countries, were assured that observance of the ceasefire and the resulting disengagement of forces, would bring lasting peace and stability to the conflict-ridden eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo.

MONUSCO, which was created from the ashes of the former MONUC pursuant to resolution 1925 (2010) of 1 July 2010, had a mandate to restore security, build peace, stabilize the country and promote long-term development, both in the Democratic Republic of Congo and in the Great Lakes region.

History will record that MONUSCO has also achieved a great deal in the implementation of its mandate, notably through its contribution to the electoral process, the Forces armées de la République démocratique du Congo (FARDC), the Congolese National Police and humanitarian action.

In 2013, MONUSCO provided the FARDC with considerable support for defeating the M-23 insurgents in North Kivu, thanks to its Force Intervention Brigade, comprised of soldiers from South Africa, Malawi and Tanzania — a brigade created by the Security Council, exceptionally, with an offensive mandate and substantial military resources. Unfortunately, the Force Intervention Brigade lasted only as long as the operation.

One can therefore wonder why the issue of MONUSCO's withdrawal is back in the headlines in the Democratic Republic of Congo and here at the United Nations. After its debacle in 2013, the M-23, utilized by Rwanda to destabilize the eastern Democratic Republic of Congo, resurfaced in November 2021, when well-equipped fighters launched a series of deadly attacks on the FARDC and the Institut Congolais pour la Conservation de la Nature positions, occupying the corner of the border shared by the Democratic Republic of Congo, Uganda and Rwanda, thereby aggravating tensions in the region.

Since then, with the support of the Rwandan Patriotic Front, the M-23 has stepped up its attacks and taken over several positions, which it has held for almost two years now, under the dumbfounded gaze of the international community and MONUSCO, which is no longer able to implement the mandate entrusted to it by the Council, namely, to support the FARDC or

to ensure the protection of civilians abandoned to their sad fate.

Despite its size — 20,000 military and police personnel in 2016 and 16,000 currently deployed in the Congo to support the Government's efforts — MONUSCO has not been able to put an end to the vicious cycle of massacres of civilian populations, massive human rights violations, war crimes and crimes against humanity and the open illegal exploitation of the country's natural resources by national and foreign armed groups. On the contrary, those abuses have continued and increased in the eastern Democratic Republic of Congo, particularly in the provinces of Ituri, North Kivu and South Kivu.

That has been compounded by the fundamentalist terrorism of Da'esh, which has even extended its reach into Ituri through the Allied Democratic Forces. The massacres perpetrated in Rutshuru territory by the M-23, supported by soldiers of the Rwandan Defence Forces — on 28 November 2022 in Kishishe, in March 2023 in Kasimba, in May 2023 in Tongo and in July 2023 in Bukombo — once again brought the horror to the east of our country. That should have done more than stir the moral conscience of the community of nations. It should have triggered the responsibility of those who exercise world leadership through the Security Council and prompted them to impose peace in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo.

This situation lies at the root of the heated tensions that for some time now have plagued relations between MONUSCO and the Congolese people, especially in areas ravaged by those armed groups. Given the situation, the reaction of the population has been swift. The hostility of the population against MONUSCO in North Kivu has increased to the point of creating real panic among Mission personnel with regard to security, resulting in the violent incidents of 30 August 2023 in Goma, with the death of 42 Congolese, following other such incidents in June and July 2022 in Goma, Beni, Butembo and Kasindi, during which 30 Congolese and five Blue Helmets lost their lives.

In that spirit, speaking from the General Assembly rostrum on 20 September, the President of the Republic, His Excellency Mr. Félix-Antoine Tshisekedi Tshilombo, stated:

“Following a United Nations presence of more than two decades, it is time for my country to fully take its destiny in hand and to become the main

protagonist of its own stability. We are grateful to the international community and to the United Nations for their support and their partnership, but we are also aware that the phased withdrawal of MONUSCO is a necessary stage to consolidate the progress that we have already achieved.” (see A/78/PV.7)

For the President of the Republic, therefore, accelerating MONUSCO's withdrawal had become an overriding necessity to ease tensions between the former and our fellow citizens. He therefore instructed the Government to enter into discussions with the United Nations authorities for an accelerated withdrawal of MONUSCO from the Democratic Republic of Congo, bringing the start of the gradual withdrawal from December 2024 to December 2023. That is the thrust of the correspondence (S/2023/648, annex), that His Excellency Mr. Christophe Lutundula Apala Pen'apala, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs, addressed to the President of the Security Council on 1 September, requesting the acceleration of MONUSCO's withdrawal.

