



Security Council

Seventy-eighth year

9427th meeting

Thursday, 28 September 2023, 10 a.m.

New York

Provisional

<i>President:</i>	Ms. Dautllari	(Albania)
<i>Members:</i>	Brazil	Mr. França Danese
	China	Mr. Dai Bing
	Ecuador	Mr. Montalvo Sosa
	France	Mr. De Rivière
	Gabon	Mr. Biang
	Ghana	Mr. Agyeman
	Japan	Mrs. Shino
	Malta	Ms. Gatt
	Mozambique	Mr. Afonso
	Russian Federation	Mr. Polyanskiy
	Switzerland	Mr. Hauri
	United Arab Emirates	Mrs. Alhefeiti
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Mr. Kariuki
	United States of America	Mrs. Thomas-Greenfield

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/2023/691)

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

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation 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/2023/691)

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

On behalf of the Council, I welcome His Excellency Mr. Christophe Christophe Lutundula Apala Pen'apala, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

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. Anny Tengamendite Modi, Executive Director and co-founder of AFIA MAMA, 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/2023/691, which contains the report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

At this meeting, the Security Council will hear briefings by Ms. Keita, Ms. Modi and Ambassador Michel Xavier Biang, Permanent Representative of Gabon, in his capacity as Chair of the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 1533 (2004), concerning the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

I now give the floor to Ms. Keita.

Ms. Keita (*spoke in French*): First of all, allow me to express my thanks to the Security Council for this opportunity to present the report (S/2023/691) of the

Secretary-General on the situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. I welcome the presence of the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Francophonie of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the Permanent Representative of Rwanda and Ms. Anny Modi, Executive Director and co-founder of AFIA MAMA.

Since my previous briefing (see S/PV.9298), insecurity has continued to permeate the eastern part of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The situation remains volatile and still requires continued efforts to protect civilians. The crisis created by the Mouvement du 23 mars (M-23) continues to fuel frustration and anger among the population, as well as the tensions between the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Rwanda.

In North Kivu, the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) has continued to deter attacks by the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF) in Beni, Eringeti and Bwana Sura. In the southern area of the province, the ceasefire between the Congolese armed forces and the M-23 has been generally respected, but the fighting between the M-23 and armed groups allied with the Government has intensified. The M-23 still controls strategic communication points in the territories of Masisi, Rutshuru and Nyiragongo, and has even re-occupied previously liberated areas, without fulfilling any of the obligations agreed in the Luanda road map.

The M-23 notably blocked MONUSCO missions in Rumangabo, Rutshuru territory, intended to prepare the site identified for its pre-cantonment. I deplore that obstruction and renew my call on the M-23 to lay down their weapons and withdraw without delay from the occupied territories, as well as my call to the signatory States to the Luanda road map to fully support the process.

In Ituri, insecurity continues at an alarming level, fuelled mainly by the Coopérative pour le développement du Congo (CODECO), Zaire and ADF militias. Djugu and Irumu are the main hotbeds of insecurity. MONUSCO has repelled numerous attacks against civilians. The coordination of operations against armed groups has also been strengthened with the entry into service in July of the new Joint Operations and Coordination Centre for MONUSCO and the Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (FARDC) in Bunia.

In South Kivu, despite notable progress, pockets of insecurity persist. The security situation in the province continues to require physical protection by MONUSCO for over 2,000 displaced people in Mikenge in Mwenga territory. Political efforts have also been deployed to reduce community tensions on the Ruzizi plain, the Uvira highlands and the Fizi territory.

(spoke in English)

All the security challenges that I have mentioned, particularly the ones in Ituri and North Kivu, have continued to fuel a dramatic humanitarian situation in the eastern provinces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. As I speak today, over 6 million people remain displaced in Ituri, North Kivu and South Kivu. I commend the extension until the end of the year of the humanitarian scale-up to assist those populations and call on donors to continue to support the humanitarian response plan which remains underfunded. Against that backdrop and in collaboration with the Congolese authorities and security forces, MONUSCO has helped to ensure the safe passage of displaced people and establish several humanitarian corridors.

Within the humanitarian crisis lies another crisis: gender-based and sexual violence. More than 10,000 survivors of gender-based violence sought assistance in North Kivu, South Kivu and Ituri in the months of June and July alone. In addition to those official figures, there are many other individuals who are unable to reach treatment centres. In response to the acute risk of sexual violence in displacement sites, the Mission increased its joint patrols with the Congolese armed forces. The Congolese authorities have, for their part, closed numerous brothels in North Kivu. Those efforts need to be sustained and intensified to protect women and girls from conflict-fuelled abuse. Impunity for those crimes should not be allowed to prevail.

The humanitarian response and security efforts are critical but the conflicts in eastern Congo also require concerted political and regional solutions. To that end, peace processes have continued over the past months, although with reduced momentum. MONUSCO is committed to supporting regional political processes, which offer the only credible solutions to the current conflicts.

I am encouraged by the visit of Nairobi process facilitator former President Kenyatta to Goma in early July. Building on the momentum of the ceasefire between the FARDC and M-23, the confidence-building measures

he recommended to move the Luanda road map forward should be operationalized and the recommendations of the third round of political consultations between the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Congolese armed groups should be implemented.

Concurrently, the East African Community regional force mandate has been extended for three months and the Southern African Development Community has confirmed its intent to deploy a peace mission to eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo. Regional organizations remain mobilized to address the enduring conflict in eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo. We must encourage regional stakeholders to actively support the Nairobi and Luanda processes and ensure their bilateral and other deployments contribute to enhancing the protection of civilians, while coordinating their operations with MONUSCO.

(spoke in French)

Regional efforts will be able to achieve their objectives only if, in parallel, essential reforms of the Congolese security sector are adopted, financed and implemented. The Government's decision to recruit 13,000 police officers in the run-up to the elections should also enable them to play a leading role in extending the State's authority and strengthening the rule of law. I encourage the Congolese authorities to accelerate all the security sector reforms, including the feminization of the security sector, to enable the Congolese army and police to effectively respond to the challenges of insecurity in all its forms.

Similarly, the implementation of the Demobilization, Disarmament, Community Recovery and Stabilization Programme is an essential condition for stabilization. Three operational plans of the Programme have been adopted for Ituri, North Kivu and South Kivu. That is an important step in mobilizing the operational and financial resources required for its implementation. I also encourage the Government to ensure that the Programme remain attractive with a view to encouraging combatants to lay down their arms.

While the Democratic Republic of the Congo continues to face security challenges in the east, the country is entering the final stages of preparations for the general elections in December. High-quality elections are essential to sustain the country's democratic gains and institutional stability and to strengthen the foundations of lasting peace in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. I note the efforts

made by the Congolese authorities and the Independent National Electoral Commission (CENI) to adhere to the constitutional time frame. However, the rejection of all proposals from the political opposition forces and civil society to resolve the crisis of confidence is worrisome. In that context, it is also important for the Government to ensure that democratic spaces be protected, that freedom of expression and freedom of the press be guaranteed and that human rights be respected. I note the significant improvement in the freedom of movement of opposition leaders throughout the country over the past two months and the commitment of the authorities to ensure their security. That stance must be maintained throughout the process. In that respect, I encourage all political parties to unwaveringly fight against hate speech and discrimination within their ranks.

I deplore and condemn the various attacks and intimidation that hinder women's participation in the elections. In that context, I commend the courage of women candidates, but regret that their candidacies have increased by only 6 per cent compared with the 2018 legislative elections, i.e. a total of 17 per cent of candidacies this year, compared with 11 per cent in 2018. The Congolese authorities, CENI, MONUSCO and United Nations agencies, supported by various partners, have helped to raise awareness and encourage those female candidacies. Numerous workshops aimed at increasing women's participation in the political process have been organized by MONUSCO in Kinshasa, North Kivu, South Kivu and Ituri to support them.

MONUSCO, together with United Nations agencies, funds and programmes, such as the United Nations Development Programme and UNESCO, is actively supporting the Congolese National Police in securing the elections through training for the prevention of electoral violence, crowd management and respect for human rights. We encourage the Congolese authorities to urgently operationalize the institutional frameworks that will enable them to effectively and responsibly manage public order during the electoral period. MONUSCO remains available to provide logistical support to CENI in the three provinces in which it remains deployed, in accordance with its mandate.

(spoke in English)

I would like to underscore the importance of ensuring a conducive environment for the effective implementation of MONUSCO's mandate and its

responsible withdrawal from the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Regrettably, the Mission continues to be targeted by misinformation and disinformation, as well as threats and attacks. I deplore the killing of civilians by national security forces on 30 August in Goma. I am hopeful that the trials currently under way will provide justice to the bereaved families of the victims, including one police officer, and will shed light on the circumstances surrounding that tragic event.

As Council members are aware, MONUSCO's progressive departure from the Democratic Republic of the Congo has been under way for some time. During his address to the General Assembly, President Tshisekedi called for the acceleration of the process to begin in December 2023. With that request in mind, I call on the Council to make its position clear with regard to the recommendations set out in the 2 August report (S/2023/574) of the Secretary-General on the future of MONUSCO.

On 15 September, the Congolese authorities endorsed the revised transition plan for MONUSCO, which is an important step towards accelerating the departure of the Mission, while ensuring that the process is conducted in a gradual and responsible manner. We will now work jointly with the Congolese authorities towards the implementation of that plan, while continuing to deliver on the mandate provided by the Council.

(spoke in French)

In conclusion, I would like once again to thank all troop- and police-contributing countries and their personnel, as well as national and international civilian staff, for their invaluable support in implementing the MONUSCO mandate.

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

I now give the floor to Ambassador Biang.

Mr. Biang *(spoke in French)*: I have the honour to deliver this statement in my capacity as Chair of Committee established pursuant to resolution 1533 (2004), concerning the Democratic Republic of the Congo. I propose to give an overview of the Committee's work since my previous briefing to the Council on 30 September 2022 (see S/PV.9142).

Since my previous briefing, the Committee held two meetings in the remaining period for 2022, and five meetings since the beginning of 2023. At its meeting on

9 December 2022, the Committee heard a presentation by the Coordinator of the Group of Experts on its midterm report (see S/2022/967) and considered the conclusions and recommendations contained therein. At its meeting on 22 December 2022, the Committee considered the report of its Chair on his visit to the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Rwanda and Uganda from 7 to 18 November. The Committee also held three informal consultations at the Permanent Mission of Gabon at the end of 2022.

