

**Security Council**

Distr.: General
24 April 2025

Original: English

Letter dated 24 April 2025 from the Permanent Representatives of Denmark, Sierra Leone and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

Denmark and Sierra Leone, as Co-Chairs of the Informal Expert Group on Women and Peace and Security of the Security Council and in close cooperation with the United Kingdom, would like to share the summary note of the following meeting of the Informal Expert Group on the situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (see annex).*

We would be grateful if the present letter and its attachment could be circulated as a document of the Security Council.

(Signed) Christina Markus **Lassen**
Permanent Representative of Denmark to the United Nations

(Signed) Michael Imran **Kanu**
Permanent Representative of Sierra Leone to the United Nations

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Permanent Representative of the United Kingdom to the United Nations

* Circulated in the language of submission only in line with current liquidity management measures.



Annex to the letter dated 24 April 2025 from the Permanent Representatives of Denmark, Sierra Leone and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

Informal Expert Group on Women and Peace and Security of the Security Council

Summary of the meeting held on 26 March 2025 on the situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo

On 26 March 2025, the Informal Expert Group on Women, Peace and Security convened a meeting on the situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The Security Council members were briefed by the 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 (MONUSCO), Bintou Keita, accompanied by colleagues from MONUSCO and the United Nations country team. The briefing was followed by an overview of key recommendations for the Security Council by the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women) and additional observations on conflict-related sexual violence by the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict.

Questions from Security Council members

Members of the Security Council raised a number of questions related to sexual and gender-based violence and conflict-related sexual violence in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, including how the Security Council and the United Nations could better respond to the drastic escalation of sexual violence in eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo and ensure justice and accountability for survivors, whether the military of the Democratic Republic of the Congo have taken concrete action to combat sexual violence, whether MONUSCO has engaged with the Mouvement du 23 Mars (M23) on the matter and how the Government is implementing related national-level initiatives and policies, including the reparations fund for survivors of sexual violence. The Security Council members also asked questions about the capacity and resources of MONUSCO and the United Nations country team to respond to the sexual violence in the current context and about the Mission's interim action plans to protect civilians and address conflict-related sexual violence. Several questions were also raised regarding women's participation in regional peace initiatives, including what the Security Council could do to promote the participation of women of the Democratic Republic of the Congo in the current mediation processes, including as part of official delegations, and to ensure that women's voices are heard throughout the processes, and whether MONUSCO has engaged with the East African Community and the Southern African Development Community (SADC) to promote this. Lastly, some Security Council members noted their concern about the situation of human rights defenders and women peacebuilders in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo and asked for more information about their situation and that of and women-led organizations.

Situation in eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo, including the humanitarian and human rights situation

- The security situation in eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo has deteriorated rapidly following the significant advances by M23 in the provinces of South Kivu and North Kivu, including the capture of the provincial capitals

of Goma, on 28 January, and Bukavu, on 18 February. The ongoing crisis has worsened the humanitarian and human rights situation, with increased killings, forced recruitment, forced displacement and conflict-related sexual violence. Nearly 3,000 people have been killed and 2,880 injured as a result of clashes since January 2025. Hundreds of thousands of people have been displaced, most of whom multiple times, and many of the former internally displaced persons camps have been destroyed or dismantled. Women represent 51 per cent of this displaced population. Some 900,000 people are living in precarious conditions in Goma, North Kivu. According to the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), more than 1,100 unaccompanied children in North and South Kivu were identified in early February 2025, with the numbers continuing to rise, putting these children at an increased risk of abduction, recruitment and use by groups, including for sexual violence. Since the beginning of 2025, the United Nations Joint Human Rights Office has verified at least 687 victims of abductions in conflict-affected provinces, including at least 90 women and 24 girls, at high risk of being subjected to some form of sexual violence while in captivity. MONUSCO continues to engage with M23 and the Alliance Fleuve Congo (AFC) to remind them of their obligations under international human rights law and international humanitarian law.