Speaking frankly, my delegation was delighted by the convergence of views that so fortunately emerged between the Government of my country, the Secretary-General and the Security Council, through its presidential statement S/PRST/2023/5 of 16 October, both on the general assessment of the difficulties facing MONUSCO in carrying out its current mandate and on the need for its accelerated and gradual withdrawal. That presidential statement is the legal basis for MONUSCO's disengagement plan, as agreed in Kinshasa on 21 November, following the deliberations between the Government and MONUSCO which, it should be noted, worked in perfect harmony on designing MONUSCO's disengagement plan.

I now turn to the withdrawal plan as it was negotiated. I welcome the fact that paragraph 75 of the Secretary-General's report was concise. For the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the disengagement plan, as submitted to the Council, is the result of a consensual commitment by both parties, duly signed by His Excellency Mr. Christophe Lutundula Apala Pen'apala, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and Ms. Bintou Keita, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Head of MONUSCO, on behalf of the United Nations.

The Democratic Republic of the Congo fully endorses what has been agreed and signed by the two parties and calls for the implementation in good faith of the resulting commitments. It is therefore up to the Security Council to endorse it and ensure that it be implemented as is, without modifying it, at the risk of jeopardizing the balance that has been re-established and undermining the trust that has been rebuilt after waves of crises that have shaken relations between MONUSCO and the local populations.

However, the war is not over, and if the Council is serious about protecting Congolese civilians caught up in the violence and restoring full peace to the Democratic Republic of Congo, it must commit itself inexorably to the full implementation of the Luanda and Nairobi peace processes, which have been regularly validated and endorsed by both the African Union and the United Nations through the Security Council.

As a reminder, the Nairobi process calls for the resumption of the political process under the mediation of His Excellency Mr. Uhuru Kenyatta, former President of the Republic of Kenya. The political consultations conducted as part of that process between the authorities of the Democratic Republic of Congo and local armed groups on peace and security in the provinces of Ituri, North Kivu and South Kivu had made significant progress with the organization of the first consultations which brought together in Nairobi, from 23 to 27 April 2022, representatives of 23 local armed groups and the Kenya-Democratic Republic of Congo joint secretariat team.

Having reached its third phase, the Nairobi process, in which the representatives of the M-23 had taken part at the beginning of the discussions, was interrupted because of the attitude of those rebels who believed they could profit from the motto “fight and talk”. The M-23 was expelled from the room at the start of the discussions in the first round of consultations for having launched armed attacks against the positions of the armed forces on 23 April 2022. In the current context, the conclusion of the political process, which has now reached its third phase and which has already brought together a total of 56 other local armed groups, requires a holistic approach involving the combined efforts of the Luanda and Nairobi processes.

Most of our partners advocate dialogue with neighbouring Rwanda. Without recalling the spirit of openness of President Tshisekedi Tshilombo who, at the start of his mandate, embraced dialogue with

neighbouring countries, in particular Rwanda, I would like to stress that the Democratic Republic of Congo is willing to engage in dialogue, provided that the objective conditions for meaningful dialogue are created, namely, the guarantee of the proper conclusion of the dialogue in the context of war and broken trust, because war is taking place on the territory of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and it is the Congolese people who are dying. It is our fauna and flora that are being destroyed, our mineral resources that are being plundered and our people who have been forced to leave their homes, with over 7 million internally displaced persons.

Furthermore, dialogue is one of the stages set out in the Luanda road map. In that regard, it is important to recall that the Luanda road map, among other things, provides for the following stages.