On 2 November 2022, delegations were briefed by the Secretariat ahead of the Chair's visit to the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Rwanda and Uganda. On 4 November and 7 December 2022, the members of the Committee met with the Head of the follow-up mechanism for the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Mr. Robert Petit. I would like to reaffirm the Committee's continued support for the mechanism, which is assisting the authorities of the Democratic Republic of the Congo in their investigations into the March 2017 murders of two former members of the Group of Experts, Zaida Catalán and Michael Sharp, and the four Congolese nationals who were with them.

I would now like to say a few words about the meetings that were held in 2023. At the meeting held on 6 December 2022 with regional and other interested States, the Coordinator of the Group of Experts presented an overview of the main findings and recommendations contained in the midterm report, after which the members of the Committee and representatives of States of the region shared their views of the report. At the meeting held on 9 May, the Committee heard a briefing by representatives of the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO), namely, members of the Joint Mission Analysis Centre, the Arms Embargo Cell and the United Nations Mine Action Service, as well as the Senior Natural Resources Adviser.

At its meeting held on 19 May, the Committee heard a briefing by the Coordinator of the Group of Experts on its final report (see S/2023/431) and considered the conclusions and recommendations contained therein. At its meeting held on 19 July with regional and other interested States, the Coordinator of the Group of Experts provided an overview of the main findings and recommendations contained in the report, after which the members of the Committee and representatives of States of the region shared their views on the report.

At the meeting held on 8 September, the Committee heard a briefing by the Coordinator of the Group of Experts on its programme of work for the remainder of its mandate ending on 1 August 2024, in accordance with resolution 2688 (2023), adopted on 27 June. In addition, the members of the Committee met with the Head of the follow-up mechanism for the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Mr. Petit, within the framework of three informal consultations held at the Permanent Mission of Gabon on 17 April, 27 June and 14 September.

In accordance with paragraph 104 of the annex to presidential note S/2017/507, the Committee issued seven press releases containing a brief summary of the informal consultations held on 9 and 22 December 2022 and on 16 February, 9 and 19 May, 19 July and 8 September 2023.

The President: I thank Ambassador Biang for his briefing.

I now give the floor to Ms. Modi.

Ms. Modi (*spoke in French*): On behalf of Congolese women, I would like to thank the members of the Security Council for the opportunity they have given me to brief them on the situation regarding conflict-related sexual violence. I would like to welcome the presence of our Minister for Foreign Affairs and Special Representative of the Secretary-General Bintou Keita.

The Democratic Republic of the Congo has subscribed to a number of international legal instruments, including resolutions 1325 (2000) and 2250 (2015). My briefing will cover the following points: the situation concerning conflict-related sexual violence, the importance of the participation of women and girls in peacebuilding efforts and a number recommendations.

With regard to the situation concerning conflict-related sexual violence, the Democratic Republic of the Congo is a country that is exceptionally rich in human potential and natural resources that are key to achieving global climate change objectives and ensuring the future of the energy transition. However, for almost three decades the country has been affected by a number of internal armed conflicts, attacks by armed groups supported by neighbouring countries and natural disasters that have caused one of the most serious humanitarian crises in Africa.

Three provinces in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo — Ituri, Nord Kivu and Sud Kivu — face extreme levels of need owing to the displacement of

persons. In every one of those contexts, cases of sexual violence against women and girls have been reported. I note that those acts have been committed not only in areas occupied by armed rebel groups but almost everywhere, especially in Tongo, Rutshuru territory, and in the camps in the area of Goma that are sheltering those who have been displaced owing to conflict.

I would also like to draw the Security Council's attention to the intercommunal conflicts in the provinces of Tanganyika, Tshopo and Mai-Ndombe, which have led to the displacement of populations and have therefore created significant humanitarian needs. Cases of sexual violence have also been reported, but the humanitarian response mechanism in those areas is weak and there is not enough holistic care available for the victims and survivors of sexual violence. Against the backdrop of those enormous needs, displaced women and girls are subjected to sexual exploitation, violence and abuse, which have significant effects on both their protection and health, including early or unwanted pregnancies and an increase in sexually transmitted infections. The Gender-based Violence sub-cluster reported 35,000 cases of sexual violence between January and June. In the context of the resurgence of gender-based violence, including marital violence, the perpetrators benefit from impunity owing to the difficulty of access to justice.

I should not conclude this point without noting that the Democratic Republic of the Congo has taken useful legislative measures to ensure access to justice and accountability for conflict-related sexual violence by enacting a law, creating a national victims' reparations fund and recruiting new magistrates. However, in order to ensure the effectiveness of those gestures of political goodwill, it is also necessary for facilities to be established to provide legal and judicial support to the survivors and victims of conflict-related sexual violence and for magistrates to be deployed to remote areas so that they can bring justice closer to the people.

Regarding my second point, on the importance of involving women and young women in peacebuilding efforts, as far as women and girls are concerned the top priority is achieving peace, security and sustainable solutions. It is essential to strengthen women's initiatives to tackle the root causes of conflict and to strengthen collaboration among humanitarian, peace and development actors — in other words, to make that nexus stronger, including by implementing resolution 1325 (2000). Congolese women need their

country to be peaceful, and they deserve peace, the chance to return home and the support they need to re-establish their livelihoods so they can provide for themselves. In that regard, I would like to make some recommendations to the United Nations agencies. They should support awareness-raising programmes on positive masculinity for ex-combatants, facilitate access to water, hygiene and sanitation, support the construction of additional integrated multifunctional centres, support apprenticeship programmes for women and strengthen initiatives for women's meaningful participation in the Nairobi and Luanda peace processes.

I call on donors to fund prevention programmes that involve men and boys in the fight against gender-based violence in emergency situations, support integrated programme-based approaches, ensure the effective leveraging of funding for women's organizations and increase support for the humanitarian response in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. I call on the members of the Council to ensure the effective implementation of resolution 1820 (2008).

I call on the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo to ensure the effectiveness of its national victims' reparations fund for victims of conflict-related sexual violence; urgently strengthen the management and security of camps for internally displaced persons; promote women's participation and leadership in community-recovery and stabilization initiatives; pursue its Demobilization, Disarmament, Community Recovery and Stabilization Programme aimed at managing armed groups at the local level; prosecute alleged perpetrators of conflict-related sexual violence; step up its national security efforts to protect civilians in general, and women and girls in particular, in conflict zones and throughout the country ahead of the departure of the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo from the country; guarantee the availability of medicines in referral hospitals to ensure the provision of adequate health care, including access to safe abortion, in accordance with the Maputo Protocol; and ensure free, democratic and transparent elections during this tense pre-electoral period, while respecting freedom of expression, which, along with the right to a fair trial aimed at achieving high-quality justice, remains a fundamental constitutional right.

The President: I thank Ms. Modi 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, the Chair of the Committee established pursuant to resolution 1533 (2004) concerning the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and Ms. Modi for their briefings. I welcome the presence here today of the Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Permanent Representative of Rwanda. I would like to make three points.

First of all, we must collectively meet the expectations of the Congolese people regarding the withdrawal of the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) and demonstrate that we are up to the challenge. France welcomed the guidelines in the report on the options for the withdrawal submitted by the Secretary-General at the beginning of August (S/2023/574). They are a step in the right direction, as they outline the parameters for withdrawing gradually and responsibly, taking into account the reality of the situation on the ground and the interests of civilians. France also welcomes the Congolese authorities' clearly expressed wish to see the withdrawal begin without delay. We hope the Council will take full account of their concrete and realistic demands.

The orderly withdrawal that we are calling for should be the result of close cooperation between the Congolese authorities and MONUSCO, under the auspices of the Council. The Congolese authorities have a central role to play in the process, at the end of which they will assume full responsibility for the security of their people. France is ready to support the Democratic Republic of Congo and MONUSCO in that effort. We continue to offer our full support to the Mission, which must have the capabilities it needs to carry out its mandate until it withdraws. For that reason, France will submit a proposal for a presidential statement to be adopted by Council members in order to prepare for the upcoming deadlines, and we hope it will be adopted without delay.

Secondly, those who are fuelling the war and instability in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo must be held accountable. France remains concerned about the growing tensions there, condemns the continued presence of the Movement du 23 mars (M-23) in the areas it has captured in that part of the country and calls on it to withdraw its troops and take part in the cantonment process. We are also concerned

about Rwanda's military support for the M-23 and the continued presence of Rwandan soldiers on the territory of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. We condemn that support and presence, which must cease. Similarly, the support provided by some members of the Congolese armed forces to armed groups such as the Forces démocratiques de libération du Rwanda (FDLR), as attested to by the Group of Experts on the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and which we also condemn, must come to an end. The commitments made in the context of the Luanda and Nairobi regional processes must be implemented without delay.

France condemns the many atrocities committed by the armed groups. Violations of human rights and international humanitarian law cannot go unpunished. Nor can we accept the possibility that the ceasefire that came into force in March could be jeopardized. That is why yesterday, together with the United States and the United Kingdom, we have proposed designating two military leaders of the M-23 and the FDLR under the Democratic Republic of the Congo sanctions regime. France also calls for the perpetrators of those crimes to be brought to justice. The decision by the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court to examine acts committed in North Kivu, in response to a request from the authorities of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, sends an important signal in the fight against impunity. More than ever, violence, whatever its origin, must be prohibited.

Lastly, France condemns hate speech targeting certain communities, including the Tutsis, in particular by institutional actors.

At this crucial time for the country's future, we call on all parties to exercise restraint in order to enable peaceful, inclusive and transparent elections to be held. France encourages an electoral process that is based on dialogue among all stakeholders and that meets the aspirations of the Congolese people. It encourages the Independent National Electoral Commission and political and civil society actors to redouble their efforts to ensure that the elections proceed smoothly and in a spirit of consensus. France calls on all stakeholders to promote inclusion and condemn hateful actions and hate speech. Respect for civil liberties is a decisive factor in a fair electoral process and a peaceful election.

Mr. França Danese (Brazil): I welcome to this meeting the delegation of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, led by its Minister for Foreign Affairs,

and the delegation of Rwanda. I thank Special Representative Bintou Keita and Ambassador Michel Biang for their briefings. I also thank the civil society briefer, Ms. Anny Modi, for providing important information on the situation and challenges in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

In that regard, we first reiterate our call for all armed groups to lay down their arms and for all external support for illegal armed groups to cease. Sustainable peace in the Democratic Republic of the Congo will be achieved only when its people are no longer subject to violence, massacres and forced displacement. That must be a priority, not only for the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo but for all its neighbours.

