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Provisional

President: Mrs. Frazier/Ms. Gatt (Malta)

Members:

Algeria	Mr. Bendjama
China	Mr. Fu Cong
Ecuador	Mr. De La Gasca
France	Mrs. Broadhurst Estival
Guyana	Ms. Benn
Japan	Mrs. Shino
Mozambique	Mr. Afonso
Republic of Korea	Mr. Hyunwoo Cho
Russian Federation	Ms. Evstigneeva
Sierra Leone	Mr. Kanu
Slovenia	Mrs. Blokar Drobič
Switzerland	Mrs. Baeriswyl
United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland . .	Mr. Kariuki
United States of America	Mr. Wood

Agenda

The situation in the Great Lakes region

Report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework for the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Region (S/2024/278)

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

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in the Great Lakes region

Report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework for the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Region (S/2024/278)

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

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the following briefers to participate in this meeting: Mr. Huang Xia, Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for the Great Lakes Region; Ms. Joyce Msuya, Assistant Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Deputy Emergency Relief Coordinator; and Ms. Pétronille Vaweka, Coordinator of Women Engaged for Peace in Africa.

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/2024/278, which contains the report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework for the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Region.

I now give the floor to Mr. Huang Xia.

Mr. Huang Xia (*spoke in French*): I am grateful for this new opportunity to speak to the Council following the submission of the Secretary General's latest report on the implementation of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework for the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Region (S/2024/278).

As we hold this Council meeting, the concerns that I expressed to you during my most recent briefing in the Council (see S/PV.9440) are far from having been resolved. Indeed, tensions between the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Rwanda persist, and have even increased, with repeated clashes between the Movement du 23 mars and the Forces armées de la République démocratique du Congo. I remain troubled

by the seriousness of the situation characterized, in particular, by an intensification of the conflict and a worrisome deterioration in the humanitarian situation in the east of the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

This is compounded by a persistent rhetoric of confrontation between the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Rwanda consisting of reciprocal accusations of plans to cause destabilization and a flare-up of hate speech. Furthermore, tensions between Burundi and Rwanda, which are closely linked to the situation in eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo, are exacerbating the worrisome situation, compromising the significant progress made since 2020 in relations between the two countries.

That alarming picture compels us to urgently step up our efforts to de-escalate and ease tensions in order to avoid a regional conflagration, which is a real risk. That inevitably requires frank and sincere dialogue between the parties concerned. For that reason, I welcome and strongly encourage the political and diplomatic efforts of President João Lourenço of Angola, which are enabling Presidents Tshisekedi Tshilombo and Kagame to remain engaged in the Luanda process. I also welcome the continuing efforts of former Kenyan President Uhuru Kenyatta, Facilitator of the Nairobi process, and the engagement of President Salva Kiir Mayardit of South Sudan in his capacity as Chairperson-in-Office of the East African Community.

The mobilization of international partners must also be noted here. I am thinking in particular of the member countries of the International Contact Group for the Great Lakes Region (ICGLR), with whom I conducted a joint mission to Kinshasa and Kigali, with my colleagues from the African Union.

All those initiatives demonstrate the determination of the stakeholders in the region and more broadly of the international community as a whole to jointly find a solution to the crisis, which has gone on for far too long.

Given the numerous challenges that we must overcome collectively, on behalf of the Secretary-General, I have continued the good offices of the United Nations in the region. During my meetings with officials of those countries, I stressed the urgency of de-escalation and continued engagement with a view to a political resolution within the context of the Luanda and Nairobi processes. I also called for the full, frank and sincere implementation of the commitments of the Framework Agreement. I welcome the consensus in

principle that is emerging on the need for a political solution to the crisis, but it is urgent that all the parties concerned agree on the concrete measures to be taken in order to achieve an effective de-escalation of tensions and a gradual resolution of the crisis.

The stakeholders in the region have appropriate instruments and mechanisms at their disposal. In support of regional initiatives, my Office has continued to facilitate the activities of the Contact and Coordination Group and its operational cell, with a view to finding a non-military solution to neutralize foreign armed groups in eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo. I would like to take this opportunity to commend the engagement of the member countries of the Contact and Coordination Group, notably Burundi and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, with a view to the repatriation of Burundian fighters operating in South Kivu. Indeed, the success of such a repatriation could be an impetus for a positive dynamic in the region, which has been ravaged by the activism of armed groups.

Women also have a vital contribution to make, which is why, in collaboration with the African Union and UN-Women in particular, I mobilized, on 17 April, before coming here, in Nairobi, experts and women leaders from several countries in the region to discuss together what can be done to support the peace process in the region. The participants, who included first-hand witnesses of the conflict, recommended in particular that women be necessarily included in all phases of the Luanda and Nairobi processes. As one of them forcefully put it, women's participation is not an option. They must play their full roles in the peace talks and in the proposed solutions that will be put forward, since they are so immediately affected by the crisis.

The question of natural resources, because of their irrefutable link with the instability and persistent tensions in the region, on the one hand, and their substantial contribution to the strengthening of regional integration, on the other hand, will also continue to draw the attention of my Office. In implementing the recommendations of the high-level workshop on natural resources held in September 2021 in Khartoum, I am delighted that, on 29 November, Uganda launched the ICGLR Regional Certification Mechanism for certain minerals, thereby joining the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Rwanda, Burundi and Tanzania, which are already implementing the main tool of the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region for the

transparent management of natural resources. I am also pleased to note that partner countries at the other end of the mineral supply chain are supporting the efforts of the Great Lakes countries by revising and aligning their due diligence guidelines with the ICGLR standards.