- In North and South Kivu, access to essential services such as electricity, water and banking systems is intermittent, and food insecurity is on the rise. The health sector is under severe strain with the surge of war-related injuries and complex trauma cases, while the looting of medical supplies and the destruction of infrastructure have considerably limited access to essential healthcare services. Critical infrastructure, such as the airports in Goma and Bukavu, remains inaccessible, adding to the challenges in delivering humanitarian assistance to those in need. The humanitarian crisis in the Democratic Republic of the Congo remains one of the most severe globally. Further clarity is needed on the implication of the freeze on United States of America-funded activities and aid, as United States funding accounted for 70 per cent of the funding for the humanitarian needs and response plan in 2024.
- Women community mediators and women peace ambassadors in Goma are calling for rapid and adequate assistance to returning internally displaced persons, including safe transportation, the rebuilding of destroyed housing and community infrastructure, the clearance of internally displaced persons sites and roads of unexploded ordinance and support for women's economic empowerment initiatives.
- The United Nations Joint Human Rights Office continues to receive requests for individual protection for human rights defenders, journalists, civil society actors and judicial authorities who are at risk of reprisals by M23. MONUSCO has supported their relocation and provided protection to allow them to continue to monitor and report human rights violations in their areas.
- Since January 2025, there have been five mass prison escapes in eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo, including from Muzenze prison in Goma and the central prisons of Bukavu, Kabare, Uvira and Kalemie. Some of the escaped prisoners have been convicted of human rights violations and abuses, including gender-based crimes, and are listed on the sanctions list, and are now threatening activists, victims and witnesses. Some are expected to have rejoined the Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo or joined Wazalendo. The United Nations Joint Human Rights Office has engaged with the Military High Court to find ways to disarm the warlords and engage in the protection of the victims.

- On 7 February 2025, the Human Rights Council established a fact-finding mission on human rights violations and abuses and violations of international humanitarian law in North and South Kivu since January 2022, including those affecting women and children, as well as an independent commission of inquiry.
- MONUSCO continues to deliver its mandate, including the protection of civilians, and stands ready to support the implementation of a future ceasefire agreement if requested by the parties and mandated by the Security Council.

Women's participation in peacebuilding efforts and in politics

- On 24 March, the second joint summit of the Heads of State and Government of the East African Community and the Southern African Development Community (SADC) appointed two women among the five co-facilitators for the merged Luanda-Nairobi process, including the former President of the Central African Republic, Catherine Samba-Panza, and former President of Ethiopia, Sahle-Work Zewde.
- Building on the High-Level Regional Forum of Women of the Great Lakes, held in Rwanda on 18 and 19 November 2024, MONUSCO organized focus group discussions with conflict-affected women in North Kivu, Ituri and Kinshasa in November 2024 to seek their priority concerns and recommendations to be presented to the mediators. Following this, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General met with women leaders of the Democratic Republic of the Congo on 21 January 2025, encouraging them to strengthen their alliances with women leaders throughout Africa and beyond for greater influence in political and diplomatic decision-making.
- The United Nations has since supported women of the Democratic Republic of the Congo in developing an advocacy note, which is expected to serve as a common agenda for peace and will be used to brief the East African Community-SADC panel of facilitators, including elements of the road map adopted at the joint ministerial meeting held on 17 March.
- Notable progress on women's political participation and leadership was made following the general elections held on 20 December 2023. Women's representation in the Cabinet, which was sworn in on 12 June 2024, increased to 33 per cent (with 17 women out of the 54 members) compared with the previous 28 per cent. On 1 April 2024, Judith Suminwa Tuluka was appointed as the first woman Prime Minister in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Women of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, from communities to the highest level in the Government, are determined to contribute to political processes and peacebuilding efforts.