While we welcome the establishment of a ceasefire between the Government and the Mouvement du 23 mars, we are concerned by the ongoing fighting among armed groups, notably in North Kivu and Ituri provinces. We are alarmed by the growing number of displaced persons and the surge in reports of conflict-related sexual violence, as noted in the Secretary-General's most recent report (S/2023/691). The transition of the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) and the Mission's future withdrawal must take into consideration that complex background. The protection of civilians, a central aspect of MONUSCO's mandate, must be ensured primarily by the Congolese Government as the Mission leaves. That task must also be a priority for regional forces that are acting on the ground, such as the East African Community (EAC) regional force, or that might be deployed in the future, such as the Southern African Development Community force. In that regard, Brazil reiterates its appreciation for the briefing provided by the Secretary General of the EAC on 26 September.

Brazil recognizes that a mission cannot, and should not, last forever. Nevertheless, MONUSCO's departure should be done responsibly, while avoiding the risk of creating security vacuums and power struggles that will lead to violence and human rights abuses against the population. The transition must be well coordinated with national and local authorities, neighbouring countries and the regional and other external forces present in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The role of the United Nations country team must be enhanced.

The security of United Nations personnel in the transition process must also be a priority for the Congolese Government. We condemn acts conducted against MONUSCO personnel and regret that civilian lives were lost in the recurrent protests against the Mission. In addition, we particularly emphasize the importance of strategic communications in the Mission's mandate in order to prevent attacks such as those mentioned from happening again. I take this opportunity to express our appreciation for the work of Brazilian personnel who have served in MONUSCO.

With regard to the sanctions regime concerning the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Brazil reiterates its support for the work carried out by the Panel of Experts and the workplan for its current mandate. Brazil hopes that the electoral process in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, which is due to be concluded in December, will lead to further political stabilization and the enhancement of the security landscape in the country.

Mrs. Alhefeiti (United Arab Emirates) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I would like to thank Ms. Bintou Keita, Special Representative of the Secretary-General, for her efforts and those of her team, and we appreciate her valuable briefing. I also thank Ambassador Biang for his comprehensive briefing. We also listened carefully to the statement delivered by Ms. Anny Modi. I welcome the participation in this meeting of Mr. Lutundula Apala Pen'apala, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and the representative of Rwanda.

The United Arab Emirates appreciates the affirmation by the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo of its commitment to holding the elections as planned by the end of this year, the recent publication of the list of candidates by the National Independent Electoral Commission and the extension of invitations to regional and international electoral observers and the relevant United Nations bodies. We encourage the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO), as a key partner in that process, to continue to provide the necessary support in that regard, in line with the priorities of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Mission's mandate.

In the upcoming period, it will be important for MONUSCO to continue to facilitate inclusive political participation in the electoral process, including by promoting women's full and meaningful participation,

in order to ensure the effectiveness of those efforts. As the Secretary-General's report (S/2023/691) indicates, the workshops organized by MONUSCO in recent months in Bunia and South Kivu contributed to an increase in the number of women candidates for political office. We look forward to the consolidation of those important gains. We also hope that the Mission will focus, within its mandated tasks, on promoting tolerance and peaceful coexistence across communities and countering hate speech, in line with resolution 2686 (2023), on tolerance and international peace and security. Such a preventive approach is critical for bolstering long-term security and stability and preventing conflicts from escalating.

We remain concerned by insecurity in the eastern part of the country, given the continued activity of armed groups. We stress the need for the Mouvement du 23 mars (M-23) to respect the ceasefire. We also reiterate our calls on the M-23 and all other armed groups to lay down their weapons and cease their hostilities, which we condemn, and to do so permanently and unconditionally. We believe that, in the near future, a comprehensive approach will be needed to address insecurity in the country and provide protection to communities. Particular attention must be given to the situation of women and girls, whose protection must be ensured. All armed groups must abide by international humanitarian law and cease all forms of violence against civilians.

In view of the regional ramifications of the conflict in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo, we stress that resolving differences and de-escalating tensions in the region requires an inclusive, African-led peace process that relies at its core on dialogue and constructive engagement among local, regional and international partners. Therefore, we believe that the current regional mediation efforts are commendable and deserve support, and we hope that the summits and meetings recently held in the region will help to mobilize the momentum needed to consolidate security and stability. To that end, all those initiatives will require an integrated approach and efforts, in close coordination with the Congolese Government, in order to ensure their success.

With regard to the future of MONUSCO, we thank the Secretary-General for his recommendations on the matter, which we look forward to discussing constructively in the Council in the coming weeks. With regard to the request of the Government of the

Democratic Republic of the Congo to accelerate the withdrawal of MONUSCO, which was also mentioned by President Tshisekedi Tshilombo in his address to the General Assembly last week, we stress the need to take into account the views of the host State in our deliberations and to ensure continued dialogue and communication between the Government and MONUSCO, while placing the aspirations and expectations of the Congolese people at the centre of discussions on the future of MONUSCO.

Finally, the United Arab Emirates urges the relevant United Nations agencies to continue working with the national authorities to alleviate the dire humanitarian situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. That is particularly critical for children, nearly 1 million of whom are suffering from acute malnutrition, besides those children who are displaced and living in difficult conditions. The closure of more than 1,000 schools is unacceptable. We must protect the future of this generation and empower them, because one day they will lead the country. And we want to emphasize that addressing all of those challenges in a sustainable manner requires making tangible progress on the political and security tracks so that stability and prosperity can prevail in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Mr. Polyanskiy (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): We thank Ms. Bintou Keita, Special Representative of the Secretary-General, and the Permanent Representative of Gabon, in his capacity as Chair of the of the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 1533 (2004) concerning the Democratic Republic of the Congo, for their briefings. We listened carefully to Ms. Modi. We welcome the participation in today's meeting of the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Permanent Representative of Rwanda.

We note with regret that despite the measures taken and the maintenance of a ceasefire between Congolese Government forces and the Mouvement du 23 mars (M-23), the situation in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo remains extremely difficult. We condemn the criminal activity of the Islamist Allied Democratic Forces and other illegal armed groups operating in the territory of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, including the Coopérative pour le développement du Congo, the Résistance pour un état de droit au Burundi, the Mai-Mai and the Forces démocratiques de libération

du Rwanda. We call on them to refrain from violent action, lay down their arms and participate without preconditions in the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration programme. We are extremely concerned about the ongoing deterioration of the humanitarian situation, with rising numbers of internally displaced persons and refugees, human rights violations and the daily suffering of the civilian population. We note the significant role that United Nations agencies are playing in alleviating the humanitarian consequences of the crisis.

We believe that achieving concrete results through regional leaders' efforts through the Nairobi and Luanda processes will be crucial. We note the important contribution of the East African Community regional force and welcome the willingness of the Southern African Development Community to join the settlement process in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo. We believe it is essential to continue combining complementary efforts and initiatives for regional assistance. The priority is to achieve a sustainable and long-term cessation of hostilities and create the conditions for a comprehensive and inclusive dialogue. In that regard, it will also be important to continue working to fully implement the foundational 2013 Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework Agreement for the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Great Lakes Region. We welcome the commitment of the African Union and the countries of the region to revitalizing the Framework Agreement. We support the activities of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for the Great Lakes Region, Mr. Huang Xia, aimed at establishing an intergovernmental dialogue for reducing tensions in that part of Africa.

It is obvious that it is impossible to achieve long-term normalization in the eastern Democratic Republic of Congo and the Great Lakes region solely through military measures. Only political solutions can lead to a comprehensive cessation of hostilities and the establishment of genuine conditions for sustainable stabilization, and we call for substantive measures to overcome tensions between Kinshasa and Kigali.

We support the efforts of the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) and its leadership. We believe firmly that the Mission's presence in the conflict zone continues to be an important stabilizing factor. In order to coordinate the work of protecting civilians more effectively, we hope to see

greater coordination between the Forces armées de la République démocratique du Congo and MONUSCO, as well as other regional and national security forces on the ground. We are concerned about the protests against the Blue Helmets' presence, but while we condemn all forms of violence, we also call for respect for Congolese citizens' right to protest peacefully.

We have thoroughly reviewed the Secretary-General's proposals for MONUSCO's reconfiguration (S/2023/574) in the light of the work being done jointly with Kinshasa to revise the plan for the Mission's withdrawal from the country. We have also carefully studied the letter addressed to the members of the Security Council (S/2023/648, annex), signed by Mr. Christophe Lutundula Apala Pen'apala, the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, which sets out the concerns and demands of the Congolese side. We believe it is essential to take Kinshasa's views into account within the framework of the Security Council's upcoming negotiations on MONUSCO's mandate in December. However, it will be vital to be guided primarily by rational considerations, taking into account the evolution of the situation on the ground and acting gradually and responsibly.

We hope to receive full information as soon as possible from the Democratic Republic of the Congo authorities and the United Nations on the progress of the investigation into the tragedy of the MONUSCO helicopter shot down in the east of the country in March 2022. We all remember that eight peacekeepers died in the crash, including our countryman Alexey Mizyura, the leader of the Russian military observer team. We hope the perpetrators will be identified and brought to justice.

In conclusion, I want to welcome the continued efforts of the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo in preparing for the general elections in December and to wish it every success in organizing them. For our part, as a permanent member of the Security Council, we confirm our readiness to help resolve the crisis in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo by promoting constructive dialogue between the States of the region. We are committed to working in close cooperation with the relevant institutions of the United Nations system and their representatives.

Mrs. Thomas-Greenfield (United States of America): I thank Special Representative Keita for her briefing. The United States appreciates the sacrifices

that she, her team and the entire United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) are making every single day. I also greatly appreciated the briefing by Ms. Anny Modi, whom we thank for being here with us today. And I would like to welcome the Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Mr. Christophe Lutundula Apala Pen'apala, and the Permanent Representative of Rwanda back to the Council.

We have heard the call by the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo for MONUSCO to begin planning its transition out of the country, most recently through the Foreign Minister's letter to the Council (S/2023/648, annex). We appreciate and share the Democratic Republic of the Congo's commitment to a responsible, orderly, progressive and successful withdrawal, while continuing to prioritize the protection of civilians. However, 24 years of peacekeeping in the Democratic Republic of the Congo represents an enormous investment in resources and lives, and we must build on those investments. I look forward to hearing more from the Secretariat, MONUSCO and the Democratic Republic of the Congo on how to ensure the protection of civilians before, during and most importantly after MONUSCO's departure.