The persistence of conflicts in the region draws our attention, today more than ever, to the need to pursue efforts aimed at resolving the root causes in a sustainable manner. That is the reason for the current efforts aimed at revitalizing the Addis Ababa Framework Agreement.

I welcome the fact that, in the light of an in-depth examination of the assessment report on the implementation of the Framework Agreement, submitted by a team of independent experts, the signatory countries, at the Technical Support Committee meeting held on 1 and 2 February, reviewed the recommendations for revitalizing the Framework Agreement. Those include strengthening the effective implementation of all commitments made under the Framework Agreement and improving monitoring through the guarantor institutions.

In that regard, in order to implement the recommendations to ensure a greater role for the guarantor institutions of the Framework Agreement, on 15 April in Nairobi, I had a meeting with my colleagues from the African Union, the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region and the Southern African Development Community. Together, we agreed on a number of initiatives and recommendations to ensure greater support for those institutions in resolving the current crisis and implementing the Framework Agreement. In addition to strengthening coordination and the exchange of information, we also committed to conducting joint missions in the region.

As a next step, the region's Heads of State are expected to endorse the proposals that have been put forward and provide further guidance on the way forward at the twelfth high-level meeting of the Regional Oversight Mechanism to assess the Agreement, to be hosted by Uganda. I intend to travel to Kampala soon to discuss that and other important issues with the Ugandan authorities.

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

I now give the floor to Ms. Msuya.

Ms. Msuya: I thank you, Madam President, for the opportunity to brief the Council on the humanitarian

situation in the Great Lakes region. I will focus my remarks on the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the country with the highest number of people in need in the world.

When I visited the Democratic Republic of the Congo in February last year, I was struck by the scale and depth of that immense crisis. Since then, sadly, the crisis has deteriorated even further. As we have repeatedly warned the Council, the Democratic Republic of the Congo is the most food insecure country in the world, with close to one in four Congolese — or 23.4 million people — experiencing acute hunger. It is also facing massive levels of displacement — more than 7.2 million people are now internally displaced. Between December 2023 and March 2024 alone, that figure increased by an alarming 700,000 people. Please allow me to focus on the situation in the three most affected provinces, namely, South Kivu, North Kivu and Ituri.

In South Kivu, the crisis is deepening as armed groups continue to strengthen their capacity and extend their presence, particularly in the Hauts Plateaux sections of the Fizi and Uvira territories. Some 280,000 people have arrived in Minova in South Kivu since early February, fleeing fighting in North Kivu.

In North Kivu, armed fighting, looting of health facilities, damage to schools and severe restrictions on humanitarian access have exacerbated the plight of displaced people. More than 200,000 people were forced to flee their homes in February alone, many seeking refuge in Goma and its outskirts. As of March, more than 100 displacement sites have been created in and around Goma, hosting an overwhelming 630,000 people.

Finally, in Ituri, intercommunal violence and attacks between the Zaire and Coopérative pour le développement du Congo armed groups increased steadily over the past six months. Almost 200 attacks have taken place since the start of the year, forcing hundreds of thousands of people from their homes.

Across those provinces, the presence of United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) bases has until now provided a degree of protection for civilians. It has also played a critical role in facilitating humanitarian access. Against the backdrop of intensifying violence, humanitarian organizations

are deeply concerned about the potential impact of MONUSCO's ongoing withdrawal.

Allow me to highlight the particularly worrisome impact of the crisis on women and children. The eastern part of the Democratic Republic of the Congo is today one of the most dangerous places in the world to be a woman or a girl. In the overcrowded camps around Goma, often with no lighting, no privacy, inadequate hygiene facilities and minimal safety measures, women and girls are exposed to atrocious levels of abuse.

Reported cases of gender-based violence soared from 40,000 cases in 2021 to 78,000 in 2022. That number reached 123,000 in 2023, an increase of more than 300 per cent. It continues to rise. Tragically, underreporting and limited resources for survivor services mean the real numbers are probably far higher. The link between gender-based violence and the escalating conflict is unambiguous — two thirds of all cases have occurred in the three eastern provinces of North Kivu, South Kivu and Ituri. Despite those risks, we can only marvel at the determination and courage of Congolese women and women's organizations — and today we have the privilege of having one of those women present with us.

The conflict has led to a significant increase in dangers for children. That includes the recruitment and use of children — predominantly boys — by armed groups, as well as the abduction, killing and maiming of and sexual violence against children. Families are being forced into actions of last resort, including early and forced child marriage. Today 37 per cent of girls in the Democratic Republic of the Congo are forcibly married before the age of 18. Furthermore, the closure of at least 772 schools in 2023 has deprived more than 300,000 girls and boys of an education, with lasting impacts for them and the future of their country.

The repercussions of the conflict in the Democratic Republic of the Congo extend well beyond its borders. Around 1 million people have now sought refuge in neighbouring countries. More than half are in Uganda. Any further escalation in conflict would be extremely concerning for a region already grappling with numerous challenges, which include the spread of measles and cholera in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, with the risk of them crossing over into neighbouring countries. In addition, there is the continued impact of the El Niño phenomenon and above normal rainfall,

both in the eastern part of the Democratic Republic of the Congo as well as in Rwanda, Burundi and Uganda.