First, there must be a cessation of hostilities in general and in particular of the M-23's attacks against the Forces armées de la République démocratique du Congo and MONUSCO.

Secondly, the M-23 must withdraw from the occupied zones and return to its initial positions on Mount Sabyinyo, on the Democratic Republic of the Congo side, under the control of the FARDC, the regional force and the ad hoc mechanism, in collaboration with MONUSCO.

Thirdly, all political-military support for the M-23 and all other local and foreign armed groups operating in the east of the Democratic Republic of Congo and the region must cease.

Fourthly, there must be disarmament and cantonment of the M-23 on Congolese territory, under the control of the FARDC and the ad hoc verification mechanism, with the collaboration of MONUSCO.

Fifthly, displaced persons must be allowed to return to their homes.

And lastly, there must be a resumption and continuation of political consultations between the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and local armed groups, within the framework of the Nairobi process; the resumption of bilateral dialogue between the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Rwanda, with a view to normalizing diplomatic relations and resuming cooperation; the examination and resolution of the issue of the return of all refugees to their countries of origin; and the continuation of

coordination meetings at all levels between the Luanda process and the Nairobi process.

In short, it is essential to recall, as my Minister for Foreign Affairs, His Excellency Mr. Christophe Lutundula Apala Pen'apala stated in his most recent address to the Council on 28 September (see S/PV.9427), that the priority and urgency at present for the Democratic Republic of the Congo in terms of security are the end of Rwandan aggression and the withdrawal of its troops from North Kivu; the eradication of armed terrorist groups in the Congo, including the M-23; the return of displaced persons to their homes; the restoration of Congolese State authority in the territories occupied by the M-23 and the implementation of the Disarmament, Demobilization, Community Recovery and Stabilization Programme — in short, the restoration of peace and security throughout the country.

With regard to the renewal of MONUSCO's mandate, my Government has demonstrated its flexibility by accepting that the joint disengagement plan will be implemented over the course of another year.

The few major areas that MONUSCO will have to tackle are the protection of civilians in all its complexity, which is my Government's main priority; support for security-sector reform; support to the Congolese national police and armed forces; the transfer of capacities to strengthen ownership; support for the Demobilization, Disarmament, Community Recovery and Stabilization Programme; advocacy for new programming frameworks in support of the Programme; support for joint operations with the FARDC; support to the general elections in December; and support for the regional forces officially engaged on the ground in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Other important or subsidiary tasks will also be considered for the mandate insofar as they do not prejudice the main goal of disengagement.

The MONUSCO disengagement plan to which we agreed — or better still, MONUSCO's withdrawal — is not an end in and of itself. The Security Council, which is responsible for the maintenance of international peace and security, will remain seized of the situation in our country. It cannot absolve itself of its obligation to bring an end to the insecurity plaguing the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo. The Council possesses the legal and political capabilities and the resources needed to compel all of the recalcitrant parties to fully implement the road map resulting from

the Nairobi and Luanda processes and thereby end the dangerous stalemate in the security crisis.

Lastly, to once again paraphrase my country's Foreign Minister, the Council must act before it is too late. It is time to ensure accountability for the crimes that Rwanda has perpetrated against the Democratic Republic of the Congo, as well as the crimes of the M-23 on Congolese territory. It is high time to raise our voices and call firmly on the members of the M-23 to lay down their weapons, go to the cantonment zones provided to that end and join the Demobilization, Disarmament, Community Recovery and Stabilization Programme. It is also time to tell Rwanda to withdraw its troops from the Democratic Republic of the Congo unconditionally and to end its support for the M-23.

In conclusion, I want to assure the Security Council that the Democratic Republic of the Congo is staunchly committed to the new advances in the disengagement of MONUSCO. Backsliding is no longer an option. The only option is to move forward constructively and to meet any challenges in the operationalization of the disengagement plan proactively and creatively. Its provisions and other flexible clauses are all assets that can be leveraged in the light of any challenges that may arise. The clear vision of the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo is to ensure that the disengagement plan becomes a model for other United Nations peacekeeping mission withdrawals and disengagements.