The United States is frankly concerned about the possibility that the Democratic Republic of the Congo and regional security forces are not prepared to meet the security requirements of the Congolese people. The international community must ensure that the Mission's withdrawal does not exacerbate an already perilous humanitarian crisis or put additional lives at risk. I know that must be a concern of the Democratic Republic of the Congo Government as well. We are worried about the fact that the options outlined in the Secretary-General's transition plan (S/2023/574) rely heavily on the East African Community (EAC) regional force to backfill the Mission, and we urge the Council to avoid endorsing greater support by MONUSCO for the EAC without appropriate safeguards to address human rights, accountability and command-and-control concerns. I repeat our request for detailed information on the types of support that the Mission would provide to the regional force were it authorized to do so. We would also welcome a conversation with the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo on how MONUSCO can be more effective.

But let us be clear. The Mission cannot bring peace to the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo on its own. That is why we are again calling for the Forces armées de la République démocratique du Congo to cut ties with the Forces démocratiques de libération du Rwanda, thereby ending a relationship that has long been of concern to Rwanda. We also call on Rwanda to end its support for the Movement du 23 mars (M-23) and to withdraw from the Democratic Republic of the Congo territory.

In addition to condemning Rwanda's actions in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo last month, the United States imposed sanctions on six individuals for contributing to the escalation of conflict in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo. And on 15 September the United States listed Rwanda under the Child Soldiers Prevention Act for its support to the M-23, which has recruited or used child soldiers. As a result, certain elements of United States bilateral security assistance will be prohibited. We are committed to designating additional individuals and entities that threaten the peace and security of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and we urge other Council members to join us in that process.

The region has also stepped up. I appreciate the important efforts of African regional bodies to work towards peace in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo, especially through the Nairobi and the Luanda processes. The next session of the Nairobi process must be scheduled in order to demonstrate progress towards a negotiated solution.

I am concerned about the continued reports of sexual violence against women and girls, as briefed today by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Ms. Modi. In fact, I am appalled and ashamed that such attacks continue to happen, as they have, and we should all be appalled by what is happening there. We have an obligation to do everything possible to provide protection and support to women and girls. We should support their right to contest elections and their right to vote in elections without fear.

Finally, free and fair elections are key to the Democratic Republic of the Congo's future stability. I want to thank MONUSCO for its logistical support, including transporting electoral materials in Ituri, North Kivu and South Kivu. We appreciate President Tshisekedi Tshilombo's condemnation of hate speech, but urge the Government to take more concrete actions

to protect minority communities from violence. The United States is also concerned about political repression as elections approach, including infringements on civic expression, harassment and violence towards opposition and civilian society members by security forces, as well as judicial proceedings involving two declared presidential candidates. All Congolese people should be able to cast votes for the candidates of their choice, free of worry about security and safety. That is the least that they can expect from their Government.

MONUSCO needs the Council's support, but it also needs the support of the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Threats and attacks against MONUSCO are unacceptable. The United States is committed to an orderly and coordinated transition of MONUSCO and to assisting the Government to strengthen key governance, justice and security institutions.

Mr. Agyeman (Ghana) (*spoke in French*): I have the honour of delivering this statement on behalf of the three African members of the Security Council (A3).

I would like to thank Ms. Bintou Keita, Special Representative of the Secretary-General, for her truly remarkable work at the head of the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO). I would also like to thank His Excellency Ambassador Michel Xavier Biang, our brother, for his enlightening statement on the activities of the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 1533 (2004), concerning the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

I warmly welcome the participation in this meeting of His Excellency Mr. Christophe Lutundula Apala Pen'apala, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. I also welcome the presence of the representative of Rwanda, His Excellency Ambassador Claver Gatete.

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

(*spoke in English*)

The A3 is deeply concerned about the situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo at a critical moment, when the people of the sister country are preparing for the upcoming general elections.

In that connection, on the political front, we commend the progress made in the preparation for general elections, including the implementation of the electoral calendar. We welcome the convening of the electoral college and the opening of candidacies on 9 September. In that context, we encourage the Congolese authorities to continue to take all necessary measures to guarantee security, transparency, inclusiveness, respect for human rights and freedom of expression and opinion throughout the electoral process. We welcome the start of the last session of both chambers of Parliament on 15 September 2023, which will notably allow for the examination of the 2024 budget and the consideration of the laws on urgent reforms.

On the security front, we condemn in the strongest terms the cycle of violence and terror perpetuated on Congolese territory by armed groups, particular the major armed groups — the Allied Democratic Forces, the Cooperative for Development of the Congo, the Movement du 23 mars and the Forces démocratiques de libération du Rwanda. We strongly denounce the continued abuses against civilian populations and the predation and plundering of the country's natural resources.

We invite all partners to provide financial, material and technical support to the Democratic Republic of the Congo for the implementation of the Disarmament, Demobilization, Community Recovery and Stabilization Programme; security sector reform; and training and capacity-building of the armed forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

The A3 commends the invaluable contribution of MONUSCO and the East African Community in their efforts to stabilize and protect civilian populations, as well as the determination of the Southern African Development Community to contribute to peace efforts in the country.

We must express our concern over the anti-MONUSCO and anti-East African Community Regional Force (EACRF) sentiments and disinformation and misinformation campaigns, which negatively impact the implementation of their mandates. The violence that took place in Goma on 31 August is unacceptable. We therefore encourage the Congolese authorities to take all necessary measures to ensure justice for the families of the victims.

We take note of the Congolese authorities' request for the Security Council to accelerate the withdrawal of MONUSCO troops, starting in December 2023.

We stress the need for close cooperation between the Congolese authorities and MONUSCO, as well as with all other relevant stakeholders, with a view to ensuring a smooth, orderly, progressive and coordinated withdrawal that guarantees the protection of civilians and the safety and security of the personnel of the Mission.

In terms of regional-level engagements, the A3 reiterates its support for a political resolution of the security crisis affecting the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo. We reaffirm our full commitment to the Nairobi and Luanda regional processes, which are credible African political solutions to end the crisis, and thus deserve the support of the international community as a whole.

In that regard, it is urgent to implement the priority actions contained in the Nairobi and Luanda agreements, with a view to achieving the cessation of hostilities and the immediate withdrawal of armed groups from the occupied areas. Furthermore, we call for the repatriation of all foreign armed groups. We urge all local armed groups to join the Disarmament, Demobilization, Community Recovery and Stabilization programme.

We welcome the decision to renew the mandate of the EACRF status-of-forces agreement until 8 December 2023 and welcome the establishment of a working group to coordinate peace initiatives in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo.

For 25 years now, the Democratic Republic of the Congo has been going through a security crisis that has claimed the lives of more than 10 million people. Meetings of the Council have been held for years, but despite our constant calls, the security and humanitarian situation for the civilian population, in particular the plight of women and children, continues to deteriorate. That was self-evident on the occasion of the Security Council's visit to the Democratic Republic of the Congo last March, during Mozambique's presidency of the Council. Generations are being sacrificed by continuing incidents of violence and terrorism. Child labour and rape as a weapon of war are still rampant, posing a threat to the Great Lakes region and to international peace and security at large.

We strongly believe that the Democratic Republic of the Congo is endowed with immense natural resources, including resources that are crucial for the world's energy transition. The country must be freed from its limitations in order to resolve the contradiction between the extreme wealth of the Congolese soil and subsoil and the extreme poverty of its population.

We note that, notwithstanding the measures taken by the Council and the international community, the humanitarian situation remains dire. In the east of the country, there are 6.1 million internally displaced persons and nearly 4.4 million children aged 9 to 14 who are out of school.

The humanitarian catastrophe is exacerbated by the consequences of climate change, which has a palpable impact on security in Central Africa. In that regard, the A3 urges all partners in the Democratic Republic of the Congo to mobilize funds for the financing of the 2023 humanitarian response plan.

In conclusion, the A3 calls on the international community to continue supporting the current efforts for peace and stability in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. We also reaffirm our unwavering support for the independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Mr. Kariuki (United Kingdom): Let me begin by thanking Special Representative of the Secretary-General Keita, the Permanent Representative of Gabon, in his capacity as Chair of the Committee established pursuant to resolution 1533 (2004), concerning the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and Ms. Modi for their briefings today.

I welcome the participation in our meeting of Deputy Prime Minister Lutundula Apala Pen'apala and the Permanent Representative of Rwanda.

The United Kingdom fully supports the work carried out by the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO), especially in protecting civilians. We commend the Mission and Special Representative Keita for their continued efforts in increasingly challenging circumstances. We remain extremely concerned about the fragile situation in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo. Regional peace processes should be respected and all support to armed groups must stop.

We acknowledge the request of the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo to bring forward MONUSCO's withdrawal and welcome the Government's commitment to ensuring that the process is progressive and responsible. We want to see a handover from MONUSCO to the authorities of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. There has already been significant progress in that regard in recent years, with MONUSCO withdrawing from the Kasais and

Tanganyika. The lessons learned from those processes should inform MONUSCO's withdrawal from other provinces. In preparation for the further withdrawal of MONUSCO, we encourage the Mission to continue transitioning tasks to the Congolese State and, where appropriate, the United Nations country team and other international partners.

The United Kingdom is ready to consider further the consolidation of MONUSCO's footprint and a reduction of the troop ceiling during MONUSCO's mandate renewal in December, in line with the Government's request to accelerate withdrawal. However, we must also carefully consider the implications of MONUSCO's drawdown on the civilian population. The consequences of a rushed departure would be severe. In addition to providing extensive support to the Congolese security forces in operations against armed groups, MONUSCO currently protects thousands of civilians in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo. While the United Nations and international partners can play a supporting role, the Government must be willing and able to assume its responsibilities for civilian protection.

We encourage the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo to agree on responsibilities for a responsible, conditions-based drawdown with MONUSCO. That should include a sustainable plan for providing security in those areas from which MONUSCO withdraws. The United Kingdom fully supports the Nairobi and Luanda peace processes, which are key to tackling the underlying drivers of conflict.

In conclusion, we look forward to engaging with all stakeholders on MONUSCO's future during the mandate renewal and to ensuring that we uphold our responsibility as a Council to support peace and stability in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Mr. Dai Bing (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): China welcomes Mr. Lutundula Apala Pen'apala, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and the Permanent Representative of Rwanda to today's meeting.

I thank Special Representative of the Secretary-General Keita and Ambassador Biang for their briefings. I also listened closely to Ms. Modi's statement.

The Democratic Republic of the Congo is now at a critical juncture in maintaining security and stability, advancing the electoral process and improving governance. The international community and the

Security Council should pay attention to its concerns, strengthen coordination with countries of the region and provide constructive support. In the light of the report of the Secretary-General (S/2023/691), I would like to make three points.