The humanitarian community has stepped up its efforts in response to the escalating situation. From 16 June until the end of December last year, the Emergency Relief Coordinator, Mr. Martin Griffiths, activated a system-wide scale-up of the humanitarian response for North Kivu, South Kivu and Ituri in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Targeted efforts by our humanitarian colleagues on the ground meant that nearly 4 million people received humanitarian assistance across the three provinces between July and December 2023. And across the country, as of February this year, humanitarian organizations had already reached 2.6 million people with some form of support, with local women's organizations playing a key role.

But let me be clear — the humanitarian operation is dangerously overstretched. As in many places, our efforts are being severely limited by woefully inadequate funding. So far, we have received just 16 per cent of the \$2.6 billion required to reach 8.7 million people in need in the Democratic Republic of the Congo in 2024.

As I witnessed during my visit last year, the people of the Democratic Republic of the Congo are astonishingly resilient, but they are being pushed to the brink of catastrophe by overwhelming challenges. They need our support. Urgent steps must be taken to resolve the conflict and avoid further deterioration of the situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and across the region. After so many years, people in the Democratic Republic of the Congo — and in the Great Lakes region — deserve the opportunity to live in peace, and to build the safe, secure and prosperous lives that the richly abundant region promises.

It would be remiss of me not to mention that this month we commemorate 30 years since the genocide against the Tutsi in Rwanda, an atrocity that, in the words of the Secretary-General, is “a stain on our collective conscience”. That milestone is a brutal reminder of the importance of sustained international attention and action where the situation demands. After so many years, people in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Great Lakes region deserve the opportunity to live in peace and to build the safe, secure and prosperous lives that this richly abundant region promises.

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

I now give the floor to Ms. Vaweke.

Ms. Vaweke (*spoke in French*): It is with a deep sense of honour that I take the floor today to speak about the worrisome situation of women in the Great Lakes region of Africa, in particular in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

My name is Pétronille Vaweke Rutaya, and I am the national Coordinator of Women Committed to Peace in Africa, an organization dedicated to supporting a network of 100 female community leaders from the provinces of Ituri, North Kivu and South Kivu in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Our objective is to foster their role in restoring social cohesion and establishing lasting peace in their respective provinces. In December 2023, I was honoured to receive the 2023 Women Building Peace Award from the United States Institute of Peace.

Over the past 25 years, I have witnessed unspeakable atrocities. Women, girls, boys and men have been plunged into utter despair. Those who escape an excruciating death face poverty, hunger and disease. The once-sacred female body has become the site of unspeakable suffering, subjected to mutilation, rape and other unimaginable forms of violence, often perpetrated in front of women's families. I have seen babies crying over the mutilated body of their mother or feeding at the breast of their dead mother, and even today other women are buried alive. Nearly 7 million people in my country have been internally displaced, the main victims being women, young women and children.

No humanitarian programme could remedy such a disaster. Nearly 30 years of violence, atrocities and mass displacement of the population, orchestrated by domestic and foreign armed groups, and with a lack of protection for civilian populations, have plunged the east of the Democratic Republic of the Congo into chronic insecurity. Our communities are plagued by endless conflicts, manipulated and incited to kill each other for the benefit of those who covet and plunder our natural resources. Our phones, computers, electric cars and other technological gadgets are directly linked to the suffering and death of the people of the Great Lakes, in particular those of the provinces of Ituri, North Kivu and South Kivu in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. That situation is spreading to other provinces, such as Bandundu, Kasai and Maniema, and the list goes on.

In the face of this tragedy, we, the women of the Great Lakes countries of Africa, and in particular those of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, are not simply victims, but stakeholders committed to the quest for peace and security in our region. Drawing on our experience, which we are passing on to the next generation of women, we were able to curb the activities of armed groups, reconcile communities in conflict and restore State authority in Ituri province during the inter-ethnic wars of 2000 to 2008. Since then, we have been working to strengthen the capacity of women mediators at the local level in conflict management and social cohesion. I have been particularly struck by the story of Rachel, a 30-year-old woman from Ituri province, who, after being abducted, held captive and raped for months, was left to die by the side of the road. After receiving treatment, she took a training course on mediating with armed groups, thereby engaging in the quest for peace to prevent other women and girls from going through her ordeal. Her story illustrates the resilience of Congolese women.

That is why we call for an end to all wars and conflicts. We ask of this forum, and in particular the Security Council and the presidency of Malta, the involvement and enforcement to turn blood minerals into minerals of life and happiness for the world, the Great Lakes countries and the Democratic Republic of the Congo through fair trade that allows all parties to benefit. We ask for the establishment of an international follow-up mechanism to ensure that commitments are fulfilled and peace processes in the Great Lakes region of Africa are continued. We ask for increased support from the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the Office of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for the Great Lakes Region, the African Union and the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region (ICGLR) for the engagement and involvement of women in peace processes. We ask for support for the implementation of the ICGLR regional action plan on resolution 1325 (2000) and for substantive support to strengthen our technical and economic capacities to ensure lasting peace and security in the countries of the Great Lakes region.

It is imperative that we do not export the war — which we do not want at home — to others. The world in general and the Great Lakes countries in particular need peace and security. The technological advances that require the use of minerals from the

Democratic Republic of the Congo must not be a reason to decimate the Congolese population and cause women and children to suffer.

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

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

Mrs. Broadhurst Estival (France) (*spoke in French*): I thank the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General Huang Xia, Assistant Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs Joyce Msuya, and Ms. Pétronille Vaweka for their briefings.

I would like to emphasize three points.