**The President** (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of Rwanda.

**Mr. Rwamucyo** (Rwanda): As this is my first time addressing the Council as the Permanent Representative of Rwanda, allow me to congratulate you, Mr. President, and your team on your able leadership of the Council. I thank Special Representative of the Secretary-General Bintou Keita for her briefing, as well as all the members of the Security Council for their valuable contributions.

As we speak, the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and its coalition of illegal armed militia groups, the genocidal Forces démocratiques de libération du Rwanda (FDLR) and foreign mercenaries, have violated the ceasefire brokered and mandated by the regional peace processes, including the East African Community's (EAC) Nairobi process and the Luanda process. Those processes led to the withdrawal of the Mouvement du 23 mars (M-23), and the ceasefire violation aggravated the already dire humanitarian

crisis in the region. Unfortunately, Kinshasa has also terminated the EAC regional force, which is currently withdrawing from the ongoing volatile situation. The premature departure of that force is undermining all the regional efforts to bring peace to the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo. Rwanda would like to take this opportunity to urge the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo to recommit to regional agreements, which offer the best chance for peace.

The report on the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (S/2023/932) is silent on the human rights violations of the Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (FARDC) and their impunity in that regard, including for the routine murder of civilians and the State-enabled persecution and violence directed at Tutsi communities in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Disturbing images of a Tutsi Congolese soldier, Captain Gisore Rukatura, being burned alive went viral on social media last month. Such heinous crimes are a direct consequence of the prevalence of hate speech, discrimination and genocidal ideology aimed at Congolese Tutsi in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo. Last week, during the commemoration of the seventy-fifth anniversary of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, Ms. Alice Wairimu Nderitu, the Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide, warned about discrimination and the instrumentalization of disinformation, misinformation and hate speech for personal and political gain. Rwanda implores the Council to hold the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo accountable for encouraging disinformation and allowing hate speech and ethnic violence to reach unprecedented levels, actions that warrant a commission of inquiry.

Another critical component characterizing the current period in the Democratic Republic of the Congo is the violent anti-Rwandan rhetoric led by Congolese officials. Several candidates, including the country's incumbent President, Félix-Antoine Tshisekedi Tshilombo, continue to threaten Rwanda with invasion, mass murder and annexation. An incident on 21 October in which heavily armed men, including members of the FDLR, mobilized at the Democratic

Republic of the Congo's border with Rwanda, singing war songs in Kinyarwanda and making crude threats, has been brought to the attention of the Council. Rwanda takes those threats seriously, especially given the integration of the FDLR into the FARDC, and we urge the Democratic Republic of the Congo to cease its provocations.

In conclusion, Rwanda reiterates that solutions to the security challenges in the Democratic Republic of the Congo cannot be found in blame games or externalizing the country's internal problems. They lie in inclusive and constructive dialogue, regional cooperation and a cessation of hostilities, and in prioritizing the welfare of civilians. Rwanda remains committed to the ongoing regional efforts to stabilize the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo, and we look forward to working together for a peaceful, stable and prosperous region.

**The President** (*spoke in Spanish*): The representative of the Democratic Republic of the Congo has asked for the floor to make a further statement. I ask him to be as brief as possible. I now give him the floor.

**Mr. Mukongo** (Democratic Republic of the Congo) (*spoke in French*): I have spoken at length and have no intention of taking up much more of the Council's time. I would simply like to respond to the representative of Rwanda. I would first like to congratulate Rwanda on being so up-to-date about everything that is happening in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. We ourselves are less certain about what is happening in Rwanda. They are very interested in what is happening in our country and we commend them for that. However, I would just like to point out that when it comes to genocide and genocidal discourse, which has become virtually a leitmotif in the language of Rwandan officials, if there is a reference point for genocide in Africa, it will not be found in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. That is all I wanted to say.

**The President** (*spoke in Spanish*): There are no more names inscribed on the list of speakers.

I now invite Council members to informal consultations to continue our discussion of the subject.

*The meeting rose at noon.*