First, although there have been no recent major hostilities in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo, there have been increasing clashes among armed groups and attacks on civilians. The situation remains tense. China urges the Mouvement du 23 mars and other armed groups to implement the decisions of the Nairobi and Luanda processes, cease violence as soon as possible and withdraw from the occupied areas. China supports the countries concerned in resolving their differences through dialogue and consultation. It must be noted that the maintenance of stability in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo is essentially dependent on the country's own security capacity-building. The report of the Secretary-General notes that the army reform plan of the Democratic Republic of the Congo continues to face challenges, such as funding shortfalls. China calls on the international community to continue to provide the necessary financial and technical support.

Secondly, the stability of the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo affects the overall security of the Great Lakes region. Last week, in their statements to the General Assembly, the leaders of Angola, Burundi, Kenya and other countries of the region called on the international community to pay more attention to the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo and for greater mutual trust to maintain common security. China supports the peacekeeping and security operations of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the East African Community (EAC), the Southern African Development Community (SADC) and Angola, among other countries and entities, and encourages the international community to provide support. In June, the African Union invited representatives of the EAC, the Economic Community of Central African States, SADC and the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region to a quadripartite summit held in Angola with a view to promoting greater coordination among regional organizations. China encourages all parties to act in the spirit of the summit for greater synergy on the issue of the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo. We expect Special Envoy Xia Huang and Special Representative Keita to strengthen communication and collaboration and support regional mediation efforts, in line with their respective mandates.

Thirdly, the general elections to be held at the end of this year will be a milestone in the political and peace processes of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. China supports the efforts of the Congolese Government in preparation for the elections. There has been a recent uptick in political tensions. China hopes that all parties will bear in mind the fundamental interests of the country and its people, strengthen dialogue and resolve differences to ensure the smooth and peaceful conduct of elections. As this year's general elections are by their very nature the internal affairs of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, China hopes that the international community will respect the sovereignty and ownership of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and avoid external pressure and interference.

China supports the efforts of the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) in the areas of the protection of civilians, preparations for the election and disarmament, demobilization and reintegration, and hopes that the Mission will strengthen its communication with the host Government and its people in order to enhance mutual trust, avert clashes and security incidents and deliver effectively on its mandate.

The attention of all parties is focused on future arrangements for MONUSCO. China has noted President Tshisekedi Tshilombo's address to the General Assembly in which he elaborated on the Congolese position and the letter from the Minister for Foreign Affairs and la Francophonie Lutundula Apala Pen'apala's to the Security Council on the matter (S/2023/648, annex). The Council should promote constructive and responsible discussions among the Secretariat, MONUSCO, the Congolese Government and troop- and police contributing countries. In formulating the mandate and transitional plans for MONUSCO, it is necessary to fully heed the views of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and take into account the security situation in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo to make sound and reasonable arrangements.

Mr. Hauri (Switzerland) (*spoke in French*): I would like to thank the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Ms. Bintou Keita, and Ms. Anny Tengamendite Modi for their briefings. I would also like to thank the Permanent Representative of Gabon for his statement. I welcome the participation of the Minister

for Foreign Affairs of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Permanent Representative of Rwanda in this meeting.

The Democratic Republic of the Congo is at a decisive crossroads in terms of ensuring lasting peace and security on its territory. To that end, Switzerland believes that there are three priority areas for our efforts: first, guaranteeing a successful transition; secondly, deepening regional initiatives in favour of peace, and thirdly, ensuring credible and peaceful elections.

First of all, we heard the Congolese Government's request to accelerate the gradual withdrawal of the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO). We take that seriously. It will be necessary to ensure a responsible, orderly and sustainable withdrawal, while insisting on the importance of respect for international humanitarian law and human rights by all parties.

The withdrawal must take place within the framework of a partnership based on trust between the Congolese State and the United Nations, including the Security Council. A hasty departure of peacekeepers could have harmful consequences for the thousands of internally displaced persons, in particular women and girls, as we have heard. That is particularly true in regions where MONUSCO bases are the only bulwark, however weak, against violations and abuses by armed groups.

To ensure a successful transfer of the main responsibilities of the Mission to the Democratic Republic of the Congo, in particular the protection of civilians, the rule of law and the security sector must be strengthened. The report of the Secretary-General (S/2023/574) presents MONUSCO's options for adaptation. On that basis, we encourage the Democratic Republic of the Congo to step up its cooperation with the Mission to strengthen the capacities of the armed forces and the National Police.

Secondly, the region's role in seeking peaceful solutions remains central. That is key to ensuring a political space for easing regional tensions and addressing insecurity. The support of the East African Community has helped to deter certain operations by armed groups such as the Mouvement du 23 mars (M-23). In that respect, the Secretary-General's proposal for support to be provided by MONUSCO for the efforts of regional forces could be further explored.

All regional military efforts must be part of the political processes aimed at consolidating peace in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. They must be conducted in accordance with the objectives and principles of the United Nations and international law. Switzerland reiterates its support for regional political and diplomatic initiatives. In that respect, we call on all players, in particular the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Rwanda, to honour their commitments, establish a sincere dialogue and cease their support for armed groups.

Thirdly, in the run-up to the elections, the Congolese authorities must redouble their efforts to guarantee an open, plural civic space. That entails ensuring credible results and an inclusive and transparent process, as stated by President Tshisekedi Tshilombo in the General Assembly last week. We welcome the commitment of the Independent National Electoral Commission to register voters. However, we deplore the reports of a reduction in civic space and the allegations of arbitrary detentions of journalists, human rights defenders and members of opposition parties.

Finally, the violence committed during the recent demonstrations in Goma is unacceptable. We welcome the measures taken to bring the alleged perpetrators to justice and encourage the authorities to conduct credible and transparent investigations.

In conclusion, allow me to reiterate Switzerland's concern about the deteriorating security and humanitarian situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. We therefore support increasing the international humanitarian response and have allocated additional funds. Switzerland has a long-standing presence in the country, both in Kinshasa and in the east. It stands ready to support the transition, in particular with regard to the protection of civilians.

Mrs. Shino (Japan): I would like to express my gratitude to Special Representative of the Secretary-General Keita and Ms. Modi, Executive Director and co-founder of AFIA MAMA, for their briefings. I welcome the report from the Chair of Committee established pursuant to resolution 1533 (2004) and the participation of the Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, as well as the representative of Rwanda.

Last month, we received the report of the Secretary-General on options for the reconfiguration of the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in

the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) (S/2023/574) and the United Nations future role in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. As the report highlighted, achieving a smooth, responsible and sustainable transition is our shared goal. Creating feasible conditions for that requires close and constructive cooperation among all stakeholders guided by strong ownership by the host country. The prioritized benchmarks are the key guideline for our coordinated efforts.

For furtherance of our collective endeavour, I would like to highlight the following points.

First, ensuring the protection of civilians is the fundamental element for any future reconfiguration of MONUSCO. We are concerned by reports of a significant increase in the number of human rights violations, including gender-based violence and casualties, due to the growing deadliness of attacks by armed groups, especially in the eastern part of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. We commend MONUSCO for its dedication to providing safe spaces for local people. The recent extension of the mandate of the East African Community regional force is a positive development. Building upon that, ongoing regional initiatives, including the Nairobi and Luanda processes, should gain renewed momentum.

Support of any kind to armed groups exacerbates an already worsening regional situation and must be stopped immediately. To avoid creating a security vacuum, Government-led security sector reform remains an urgent task. Japan continues to support the Democratic Republic of the Congo Government's efforts to develop community policing through capacity- and institution-building. The Mission's responsible withdrawal must also be accompanied by the concomitant establishment of an effective presence of State authorities ensuring the rule of law.

Our continuous efforts to mitigate ongoing human security crises are imperative, especially in conflict-affected areas, and we must uphold the humanitarian-development-peace nexus approach. People in overflowing internally displaced person camps, especially women and children, are vulnerable to violations and abuses of their human rights. In partnership with the United Nations Population Fund, Japan has been helping with the prevention and the aftercare of gender-based violence, as well as with reproductive health, by providing mobile clinics in the North Kivu region.

Finally, strengthening social cohesion is fundamental for sustainable stability. We have been observing preparations for national and local elections gearing up. Winning people's confidence and building unity require free, fair, inclusive, peaceful and transparent elections. By contrast, reducing civic space and obstructing legitimate political campaigns will further divide the population. MONUSCO has a significant role to play in providing support for conducting the elections in December.

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

Mr. Montalvo Sosa (Ecuador) (*spoke in Spanish*): We acknowledge the presence of the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Permanent Representative of Rwanda at this meeting. I thank Ms. Bintou Keita, Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO), and Ambassador Michel Xavier Biang, Permanent Representative of Gabon, in his capacity as Chair of the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 1533 (2004) concerning the Democratic Republic of the Congo, for their briefings. I am also grateful for the briefing by Ms. Anny Modi, Executive Director of AFIA MAMA.

Violence continues to exacerbate the humanitarian crisis that the Democratic Republic of the Congo is enduring. We are saddened by the deaths that the conflict has claimed, and we reiterate our commitment to supporting all efforts to build peace in the country. The support of the international community is key to meeting the needs of the 26.4 million people living in acute food insecurity and the 350,000 displaced persons in the territories of Nyiragongo and Goma. We call for guaranteeing the security of humanitarian personnel at all times and ensuring their rapid and unimpeded access throughout the country. We condemn the kidnapping of nine humanitarian workers in Kabasha, the Kibirizi health zone and Gatega, who were released thanks to the efforts of the security forces.

We urge the Government to continue to deploy the resources required to support the implementation of the Disarmament, Demobilization, Community Recovery

and Stabilization Programme. While we respect the decision of the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo on the expected departure of MONUSCO, we call for close cooperation between the Government and the United Nations in enabling a gradual, responsible transition, one without security gaps and that ensures respect for human rights and international humanitarian law before, during and after the transition. The implementation and completion of the measures decided under the Luanda and Nairobi processes are key to the success of the peace process in the region.

We hope that all the parties concerned will participate constructively in the fourth round of consultations of the Nairobi process. All bilateral, regional and international initiatives in support of the Democratic Republic of the Congo must function in a coordinated manner to achieve peace, dialogue and political stability. In that regard, we believe MONUSCO's work has been effective, which is why it has been able to count on our support. We acknowledge the work of the Government in preparing for the holding of the elections in December, as well as that of the Independent National Electoral Commission in ensuring a free, fair, inclusive and transparent electoral process that includes the participation of women, all of them efforts that must be intensified, however. We also call for allowing for civic space and respect for freedom of expression, opinion and assembly. We underscore that protecting human rights defenders, journalists and members of civil society must be paramount, especially during the run-up to the elections. The grave violations of children's rights and the increase in gender-based violence must be investigated and the perpetrators brought to justice. Accountability is vital to peace processes. We therefore believe that the request of the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo that the International Criminal Court investigate the crimes committed in North Kivu is an important step towards achieving that goal.