First, the escalating situation that is threatening the stability of the Great Lakes region must be stopped as a matter of urgency. As the report of the Secretary-General (S/2024/278) demonstrates, violence among armed groups and against civilian populations continues, taking too many lives and continuing to result in forced displacement. In eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo, we must respond to one of the most complex, protracted and acute humanitarian crises in the world, which is taking a disproportionate toll on women and children. The deployment and use of anti-aircraft systems on Congolese territory mark the crossing of a new threshold, and we condemn the operations of all armed groups in the east of the country. France recalls three of the cardinal principles of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework Agreement for the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Region: not to support armed groups, to respect the sovereignty and territorial integrity of neighbouring States and not to harbour or provide protection to persons accused of crimes and violations of international law. Those principles must be respected by all parties.

My second message is simple: there can be no military solution to this crisis. Only the implementation of the commitments made within the framework of regional peace processes, in particular the Luanda and Nairobi processes, will make it possible to create the conditions for a lasting peace. France supports regional efforts to that end, and in that regard we welcome the meeting of the Congolese and Rwandan Ministers for Foreign Affairs held in Luanda on 21 March.

We encourage the parties to continue to rekindle dialogue, and we welcome the Congolese proposal for a plan to demobilize and disarm the Forces démocratiques de libération du Rwanda, a group made up of members

of the militias that committed the genocide against the Tutsis. The plan's implementation would help to restore trust between the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Rwanda. An end must also be put to hate speech targeting certain communities, particularly the Tutsis. We encourage the coordination of efforts being undertaken under the auspices of the African Union, within the framework of the quadripartite format.

My third point pertains to the whole of the United Nations system, which must work together in order to contribute to restoring peace. The Security Council must shoulder all its responsibilities, and France will continue to submit proposals to Council members to help restore peace and to sanction those who fuel conflict. The Peacebuilding Commission and the Peacebuilding Fund also have an important role to play in mobilizing funding and encouraging coordinated action to address the root causes of the conflict. In particular, I have in mind the question of the return of ex-combatants and judicial cooperation.

Finally, we commend the work of Special Envoy Xia Huang and his Office to implement the United Nations Strategy for the Great Lakes Region, as well as all his efforts to revitalize the Framework Agreement. We encourage him to continue his efforts.

Mr. Kanu (Sierra Leone): I have the honour to deliver this statement on behalf of the three African members of the Security Council plus (A3+), namely, Algeria, Guyana, Mozambique and my country, Sierra Leone.

The A3+ wishes to express its appreciation to Special Envoy Huang Xia for his comprehensive and enlightening briefing and for his active engagements and efforts aimed at attaining and consolidating peace and security in the Great Lakes region. We also extend our gratitude to Assistant Secretary-General Joyce Msuya and Ms. Pétronille Vaweka for their comprehensive, insightful and sobering briefings.

The A3+ acknowledges the presence of Her Excellency Ms. Esmeralda Mendonça, Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Angola, and of the Permanent Representatives of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Republic of Rwanda.

The A3+ remains deeply concerned about the heightening of political tensions in the region, exacerbated by recent threats of war and the deteriorating security situation on the ground. That

volatile environment has resulted in untold suffering for the civilian population. Millions of men, women and children have been displaced from their homes and are in dire need of humanitarian assistance. Reports indicate high levels of human rights violations and abuses, including sexual violence and exploitation against women and children, particularly around camps for internally displaced persons.

Those acts are a gross violation of international law, including international humanitarian law, the Charter of the United Nations and other relevant international instruments. They are fundamentally at odds with the principles of humanity that form the core of our existence. The A3+ condemns in the strongest possible terms all acts of violence, human rights violations and abuses perpetrated against innocent civilians by armed groups, including the Mouvement du 23 mars (M-23), the Allied Democratic Forces, the Forces démocratiques de libération du Rwanda and the Coopérative pour le développement du Congo, to name but a few.

We urge the international community to continue providing the necessary support for the successful delivery of humanitarian aid to the people and countries within the Great Lakes region. We further call on all parties to the conflict to allow and facilitate unimpeded, rapid, meaningful and safe access for the delivery of humanitarian assistance to affected populations, especially women and children, and to respect and protect civil and humanitarian personnel, assets and infrastructure. Equally important is the solidarity shown among countries in the region with regard to hosting refugees, which we highly commend.

The A3+ reiterates its call to all countries that acceded to the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework for the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Region to act in good faith to ensure its effective implementation. We re-echo the call of the Secretary-General to all Congolese and foreign armed groups to immediately and unconditionally lay down their arms and engage in the disarmament process. We demand the end of any further advances by the M-23 and call for its unconditional and immediate withdrawal from all occupied territories, as agreed through the Luanda process.

We look forward to the convening of an inclusive inter-Congolese dialogue stemming from the Nairobi process on the restoration of peace and security in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo as an

opportunity for armed groups to recommit themselves to silencing the guns, adhering to the ongoing peace process and paving the way for a lasting peace, stability and reconciliation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

The A3+ further reaffirms the joint communiqué of the United Nations-African Union Joint Task Force on Peace and Security and the twenty-third consultative meeting, of 16 April, which commended the progress achieved in the advancement of the peace process in the region. The A3+, however, notes that those gains remain fragile, pointing to the deterioration of the security situation at the border areas and transhumance zones, which continues to pose a threat to civilian life. To that end, we reiterate the importance of concerted regional efforts to address the persistent insecurity in the Great Lakes region.