Sexual and gender-based violence, including conflict-related sexual violence

- Women and girls continue to suffer from unprecedented levels of sexual and gender-based violence, including conflict-related sexual violence, throughout the country. Within a mere eight-day period from 27 January to 3 February 2025, a total of 492 cases of conflict-related sexual violence were recorded, including 164 women who were raped by inmates during a prison break at Muzenze prison in Goma according to judiciary authorities, of whom at least 150 later died in a fire set by the inmates. Displaced women and girls are at particular risk of sexual violence, especially when leaving the internally displaced persons camps.
- In 2024, MONUSCO documented 823 cases of conflict-related sexual violence, affecting 416 women, 391 girls, 7 boys and 9 men. Displaced women and girls

in and around Goma were also forced to engage in survival sex, including in more than 1,000 brothels.

- The situation of the Democratic Republic of the Congo has been covered in the annual report of the Secretary-General on conflict-related sexual violence since 2012, with the highest number of conflict-related sexual violence cases recorded year by year, reflecting both the gravity of conflict-related sexual violence in the Democratic Republic of the Congo but also the efforts made to support reporting. Successive reports have documented cases of rape, gang-rape, sexual slavery and forced marriage, which were often accompanied by extreme physical violence and in some cases the killing of the victims. There have also been reports of women and girls being targeted in the pursuit of livelihood activities and food cultivation.
- Among the 25 parties listed in the annual report of the Secretary-General on conflict-related sexual violence, there are two State actors and 23 non-State actors. Non-State actors were responsible for 625 of the 823 cases of conflict-related sexual violence in 2024, and 14 of the 23 non-State actors have been listed in the report since 2015. The Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo has actively addressed conflict-related sexual violence committed by the State actors since the signing of the Joint Communiqué between the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the United Nations on the Fight Against Conflict-Related Sexual Violence, and there have been hundreds of prosecutions of the Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (FARDC) for committing conflict-related sexual violence.
- To respond to the escalating sexual violence, MONUSCO and the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict have agreed to create a temporary Women's Protection Adviser position at the P-5 level. Adequate funding to MONUSCO, the United Nations Joint Human Right Office and the United Nations country team is essential to ensure that the United Nations is able to respond to the shocking levels of sexual violence throughout the country.
- MONUSCO and the United Nations country team continue to support the civil and military justice reform, including the Prosecution Support Cell within the military justice system, and advocate for accountability for serious crimes during the conflict, including sexual violence, and for the preservation of evidence and the documentation of cases to ensure justice and eventual reparations for the survivors of sexual violence. The United Nations also supports the Government in gender-responsive budgeting.

Recommendations

In any upcoming decisions on the Democratic Republic of the Congo,¹ the Security Council should:

- Reiterate demands that all parties immediately cease hostilities and ensure the protection of civilians from violence, including sexual and gender-based violence.
- Call on the parties to ensure women's full, equal and meaningful participation in the negotiations to bring about a permanent ceasefire, and urge Member States and regional organizations brokering these talks to both request women's

¹ These recommendations are prepared by the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women) as the secretariat of the Informal Expert Group, in consultation with other United Nations entities, including the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict.

participation of the parties and include women and gender expertise in their own mediation and facilitation teams, including in leadership positions, ensure the inclusion of displaced women and report to the Security Council on these efforts.