Bringing about peace in the Democratic Republic of the Congo must remain a priority in Security Council discussions, and we should therefore focus our attention on discussions concerning the MONUSCO mandate and transition process.

Ms. Gatt (Malta): I thank Special Representative of the Secretary-General Keita for her briefing and for the work that she and her team are doing. I thank Ms. Modi for her remarks. I am also grateful to the Permanent

Representative of Gabon in his capacity as Chair of the Committee established pursuant to resolution 1533 (2004), concerning the Democratic Republic of the Congo, for his updates.

As we have heard, the humanitarian situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo continues to be a concern. The number of food-insecure people this year alone is estimated at 25.8 million, and the actual number is likely to be much higher. The numbers of the displaced are soaring. Sexual and gender-based violence continues unabated, and the recruitment of children persists. While we welcome the system-wide scale-up for the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo activated in June, and the corresponding operational plan, we note that the humanitarian response is underfunded vis-à-vis the needs.

This periodic briefing comes at a pivotal juncture, as we are in the final quarter preceding presidential elections. It will be crucial to ensure that the electoral process embodies the principles of freedom, fairness, transparency and inclusivity. The civic space should remain unimpeded if it is to shape public discourse. Beyond the electoral outcome, progress could truly shape the country's destiny and instil trust in its institutions. We are concerned about reports of incidents of intimidation and violence directed at political opposition members and civil-society representatives. We commend President Tshisekedi's invitation to non-governmental and international organizations to observe the electoral process, and Malta trusts that the Congolese Government will guarantee their safe and unimpeded participation. In that context, we echo the Secretary-General's call for the swift enactment of the draft law against tribalism, racism and xenophobia.

The Security Council will soon be tasked with negotiating the renewal of the MONUSCO mandate, aligning with the ongoing revision of the joint transition plan, which will pave the way for the Mission's eventual withdrawal. Malta welcomes the convergence towards a withdrawal that aligns with the realities on the ground and envisions a transition that involves the transfer of MONUSCO's core responsibilities to the Congolese authorities. Guided by those principles, we support the Secretary-General's proposal to withdraw units from South Kivu. We believe that establishing a well-defined timeline for the process is imperative, and we are prepared to engage in negotiations to forge a unified vision. At the same time, we consider an enhanced mandate to support the training and capacity-

building of the national security forces to be a positive step. Malta encourages enhanced and structured coordination between MONUSCO and the East African Community regional force and stresses the importance of focusing on the outcomes of the African Union-led peace support operations' negotiations.

Malta reiterates its steadfast commitment to a peaceful resolution to the protracted conflict in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo. We unequivocally condemn the atrocities committed by all armed groups and expect all the parties to honour the decisions and agreements reached under the Nairobi and Luanda processes. The strengthening of the judicial system must remain at the heart of multilateral and governmental endeavours, offering hope to communities that have been constantly exposed to heinous crimes and violations. If wielded effectively, it will also serve as a deterrent to future transgressions. We welcomed the launch of a prosecutorial investigation mission to Lala earlier this month and appreciate the Government's commitment to holding those responsible for the violence on 30 August accountable. We express our condolences to the families of the victims of the heinous massacre.

In conclusion, we maintain our belief that military endeavours, no matter how robust, will never suffice to resolve the conflict in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo. Genuine political dialogue and concerted efforts towards compromise must take precedence in order to pave the way for peace and stability in the region.

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

I would like to start by thanking Special Representative of the Secretary-General Keita for her briefing and for the work carried out by the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO), as well as Ambassador Biang for his briefing on the activities of the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 1533 (2004), concerning the Democratic Republic of the Congo. We welcome the participation in this meeting of Mr. Christophe Lutundula Apala Pen'apala, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and that of the Permanent Representative of Rwanda. I would also like to thank Ms. Modi for her remarks and for sharing with us the suffering of all the

voiceless victims and survivors of sexual violence, who deserve justice and a second chance at a decent life. It is important that we support the efforts to confront the dramatic surge in sexual violence targeting displaced women and girls, including those who live in internally displaced persons camps.

I will now focus on the political and security situation, as well as MONUSCO. Albania is encouraged by the commitment to the electoral calendar and the preparations for the elections to be held on 20 December, as well as the efforts to ensure a transparent and inclusive process for all the parties, including women. We hope to see that same commitment by the Government to addressing several concerns and shedding light on electoral incidents, including the shrinking of the civic space, as documented in the report of the Secretary-General (S/2023/691).

Turning to the security developments, we all share the same concerns about the volatile situation in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo. We should have no false impressions: the Allied Democratic Forces and the *Coopérative pour le développement du Congo* remain a constant terror for civilians. Moreover, we are cautiously monitoring the holding of the ceasefire between *Mouvement du 23 mars* (M-23) and the Congolese armed forces. The increased clashes between the M-23 and armed groups and the unstable relations between the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Rwanda could disrupt the region's geopolitical architecture. To prevent that, it is important for all the parties to commit themselves to the regional peace processes, namely, by implementing the Nairobi and Luanda processes.

Rwanda and the Democratic Republic of the Congo have the responsibility to give peace a chance to grow stronger by ending support for, and cooperation with, local armed groups. All Congolese and foreign armed groups must cease their hostilities, and the M-23 must effectively withdraw from its occupied positions and join the demobilization and disarmament process, as agreed in Luanda, while respecting the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Turning now to MONUSCO's transition, Albania has taken note of the Democratic Republic of the Congo's request for an accelerated withdrawal of the Mission. Albania supports the United Nations efforts to finalize the revised joint transition plan, in cooperation

and in line with the aspirations of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Given the elections to be held in December and the fragile security situation in the east, the finalization of the plan should guarantee an orderly withdrawal and, at the same time, an extension of the authority of the State and its ability to protect civilians.

Finally, I would like to convey Albania's sincere condolences to the Congolese authorities and the Congolese people for the loss of life following the events of 30 August in Goma. It is the absolute right of the people to gather peacefully, and the authorities have an obligation to respond proportionally to acts of violence. In that vein, we welcome the Government's announcement that the incident is under investigation and a trial has begun, the results of which should be thorough and impartial.

I now resume my functions as President of the Council.

I give the floor to the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Mr. Lutundula Apala Pen'apala (Democratic Republic of the Congo) (*spoke in French*): On behalf of President Félix-Antoine Tshisekedi Tshilombo of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Congolese Government, I would like to thank you, Madam President, for convening today's meeting, which is devoted exclusively to the security situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. That action demonstrates to me the focus of the countries here — and through them, the Security Council — on a swift and definitive settlement of the security situation and the humanitarian issues in my country, and I reiterate our gratitude for that.

I listened very attentively to the various statements delivered prior to my own, and in doing so I noted a significant determination and clear commitment on the part of the Council to cooperating with the Democratic Republic of the Congo in order to ensure, as soon as possible, that the tragic aggression and suffering endured by my compatriots for 25 years becomes a memory and is relegated to the archives of history; I thank the Council for that as well. In my statement, I will try to answer members' concerns and, above all, to help them understand the essence of the approach of my country's Government and Head of State, which is outlined in the letter I transmitted to the Council (S/2023/648, annex).

I would first like to say that the focus of this meeting is on the security situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. My President's Government requested that I speak here today in order to provide clarification for everyone and to contribute to the Council's search for solutions. I would have preferred to be the last speaker so that I could address the concerns of all the other speakers. I therefore would like to be able to clarify certain points after delivering my statement, if need be, in order to move the discussion forward objectively and transparently.

My statement today before the Council will be a brief reminder of the Democratic Republic of Congo's current approach to the grave security crisis that has raged for a quarter of a century in the eastern part of the country, specifically in the provinces of Ituri and North Kivu, which have suffered as a result of the criminal activities of armed terrorist groups, including the so-called Movement du 23 mars (M-23), supported in terms of war materiel and troops by Rwanda, our country's aggressor — which is known to the United Nations and denied by no one.

Indeed, in my letter of 1 September addressed to the President of the Security Council, I communicated the vision and proposals of the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo for an effective and fruitful partnership — I repeat, a partnership with the United Nations to restore real and lasting peace and security throughout our national territory that will undoubtedly help to restore the broken trust between the Organization and the Congolese people and restore the tarnished image of our Organization in the country. I confirm the contents of the letter and reiterate my thanks to the Council for considering it in depth, with what I hope will be the utmost lucidity and objectivity and in a constructive spirit.

Allow me to refresh the Council's memory by pointing out that, in December last year (see S/PV.9215), I had the privilege of drawing the attention of members to the fact that the massacres of Congolese populations, the most barbaric atrocities, the acts of sexual violence against women, the recruitment of child soldiers, the massive human rights violations and the illegal exploitation of the Democratic Republic of the Congo's natural resources by armed terrorist groups were continuing and increasing in the east of the country, despite the presence there of some 16,000 United Nations troops over the past 25 years and the billions of dollars spent to restore peace and security.

I also alerted the Council to the heightened tensions that were poisoning relations between the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Congo (MONUSCO) and the Congolese people, especially those living in the territories ravaged by those armed groups. Those citizens have consistently criticized the Mission for its demonstrable passivity and inability to protect them from criminal groups or to help put an end to the almost perpetual insecurity to which they have been subjected. In order to prevent the situation from continuing to deteriorate, give the Nairobi and Luanda peace processes a chance to succeed and prevent the worst from happening, at that meeting in December I not only suggested that the Council clarify MONUSCO's mandate but also made it clear that the Democratic Republic of the Congo would prefer to see MONUSCO imposing and making peace and equipped with weapons adapted to its current challenges and issues, including having to deal with a Member State's conventional army, the Rwanda Defence Forces, and its M-23 proxies.

Incidentally, that request overlapped with the statement made by Secretary-General António Guterres to the international press, specifically Radio France International and the France 24 television network. It acknowledged with great sincerity, it must be said, and a high sense of responsibility, how impossible it was for MONUSCO to confront the M-23, who possess heavy weapons that are more advanced than MONUSCO's equipment, and proposed, as did the Secretary-General, that MONUSCO's mandate and military equipment be strengthened in order to enable it to fulfil its mandated responsibilities of protecting civilian populations and supporting the Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (FARDC).