The A3+ emphasizes the critical need for coordination and complementarity between political and military initiatives in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, as highlighted, *inter alia*, in the recently adopted presidential statement (S/PRST/2023/5) on the situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the communiqué of the eleventh high-level meeting of the Regional Oversight Mechanism of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework for the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Region and the communiqué of the quadripartite summit of the East African Community, the Economic Community of Central African States, the International Conference on the Great Lakes and the Southern African Development Community, held under the auspices of the African Union.

The A3+ firmly believes that the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework for the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Great Lakes Region remains a strategic mechanism for resolving the conflict, promoting sustainable peace and fostering development and economic integration in the region. We commend the relentless efforts and steadfast commitment of regional leaders, including President João Lourenço of Angola and former President Uhuru Kenyatta of Kenya, to mediate between the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Rwanda and to ensure the full implementation of existing peace agreements by all parties to the conflict. The A3+ is particularly encouraged by the laudable efforts of countries in the region to deepen their bilateral and diplomatic engagement through the holding of Joint Permanent Commission meetings and high-level visits, and the signing of bilateral trade and development

cooperation agreements characterized by mutual trust and respect. Concerted efforts must be made to advance the implementation of those bilateral and multilateral agreements, which have the potential to improve socioeconomic development and, subsequently, the conditions for peace in the region.

The A3+ holds the view that, given the signing of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework a little over a decade ago, it is now an opportune time for signatory countries to take stock of its implementation. In that regard, we support the recent request made by signatory countries to the Technical Support Committee to conduct an independent and frank assessment of the Framework's implementation to date. We believe that that will serve as a good basis to revitalize the Peace, Security and Development Framework and to strengthen the adherence of all signatory countries to their commitments.

An important step towards ensuring accountability in the Great Lakes region is the ongoing effort to increase judicial cooperation between countries, especially regarding requests for extradition and mutual legal assistance. In that regard, the A3+ emphasizes the need for the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework's signatories to fulfil their commitments to promote judicial cooperation among the countries of the region and to address shared difficulties, with support from the Office of the Special Envoy.

The Great Lakes region has significant mineral resources, which, if properly utilized, could provide the countries of the region with opportunities to structurally transform their economies and build an area of shared prosperity. In that regard, the A3+ supports the timely implementation of the United Nations Strategy for Peace Consolidation, Conflict Prevention and Conflict Resolution in the Great Lakes Region, which, *inter alia*, aims to prevent the illicit exploitation and trade of natural resources in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and in the region, and to ensure the effective and transparent management of its natural resources. We commend this and other efforts by the Office of the Special Envoy to advance sustainable economic development as a pathway for peace in the region.

It is crucial that the hundreds of thousands of young men and women who have been impacted by the conflict come to view their natural resources as a blessing, rather than a curse. That shift in perspective will enable

them to harness the potential of their resources for the betterment of their communities and their future.

In conclusion, the A3+ wishes to thank the Special Envoy Huang Xia for his unwavering commitment to regional peace efforts and to the implementation of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework. We reiterate that a political solution remains the most viable means of restoring peace in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Great Lakes region. For that reason, we remain fully supportive of the planned revitalization of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework, and reaffirm our support for the independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity of the countries of the region.

Mr. De La Gasca (Ecuador) (*spoke in Spanish*): I thank Mr. Huang Xia, Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for the Great Lakes Region, for his briefing. I also thank Ms. Joyce Msuya, Assistant Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Deputy Emergency Relief Coordinator of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, and Ms. Pétronille Vaweka, civil society representative for their briefings.

I acknowledge the presence of the representatives of Rwanda, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Angola in the Chamber this morning.

The Secretary-General's report (S/2024/278) reminds us of our collective commitments to foster lasting peace and stability in the Great Lakes region and, in particular, the commitments of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework for the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Region.

Following the independent assessment of the implementation of the Framework, we have identified the need to develop a road map to spell out the recommendations, which we hope will be submitted to the Regional Oversight Mechanism of the Framework for consideration at its twelfth meeting this year.

Now more than ever, the signatories of the Framework must renew their commitments, in particular

“not to interfere in the internal affairs of neighbouring countries; to neither tolerate nor provide assistance or support of any kind to armed groups; to respect the sovereignty and territorial integrity of neighbouring countries; and to strengthen regional cooperation”.

Those commitments are the fundamental pillars of mutual confidence-building.

Amid the deteriorating security situation in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo, we rely on the strengths of the regional and subregional integration architecture in the Great Lakes, where a comprehensive and collaborative approach must prevail with a view to supporting its members in peacebuilding efforts.

We welcome the steps taken under the Luanda process, most notably the Mini-Summit of Heads of States and Governments on Peace and Security in Eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo, held on the sidelines of the African Union Summit on 17 February. The efforts to achieve a ceasefire in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, undertaken by the Chair of the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region, are very timely.

We also support the efforts to break the deadlock in the Nairobi process. These are led by the President of South Sudan and the Chair of the East African Community.

We look forward to the second quadripartite summit, under the auspices of the African Union, which will promote coherence among existing initiatives and follow up on the implementation of commitments made during the first summit held in June of last year.

We view with concern the deterioration of the humanitarian situation resulting from the exacerbation of the armed conflict in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Humanitarian action is critical, and the situation and requires the international community's immediate attention. This response must be accompanied by actions that promote peacebuilding by addressing the root causes of conflicts, which opens the path to peace.