- Call on all conflict parties to cease all acts of sexual violence and gender-based crimes and to adopt time-bound commitments to prevent and address these violations and stress that sexual violence crimes will be duly investigated, and that perpetrators will be held accountable.
- Urge the authorities to fully implement the 2019 addendum to the Joint Communiqué on addressing conflict-related sexual violence, including by advancing on the full implementation of the action plans of the national armed forces and police and ensuring accountability for all the perpetrators, as well as sufficient and sustained funding for reparations.
- Demand the opening of airports in Goma and Bukavu to facilitate unhindered humanitarian access into and throughout conflict-affected North and South Kivu Provinces, including to address the unprecedented scale of needs for services for gender-based violence survivors and to ensure continuity in access to lifesaving aid and basic services, especially in eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo.
- Condemn any threats or attacks against women human rights defenders and women peacebuilders, journalists, political actors and civil society representatives, as well as the spread of misinformation and disinformation, and urge international partners to direct more resources and support to local women-led organizations and services supporting survivors of gender-based violence or women's sexual and reproductive health and rights.
- Request the availability of gender expertise in the Group of Experts supporting the sanctions committee, and the use of gender analysis in their reports and investigations.
- Stress the importance of a gender-responsive transition process and requests the United Nations to regularly consult with women's civil society organizations throughout the country on all aspects of the transition, ensure that comprehensive gender analysis and technical gender expertise are included throughout, and monitor the impact on women and girls of any reconfiguration of the United Nations presence in conflict-affected territories (in line with paragraph 6 of resolution [2594 \(2021\)](#)).
- Call on the Security Council to ensure that adequate resourcing is allocated in the Mission's budget for sufficient women's protection advisers positions in MONUSCO to lead the work on prevention and response to conflict-related sexual violence, including engagement with parties to conflict for the implementation of effective measures to address conflict-related sexual violence and to sustain the functioning of the monitoring, analysis and reporting arrangement for conflict-related sexual violence, in line with resolution [2765 \(2024\)](#), and stress the need to ensure the availability of sufficient capacity within the United Nations country team to contribute to conflict-related sexual violence prevention and response.
- Request regional organizations involved in peace and security processes in the Democratic Republic of the Congo to prioritize women and peace and security considerations in all its interventions, and report on this in relevant forums, including the Security Council.

- Call for the strengthening of gender-responsive early warning systems to identify and prevent escalating violence, in particular threats against women and girls.
- Demand stronger measures to prevent the recruitment and use of child soldiers, with particular attention to the unique vulnerabilities of girls, including those forcibly married or subjected to sexual exploitation by armed groups.
- Recognize the role of illicit small arms and light weapons and ammunition in exacerbating patterns of sexual and gender-based violence and the need for gender-responsive efforts to fight against arms trafficking and diversion, and strengthen weapons and ammunition management in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.
- Urge stronger measures by the Government and its international partners to fight against trafficking in persons in all its forms, including through the illicit exploitation of natural resources involving women and children.
- Stress the importance of the inclusion of local women's organizations in the planning and delivery of assistance, and call on international partners to provide long-term and flexible funding to local women-led and women's rights organizations, including for women's economic empowerment initiatives.

In the negotiations on mandate renewal at the end of the year, the Security Council should retain the references to women and peace and security made in resolution [2765 \(2024\)](#). In addition, the Security Council members could:

- Urge the international community to fully fund the 2025 humanitarian response plan, with special attention to addressing all forms of sexual and gender-based violence and stronger investments in sexual and reproductive healthcare, mental health and psychosocial support, mainstreaming gender equality throughout the humanitarian response and ensuring women's participation in and leadership of decision-making at all levels of the humanitarian response and throughout the humanitarian planning cycle.
- Call for international partners to provide direct, flexible and long-term funding to women-led and women's rights organizations to support local grass-roots peacebuilding efforts and the delivery of humanitarian assistance, including through mechanisms such as the Women's Peace and Humanitarian Fund.
- Support the adoption, implementation and resourcing of the third-generation national action plan on women and peace and security and the provincial action plans on women and peace and security, as well as the implementation and resourcing of one-stop centres (known as integrated centres for multisectoral services) for survivors of sexual and gender-based violence, especially in the humanitarian context of eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo.
- Encourage the establishment by the Government of the interministerial committee and the national council for gender and parity, both provided for in the 2015 law on parity.
- Support the full implementation of the Democratic Republic of the Congo national strategy for positive masculinity and the creation of thematic rosters to facilitate the inclusion of women in peace and political processes.