On the same occasion in December, I reiterated my Government's request that the Council firmly condemn Rwanda's aggression against our country and severely punish those who have planned and perpetrated the war crimes and crimes against humanity committed on our national territory. However, we regret that in its resolution 2666 (2022) of 20 December 2022, the Security Council took neither the concerns and proposals of the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo nor the Secretary-General's judicious advice into consideration. It simply renewed MONUSCO's mandate without any changes, as if nothing had happened. Clearly, the Security Council's rigid attitude — turning a blind eye to the realities

on the ground, ignoring the legitimate demands of the Congolese people and showing its reluctance to change MONUSCO's status — has failed to give the peace process in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo any new momentum. On the contrary, as might have been expected, the population in North Kivu has grown more hostile to MONUSCO, which has left the Mission's personnel with a fearful and insecure mindset and sparked the violent incidents of 30 August in Goma in which 42 Congolese died, following on from the incidents of June and July 2022 in Goma, Béni, Butembo and Kasindi, in which 30 Congolese and five peacekeepers lost their lives.

As evidenced in the Secretary-General's latest report to the Security Council (S/2023/574), dated 2 August, the security situation in North Kivu has only deteriorated, and the humanitarian tragedy has grown and has now affected some 5 million displaced persons. In fact, according to a report I received this morning, that figure has already reached 6.2 million. Nor have tensions in the region eased. With their impunity guaranteed, Rwanda and the M-23 have stubbornly refused to uphold any of the commitments they have made to implementing the peace plan resulting from the Nairobi and Luanda processes, abiding by the recommendations of the international community or responding to the repeated appeals of the Security Council, the African Union, African regional organizations and bilateral partners to withdraw from the occupied Congolese territories.

Rwanda is reinforcing its troops in North Kivu right now. I would also like to inform the Council that not two hours ago, my colleague the Minister of Defence informed me — and I just received the message — that a Rwandan army helicopter landed in Rumangabo yesterday morning. Rumangabo is in the Congo. The M-23 refuses to participate in pre-cantonment in the Rumangabo camp or in the disarmament and cantonment sites set up in Maniema province before returning to the Nairobi process and enrolling its members in the Disarmament, Demobilization, Community Recovery and Stabilization Programme. In short, the process of resolving the security crisis in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Great Lakes region is now stalled and completely blocked by the M-23 and Rwanda.

I believe Ms. Keita mentioned the misadventure of the East African Community and the FARDC, which wanted to go to Rumangabo and Bunagana to look into

the possibility of the pre-cantonment of the M-23, as had been agreed. What some people mistakenly regard as a lull or a ceasefire is in actual fact merely a sham cessation of hostilities on the part of the M-23 and its progenitor, Rwanda, a stalemate that allows them to consolidate the Rwandan army's occupation of the Congolese province of North Kivu and the attempted partition of our country. Let me say once again, echoing our Head of State, that the Congolese people, their President, Félix Antoine Tshisekedi Tshilombo, and his Government can never accept such martyrdom and infamy, to which they are neither predestined nor condemned.

That is why, in order to avoid going round in circles at a moment when the seriousness of the situation calls for swift and effective action, our Government has chosen to speed up the withdrawal of MONUSCO, a withdrawal that the Security Council decided on five years ago in resolution 2409 (2018), of 27 March 2018, by moving the start of this gradual — and I do mean gradual — orderly, responsible and sustainable withdrawal from the end of 2024 to the end of this year, 2023. And I want to stress that we should not confuse acceleration with haste. We have already decided on the withdrawal. The transition plan has already been adopted by the Security Council. What remains are the modalities for withdrawal, but I will not come back to that — the letter I wrote to the Council clearly sets out the facts. The Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo is proposing a tactical reorganization of MONUSCO's withdrawal with the following objectives.

The first objective is to defuse the ever-increasing tension between MONUSCO and the civilian population and to avoid repeating the sad experiences of a hasty, forced and sometimes violent withdrawal of United Nations troops. In that respect, the ambition of the President and Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo is for our country to be a model of a successful and honourable withdrawal of United Nations troops from an African country.

The second objective is to prevent a repeat of the dramatic incidents in Goma, Beni, Butembo and Kasindi, with which we are all familiar.

The third objective is to ensure an honourable exit for MONUSCO and preserve the achievements of its work in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. MONUSCO has done a great deal of work — there is no denying that.

The fourth objective is to restore confidence between the people of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the United Nations while restoring the credibility of the United Nations and its tarnished image.

The fifth objective is to experiment with alternative partnership mechanisms for peace with the United Nations that are better developed and more effective, based on the real and current needs and priorities of the Democratic Republic of the Congo in order to resolve the security and humanitarian crises in the country and in the Great Lakes region.

In that respect, it is essential to recall that the most urgent security priorities for the Democratic Republic of the Congo at the moment are putting an end to the Rwandan aggression by means of the withdrawal of its troops from North Kivu; the eradication of armed terrorist groups in the country, including the M-23; the return of displaced persons to their homes; the restoration of the authority of the State in the territories occupied by the M-23; the organization of elections throughout the country; and the implementation of the Disarmament, Demobilization, Community Recovery and Stabilization Programme. In short, our top priority is to restore peace and security throughout the country.

This is the place to underscore that it is time for the United Nations, particularly the Security Council, to learn the lessons of its interventions in Africa and to change the paradigm of its peace missions on our continent. We need to properly think things through, and under no circumstances can we afford to forego such reflection. The Council should note that for the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, this is not a question of simply reconfiguring MONUSCO. We would be making a mistake — or rather the members of the Council would be making a mistake — if we were to give the impression that for any reason, even due to a misunderstanding, we wanted to move towards a MONUSCO B. That would not be merely a mistake but a grave error.

In order to achieve the objectives I have mentioned, the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo urges the Security Council above all to follow the logic of the withdrawal that we have already decided on, through an accelerated but not a hurried withdrawal. MONUSCO's withdrawal, in our view, should start no later than the end of 2023. I would recall that such an acceleration was also recommended by the Secretary-General in his most recent report.

We also ask the Council to instruct the Secretary-General to begin discussions with the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo as a matter of urgency within the framework of the Joint Committee established by resolution 2409 (2018), to which I have referred, on the following matters, discussion of which has been lacking in the past five years, and I therefore call on Ms. Keita to act as a witness in order to move forward with the withdrawal process.

First — and this is a concrete measure to be taken — the general staff of the FARDC and the MONUSCO Force Commander must prepare a plan for MONUSCO's disengagement and a timetable for the gradual and orderly withdrawal of United Nations troops.

Secondly, practical arrangements must be defined for the gradual transfer of the activities currently being carried out by MONUSCO to what I would call traditional agencies and United Nations funds and programmes, as well as to the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Thirdly, the gradual reduction of the number of MONUSCO staff must be discussed.

Fourthly, an operational plan to implement the withdrawal must be developed.

Fifthly, the tasks to be carried out by MONUSCO during the transition under the four benchmarks set out in the revised transition plan — namely security, the protection of civilians, electoral support and the Disarmament, Demobilization, Community Recovery and Stabilization Programme — must be precisely defined. What is now expected of MONUSCO in terms of security? In terms of protecting the civilian population, what are the tasks to be accomplished during the transition? Electoral support is working very well, as is the Disarmament, Demobilization, Community Recovery and Stabilization Programme.

These tasks, as I stated in my letter, constitute essential preparatory activities to give the withdrawal real substance, to be able to visualize it and above all to gauge the scope and scale of what needs to be accomplished. That is especially pertinent as I know that discussions on the budget will begin at the United Nations in October, in particular for projects, programmes and agencies. Therefore, now is the time to carry out those tasks in order to integrate them into the withdrawal process.

The reports of the MONUSCO-Democratic Republic of the Congo Joint Committee on the fundamental issues I have mentioned must be submitted to the Government and the Security Council by the end of October at the latest. I have just explained why we are making such a proposal. It goes without saying that MONUSCO's withdrawal, being gradual, will be assessed regularly, and that any difficulties that arise during its implementation will be examined jointly by the two parties — the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the United Nations — with a view to finding appropriate solutions. Our Government also expects the Security Council, at a meeting to be held in December, to consider all the consequences of the new approach to MONUSCO's withdrawal in the draft resolution to be adopted on the Mission's status.

During the sincere exchanges that my accompanying delegation and I have had bilaterally in the past week with the representatives of the five permanent members, the three African members and the President of the Council, as well as with delegations of other States Members of the United Nations, we have noted with satisfaction that a consensus is emerging on the substance of MONUSCO's accelerated phased withdrawal.

However, two relevant concerns emerged as a leitmotif in the statements made by our interlocutors, as they did just now, namely, the protection of civilians after the departure of MONUSCO and the coordination of regional initiatives to manage the security crisis in Ituri and North Kivu. We once again thank all our partners for their interest in the return of peace and an end to the war in those two provinces and for their show of solidarity with the Congolese people.

On behalf of the President and the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, I would like to reassure everyone that our leaders, who have a constitutional duty to provide security for all the inhabitants of our country, are sufficiently aware of the problems raised and that, in addition, effective measures have been taken so that, together with the people themselves, our defence and security forces can ensure their security. Of course, it goes without saying that there is no surer way of guaranteeing their security than putting an end to the war. There is no surer way of guaranteeing respect for human rights and the stability of the Congolese institutions — make no mistake — than putting an end to the war. Everything else is just a stop-gap measure. In fact, on closer inspection, it is precisely

the protection of the civilian population that is at the heart of the population's demand for an accelerated withdrawal of MONUSCO.

As for the coordination of regional peace initiatives, it is important to remember that, under the auspices of the African Union, the Joint Summit of Heads of State and Government of the East African Community, the Southern African Development Community (SADC), the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region and the Economic Community of Central African States, held on 27 June 2023 in Luanda, set up a Quadripartite Summit of the above-mentioned regional communities to coordinate and harmonize their initiatives in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

It is within that framework that the Chiefs of Staff of their respective forces and that of the FARDC will meet next week, on 4 October, in Addis Ababa, to examine all current initiatives and agree on actions to be taken to remove all obstacles to the resolution of the armed conflict in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Just yesterday, the Heads of State of the member States of the Organ on Politics, Defence and Security of the SADC met and agreed on practical modalities for the deployment of the SADC regional force in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. That recent initiative represents a significant step forward.

Be that as it may, the Democratic Republic of the Congo has no intention of breaking with the United Nations or with other bilateral and multilateral partners that wish to support internal efforts in the ways agreed with our Government. It would be unwise and untrue to erroneously deem MONUSCO's withdrawal an end in itself or a panacea for the insecurity and recurring violence in the east of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and in the Great Lakes region.

Rather, the withdrawal serves to facilitate efforts to unfreeze of a very laborious and complex peace process deliberately blocked by Rwanda and its M-23 supporters, who are continuing to defy the Congolese people and thumb their noses at the community of nations. This neighbouring country and this armed terrorist group have transformed North Kivu into a powder keg, just waiting for a spark to once again set ablaze this province, which has been martyred for two and a half decades.