In that connection, Ecuador welcomes the advice of the Peacebuilding Commission, which emphasized elements that contribute to building more just societies by implementing the relevant elements of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework for the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Region.

We welcome the actions of Special Envoy Huang Xia to promote the implementation of the United Nations Strategy for Peace Consolidation, Conflict Prevention and Conflict Resolution in the Great Lakes Region. The actions coordinated with the United Nations system are fundamental in the most important issues for the region, such as the sustainable and transparent management of natural resources, the promotion of human rights, the implementation of the women and peace and security

agenda and the youth, peace and security agendas, and the implementation of the recommendations of the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict.

Ms. Evstigneeva (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): We thank Special Envoy Huang Xia and Assistant Secretary-General Joyce Msuya for their briefings. We listened attentively to the statement delivered by Ms. Pétronille Vawek, the civil society representative. We welcome the participation in today's meeting of Ms. Esmeralda Mendonça, Secretary of State for External Relations of Angola, as well as the Permanent Representatives of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Rwanda.

We have been closely following developments of the situation in the Great Lakes region. We cannot but note that the situation in that part of Africa continues to deteriorate as a consequence of the negative impact of the security crisis in the eastern provinces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

We are very concerned about the escalation of the conflict with the participation of the illegal armed group, Movement du 23 mars. Of particular concern is the resulting heightened tensions between Kinshasa and Kigali. We stress the need to return to the full implementation of the agreements through the Luanda process.

We note with regret that escalating tensions in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo has led to heightened tensions among other regional States, as well. It is important to prevent further deterioration of the architecture of international assistance and cooperation in the region. The ongoing armed conflict in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo is also a root cause of the deteriorating humanitarian situation in the Great Lakes region. We all heard Ms. Msuya's briefing, and there is nothing we can add regarding the magnitude of the humanitarian challenges.

The military operations also serve as a cover for the illegal exploitation and smuggling of Congolese natural resources. Numerous illegal armed groups are exploiting the situation to strengthen their positions. We support the efforts of the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) and its leadership to uphold peace and the protection of civilians. We unequivocally condemn attacks and violence against Blue Helmets.

We also note the measures taken by the Southern African Development Community to promote a resolution in the Democratic Republic of the Congo directly on the ground. It is important to ensure an appropriate level of coordination with MONUSCO, as well as to identify effective modalities for joint efforts. We stand ready to discuss parameters for possible assistance to regional forces from the Mission after we receive the relevant report from the United Nations Secretariat. We are awaiting the relevant proposals.

There is no doubt that a prompt resolution of the security crisis in the Democratic Republic of the Congo reflects the interests of the countries of the region, first and foremost. That requires political solutions that could facilitate a sustained stabilization of the situation. It is critical to step up regional mediation and establish direct and transparent dialogue among States of the Great Lakes region. We note, in particular, the efforts undertaken by Angolan President Lourenço in that regard. We hope that they will lead to mutual understanding among the parties concerned. At the same time, the challenge of comprehensively implementing the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework for the eastern part of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Great Lakes region is more relevant than ever. We support the work of Special Envoy of Secretary-General Huang Xia in promoting the revitalization of that fundamental document. We note his efforts to reduce tensions in the region.

For its part, Russia will continue to promote constructive dialogue among the countries of the Great Lakes region to seek balanced and long-term solutions to regional problems.

Mr. Kariuki (United Kingdom): I thank Special Envoy Huang Xia and Assistant Secretary-General Msuya for their briefing. I am particularly grateful to Ms. Vaweka for her powerful testimony today. I welcome the participation of the representatives of Rwanda, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Angola in this meeting.

I would like to make three points.

First, the United Kingdom is deeply concerned by the worsening conflict in eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo and the deteriorating humanitarian situation. That has resulted, as we have heard, in the large-scale displacement of people from their homes and high levels of sexual violence, including in internally displaced persons camps. The United Kingdom has

committed \$126 million in humanitarian funding to eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Secondly, the efforts of the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) remain critical. We urge all parties to immediately end attacks on peacekeeping troops. Such attacks undermine MONUSCO's ability to deliver on its mandate, including to protect civilians and to build the capacity of the Democratic Republic of the Congo's security forces. We also urge all security partners to coordinate and deconflict their activities. We call on all parties to respect the Mission's freedom of movement and emphasize our commitment to a gradual, responsible and sustainable withdrawal. We call on the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, through close coordination with MONUSCO, to assume its protection responsibilities for the civilian population in line with the joint disengagement plan.

Thirdly, the United Kingdom is concerned about the increased tensions between the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Rwanda and between Rwanda and Burundi. We have condemned the continued advance of the United Nations-sanctioned Mouvement du 23 mars (M-23) forces, and we have called on all external actors to end their support for armed groups in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. We have engaged the authorities in Kigali and Kinshasa on the need for dialogue and have urged them to use their influence to de-escalate tensions and seek a cessation of hostilities. We also encourage both Presidents Kagame and Tshisekedi Tshilombo to engage directly with each other to bring an end to the conflict.

In conclusion, the United Kingdom welcomes and encourages the continued engagement of the Great Lakes region, including the valuable work of the United Nations Special Envoy. We commend the efforts of regional leaders to encourage dialogue and de-escalation. We reiterate our support for the Nairobi and Luanda processes, and we are encouraged by progress and talks in Luanda.

There is no military solution to the conflict. We encourage every effort to bring the parties back to political processes. The United Kingdom stands ready to support all efforts in that regard.

Mr. Wood (United States of America): I thank Special Envoy Huang Xia for his informative briefing. I would also like to express my appreciation to our

briefers, Assistant Secretary-General Msuya and Ms. Vaweka. I also welcome the representatives of Rwanda and the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Secretary of State for External Relations of Angola to this meeting.

The situation in the Great Lakes region continues to deteriorate. State support to non-State armed groups is widespread. Non-State actors are growing in influence and have increased access to arms. Civilians are bearing the brunt of the violence, falling victim to bombings and, increasingly, heavy artillery.

The Mouvement du 23 mars (M-23), with the full support of the Rwandan Government and backed by the Rwandan Defence Forces, has further expanded into key areas of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and is poised to take over more at any time. The M-23 has full control over Virunga National Park, a renowned UNESCO World Heritage Site with irreplaceable biodiversity that is a life-sustaining resource for the Congolese people, especially in North Kivu. The M-23 also threatens Sake and Goma, posing risks to the security of millions of people and regional stability writ large.

Violence in the Democratic Republic of the Congo has led to one of the largest displacement crises in the world, with 2.5 million displaced in North Kivu alone. More than 25.4 million people require humanitarian assistance.

Displaced Congolese women and children are exposed to the worst forms of abuse and sexual exploitation. As the Secretary-General's report (S/2024/278) states, 113,000 cases of gender-based violence and sexual exploitation were registered in 2023, but the true number is likely far higher. That is simply unacceptable.

The international response to the United Nations humanitarian appeal has been weak at best. Of this year's \$2.58 billion appeal, only \$393 million, approximately 15 per cent, has been funded.

The United States is the largest donor to the humanitarian response in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, providing over \$294 million so far in the fiscal year of 2024. The 2023 Democratic Republic of the Congo humanitarian response plan was only 40 per cent funded, but the United States provided more than half of that amount. We call on countries that care about

the Democratic Republic of the Congo to translate their words into action and support the humanitarian appeal.

But humanitarian funding is not enough. That is why we repeat our call for armed groups and their supporters to immediately cease hostilities, uphold international humanitarian law and respect human rights, protect civilians, hold their members accountable for human rights abuses and ensure unhindered humanitarian access to those in need.

Rwanda's destabilizing actions in eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo have pushed the region even closer to war. The United States calls on Rwanda to cease its support for the M-23 and withdraw from the Democratic Republic of the Congo territory. Rwanda must halt all attacks against MONUSCO positions and equipment. Such conduct by a major United Nations peacekeeping contributor is unacceptable. We have publicly condemned incidents, intentional or not, that threaten peacekeeper safety, security and morale. We echo the Secretary-General's reminder that attacks against United Nations peacekeepers may constitute a war crime under international law.

MONUSCO must be able to carry out its protection of civilians mandate, a task that becomes increasingly daunting as operations cease in South Kivu and the security situation in North Kivu and Ituri remain extremely volatile. We strongly support the United Nations steps to ensure peacekeeper performance remains at the highest possible standards as the Mission withdraws.

We all know there is no military solution to the crisis, which is why we must support the efforts led by regional actors to resume and reinvigorate the Nairobi and Luanda processes, which offer the most viable path towards resolving 30 years of conflict in eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo. The United States appreciates the Special Envoy's use of his good offices to generate international support for those processes. We look to the Special Envoy for additional recommendations on how to make much-needed progress in that regard.

I will conclude where I began, and that is with recognition of the devastating toll the crisis has taken on the people of the Great Lakes region — the lives lost, schools closed and families torn apart. Over the past five years, the United States Government has provided over \$2.3 billion in humanitarian assistance to the people of the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

But it is not enough, and we cannot do it alone. We urge donors to scale up the humanitarian response. And we call on the leaders of the Great Lakes region to choose the path of peace and make the decision to end the conflict once and for all.

Mrs. Blokar Drobič (Slovenia): I wish to express my gratitude to Special Envoy Xia, Assistant Secretary-General Msuya and Ms. Vaweka for their sobering briefings.

The Great Lakes region has faced myriad challenges affecting its security, humanitarian and human rights situation and governance. It is clear that its stability hinges on continued cooperation within the region. The deteriorating security and humanitarian conditions in the eastern part of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, cross-border incidents and the overall activity of armed groups are deeply concerning and have serious regional implications. Allow me to raise three points in that regard.

First, we support efforts to revitalize and strengthen the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework for the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Region. Its effective implementation remains crucial for the stability, sustainable development and prosperity of the Great Lakes region. Regional diplomatic efforts must remain pivotal to conflict resolution, with the Nairobi and the Luanda processes playing significant roles. We commend the African Union, regional and subregional organizations, countries of the region, United Nations entities and the Special Envoy for their efforts to foster peace and stability in the region. However, there is a significant risk that progress may be undermined by inflammatory rhetoric. We reiterate the importance of avoiding actions that escalate tensions, including the use and spread of misinformation, disinformation, hate speech and incitement to violence. The escalating tensions between countries in the region are a significant cause for concern. We welcome the leadership of the regional actors promoting and working towards diplomatic solutions. We reiterate the call for all armed groups to cease hostilities. Support of any kind to armed groups must be halted, and the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the States in the region must be respected.