As evidenced by the assessment of the Secretary-General in his recent report (S/2023/691), which we have spoken about, the security and humanitarian

situation in the east remains catastrophic. At the international level, the Secretary-General's observation is undoubtedly a concern, first and foremost, for the Security Council, the central organ of the United Nations for matters of international peace and security. The Democratic Republic of the Congo therefore calls on the Council to shake off its lethargy and assume its statutory responsibilities.

Indeed, to paraphrase the President of our Republic, in his address to the General Assembly during its seventy-eighth session, on 20 September, it is inadmissible and unjust, in particular, that several reports by groups of experts mandated by the United Nations itself to investigate the situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, duly submitted to the Council, have been gathering dust for several years without being examined; that the people named in those reports as responsible for, and repeat offenders in the commission of, serious crimes against humanity, war crimes and massive human rights violation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo remain unpunished, with the total silence of the Council, as if they were somehow being encouraged to continue their criminal acts. There have been massacres in Kishishe, in Rutshuru territory, and elsewhere, for which no investigation has been conducted. Those files have been forgotten.

That is why, on 19 September, the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo submitted to the Republic of Gabon, Chair of the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 1533 (2004), concerning the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the names of the persons and entities listed in the above-mentioned reports for their inclusion on the Security Council sanctions list.

Our country hopes that this time the Council will deign to look into the matter in earnest and follow the good examples set by the Government of the United States of America, which sanctioned Rwanda for its support for the M-23 terrorists, and by France, which has just sanctioned two leaders of the same group and criminals from the Forces démocratiques de libération du Rwanda.

With regard to elections, I can confirm the words of my country's Head of State, delivered during the seventieth eighth session of the General Assembly, that they will indeed be held within the constitutional timeline, on 20 December. Be assured that they will be transparent, inclusive and free. Everyone who meets the legal

requirements will be allowed to participate. The Council should know that, as of today, all the political families and independents have submitted their application packages to the Independent National Electoral Commission (CENI), and the Constitutional Court has resolved all candidacy disputes. For three days now, the definitive list of candidates for community, provincial and national legislative elections is being published.

The submission of candidacies for presidential elections are under way. In addition, we invited the United Nations to send an electoral observation mission to the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The United Nations Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs visited the country in March and carried out work with the CENI. Our elections are under way, and the Council can be reassured on that front.

The United Nations Organization is, above all, the expression of the desire of the peoples of our planet to coexist based on a minimum of shared fundamental values, notably justice, respect for human rights, mutual respect, solidarity and humanism. The Council bears a heavy responsibility to ensure that those values are upheld and to guarantee peace in the world. The Council has the legal, political and material capacities to compel all recalcitrant parties to fully implement the road map resulting from the Nairobi and Luanda processes, which the Council endorsed, and thus to stop the dangerous stalemate of the security crisis in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo.

The Council must act before it is too late. It is time to speak up and to uphold the law by sanctioning Rwanda's documented aggression against the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the crimes of the M-23 and other armed groups on Congolese territory. It is high time for us to raise our voices and demand that the M-23 lay down its weapons, go to the cantonment sites established for that purpose and join the Disarmament, Demobilization, Community Recovery and Stabilization Programme. Rwanda should withdraw its troops, unconditionally, from the Democratic Republic of the Congo and cease its support to the M-23. As far as the Forces démocratiques de libération du Rwanda (FDLR) are concerned, the Congolese Government is making a simple proposal to the international community. The members of the FDLR are not Congolese citizens. Why can the Security Council not create a plan to eliminate the FDLR? The Democratic Republic of the Congo is ready to take an active part in implementing that plan. We are offering the Council a helping hand.

For its part, the Democratic Republic of the Congo has not failed to honour its commitments. We will never stop fighting to protect our country's territorial integrity and independence and ensure the welfare of our population. That is why our compatriots who were forcibly displaced in the country as a result of the war imposed on us by Rwanda and the M-23 will very soon return home to exercise their legitimate right to elect their leaders at every level. They can no longer continue to live like cattle in makeshift displaced-persons camps. State authority will be restored in the areas occupied by our aggressors.

In conclusion, I want to emphasize how important our Head of State and our Government consider good relations with the United Nations, and how firmly they believe that only through close collaboration with the United Nations, in mutual understanding, harmony, sincerity and with greater political will, will it be possible to restore lasting peace and security in the eastern areas of our country and throughout the Great Lakes region. To that end, I want to assure the Council that the Democratic Republic of the Congo remains at its disposal.

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

Mr. Gatete (Rwanda): I thank Ms. Bintou Keita, Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, for her briefing, and all members for their valuable contributions.

In the wake of the Luanda and Nairobi mechanisms, which were reinforced by numerous communiqués from various summits of Heads of State, the concurrent withdrawal of the Mouvement du 23 mars (M-23) and the deployment of the East African Community regional force gave rise to optimism that it would be possible to finally put an end to the devastating conflict that has caused immense suffering to the people in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo. The swift deployment of the East African Community regional force and the relatively quick establishment of a ceasefire have underscored the political determination to address the regional crisis. Nevertheless, we must acknowledge that a ceasefire is only one step in the conflict-resolution process, contingent on the willingness of all of the warring parties to pursue a peaceful solution. It is imperative that the Democratic Republic of the Congo

seize the opportunities provided by the ceasefire and the M-23's withdrawal and address the root causes and drivers of the conflict, rather than resorting to using Rwanda as a scapegoat while the internal failures of the Democratic Republic of the Congo persist.

Rwanda remains deeply concerned about the Congolese Government's ongoing collaboration with and arming of the genocidal militia known as the Forces démocratiques de libération du Rwanda (FDLR) and indigenous armed groups. Many Council members have repeatedly brought up the issue of Kinshasa's collaboration with and arming of the FDLR, despite the denials last year by the Foreign Minister of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, when he said that there are no members of the FDLR in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. He said that last year to the Security Council (see S/PV.9215), which has actually imposed sanctions on that genocidal militia, a group that committed genocide in Rwanda in 1994 and has been living in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and working with the Congolese Government for more than 20 years. And now it is not just a matter of collaboration. They are fighting alongside the Democratic Republic of the Congo's army and are also supported by the Government through its arming of them. I do not see that anyone can claim any legitimacy when what is at issue is a group that committed genocide in Rwanda and is being supported by another country. And then that country turns around and blames Rwanda. What is Rwanda supposed to do in that case?

The disruptive behaviour of those negative forces, in alliance with the Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, threatens to reignite hostilities and undermine any positive regional initiatives. The Council should therefore urge the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo to fulfil its responsibility to dissociate itself from the FDLR and ensure its members' immediate repatriation, as stipulated in the Luanda and Nairobi mechanisms.

As has been said in the past, the proliferation of hate speech targeting Rwandophones, along with killings and the confiscation of property belonging to Kinyarwanda-speaking communities in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, poses a grave threat not only to Rwanda but to the entire Great Lakes region. That has continued for several years now with impunity, and the Council cannot continue to be a mere observer.

Rwanda gains no benefit from an insecure Democratic Republic of the Congo and would like to reaffirm its

steadfast support for regional mechanisms, especially the Nairobi and Luanda peace processes. Those who seek to exploit the conflict for personal political gain are misguided. In addition, actions by certain external Powers designed to please the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo in pursuit of their own economic interests, at Rwanda's expense, are unhelpful and risk aggravating the situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. That is the paramount issue demanding the Council's attention.

In conclusion, Rwanda remains deeply concerned about the plight of refugees from the Democratic Republic of the Congo, most of whom have been sheltered in Rwanda for more than 20 years. We appeal to the Council to direct its collective efforts to creating conditions conducive to their safe repatriation.

The President: The Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Democratic Republic of the Congo has asked for the floor to make a further statement.

Mr. Lutundula Apala Pen'apala (Democratic Republic of the Congo) (*spoke in French*): I will be brief. I will start with the easiest point. I can see that the Permanent Representative of Rwanda has not been following the situation on the ground as it pertains to the issue of Rwandan refugees and refugees from the Democratic Republic of the Congo in Rwanda. We can call the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees right now and he will confirm that in May we held a meeting with the Rwandan and Congolese delegations, which I myself chaired, at which we resumed discussions on the refugee issue. The meeting was convened at the request of President Tshisekedi. There is a communiqué that the Ambassador can consult. He will find it on the Internet, on the official website of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees.

Secondly, since the Ambassador is unaware of it, two weeks ago the meeting continued in Nairobi because we had agreed in Geneva that that was what we would do. The meeting did indeed take place, and everyone agreed to meet in Goma last week to continue discussions, particularly on the issue of identification cards. The Rwandan delegation refused to attend. I do not know if the Ambassador will deny that. We are at a stalemate. I asked the representative of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, whom I met here last week, if we could propose a compromise either on returning to Nairobi or going to Addis Ababa. The Ambassador does not know about that.

With regard to the Forces démocratiques de libération du Rwanda (FDLR), I believe that we must respect the Security Council and the United Nations. That old refrain is not important. What Rwanda has been saying is, "I am in the Democratic Republic of the Congo because the FDLR is there." However, there is nothing in international law or the Charter of the United Nations that obliges a country to behave in that way.

I would like to remind the Ambassador and the Council, in the context of the Nairobi process, since last year, all the Heads of State, including His Excellency the President of the Republic of Rwanda, have agreed that any Head of State or Head of Government who has armed groups in the Democratic Republic of the Congo must initiate discussions with those armed groups so that they return to their country of origin. And if they refuse, at that time, the East African Community regional force shall use, what one might call, coercive means so that those groups return to their countries. That is what is called the Nairobi process. We have been in discussions with our compatriots, even with the Mouvement du 23 mars (M-23). Members of the M-23 were at the meeting, but at the instigation of Rwanda, they did not want to continue. As of today — I ask that the Ambassador of Rwanda respond — has that recommendation of the Nairobi process been implemented by the Rwandan Government? Nothing has been done. We always come back to genocide, but as I said last time, we do not know about matters of genocide.

We stand by that. I would like the Council to consider, at another time perhaps, the proposal that the Democratic Republic of the Council is making that a mechanism be put in place — by either the African Union, the East African Community or the Security Council — so that we can go into the field and dislodge the notorious FDLR. We are waiting to see what happens next, so we will not come back to this. This does not justify the landing yesterday of a Rwandan army helicopter carrying soldiers on Congolese territory. I do not think the Ambassador is informed. We must always try to get the real information to be constructive in a high-level debate such as this.

The President: 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 12.35 p.m.