Secondly, as in many other situations, addressing the root causes and drivers of instability is essential to fostering peace and progress. Natural resources, including high-value minerals, have the potential to

significantly contribute to sustainable development throughout the region. However, practices that are often unjust and unsustainable fuel conflicts and instability. The illicit exploitation of natural resources is of critical concern, as it not only finances armed groups but also perpetuates cycles of corruption and environmental harm, undermining the region's development and stability. We encourage countries in the region to continue making tangible progress in the implementation of the Regional Certification Mechanism for minerals of the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region. Ethnic tensions and historical grievances also play a role in the region's ongoing instability. Concerted efforts to address those challenges must prioritize the rule of law, inclusive governance, upholding and protecting human rights and fundamental freedoms, and fostering equitable socioeconomic growth, including responsible resource management. In addition, the adverse impacts of climate change serve as significant drivers of instability. Severe weather events, displacement and climate-induced food insecurity, among other factors, exacerbate humanitarian needs and tensions. Implementing conflict-sensitive climate action is essential for promoting stability and security.

Thirdly, the human rights and humanitarian situation, in particular in the eastern part of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, remains deeply troubling. Civilians, especially women and children, bear the brunt of ongoing armed conflicts. We condemn the continuous violations and abuses of human rights, including sexual and gender-based violence, child recruitment and other grave violations against children, and mass displacements. Reports of shelling, sexual violence and exploitation in and around displacement camps are profoundly disturbing, and the number of cases is horrifying. Those violations must be thoroughly investigated and perpetrators held accountable. Ensuring accountability is imperative. There is an urgent need to alleviate the suffering of the populations affected, yet persistent obstacles hinder humanitarian efforts. The safety of humanitarian workers and the secure delivery of aid must be guaranteed. We call on all parties to respect and uphold their obligations under international humanitarian and human rights law.

In conclusion, we thank Special Envoy Xia for his efforts and encourage him to continue his good offices and activities aimed at providing continuous support to countries in the region, as detailed in the most recent report of the Secretary-General (S/2024/278). We

commend his work in promoting women and peace and security, empowering youth and raising awareness about gender-based violence, including in the mining sector.

Instability, insecurity, conflicts and human suffering have too long been defining characteristics of the Great Lakes. However, peace and stability should not merely be the absence of conflict, but rather the presence of equitable opportunities that ensure the sustained well-being and resilience of communities. Slovenia stands ready to work with partners to that end.

Mrs. Baeriswyl (Switzerland) (*spoke in French*): I would like to start by thanking the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for the Great Lakes Region, the Assistant Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Ms. Pétronille Vaweka for their briefings and their efforts. I would also like to thank the Peacebuilding Commission for its written opinion. I extend a warm welcome to the representatives of the States of the region.

There is no doubt that women are key players in achieving lasting peace in the Great Lakes region. Yet they are still too often marginalized. We therefore especially welcome the Presidency's call to pay particular attention to the women and peace and security agenda in our deliberations today, and we will strive to follow that instruction. With that in mind, I would like to address three points.

First, for peace to take root and be lasting, women must be at the forefront of all political processes. While women play a central role in peace movements in the Great Lakes region, as we have heard, much remains to be done to ensure their full participation, in particular in the Nairobi and Luanda processes. Switzerland therefore supports the call by the Special Envoy of the Chairperson of the African Union Commission on Women, Peace and Security to support mechanisms that ensure the meaningful participation of women in conflict prevention, mediation and resolution processes. To that end, we support the work of Ms. Vaweka and other women involved in peace dialogue processes in the eastern part of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and we thank her for her work. We also recall that greater cooperation between the players in the region is essential to defuse tensions and consolidate peace. To reduce the risk of a regional military confrontation, it is crucial that the countries concerned pursue diplomatic measures and respect their commitments. We therefore

welcome the efforts made within the framework of the regional peace processes.

Secondly, the deteriorating security and humanitarian situation has a devastating impact on women in the region. We are concerned in particular about sexual violence in and around internally displaced person sites. It is unacceptable that women and girls in severely precarious situations are being exploited and attacked. Prevention and accountability must be a priority. In that regard, Switzerland is working with communities and authorities in North and South Kivu to facilitate a holistic response to sexual and gender-based violence. We also note with concern that the humanitarian environment in the region — as we have heard today — in particular in the eastern part of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, is becoming increasingly dangerous and complex. In that context, we applaud the commitment of humanitarian and United Nations personnel, including national and locally recruited staff, and recall that they are protected by international humanitarian law. We urge all parties to allow and facilitate rapid and unhindered humanitarian access and to respect the civilian character of internally displaced person camps and the protection afforded to them.

Thirdly, women's leadership is key to preventing climate change-related conflicts. It is clear that climate change is having a negative impact on the security situation in the Great Lakes region. In addition to existing political, security and socioeconomic challenges, natural disasters exacerbated by climate change are fuelling instability. While women in the region are particularly affected by natural disasters, they are also stakeholders with a sound understanding of climate change mitigation strategies. Switzerland therefore supports the Women's Peace and Humanitarian Fund, which includes aspects of climate security in its programmes.

At a time when relations between certain States of the region are at their worst, de-escalation must be our priority. To that end, the States of the region and the members of the Security Council have a responsibility to commit fully to a political resolution of conflicts. It is in that spirit that Switzerland has been organizing Great Lakes retreats, together with the Office of the Special Envoy for several years now, the most recent of which took place last month in Bujumbura, Burundi. We thereby hope to contribute to dialogue and to the

full, equal and meaningful participation of women to promote lasting peace.

Mrs. Shino (Japan): I would like to express my gratitude to Special Envoy of the Secretary-General Xia, Assistant Secretary-General Msuya and Ms. Vaweke for their briefings. I also welcome the participation of the representatives of Angola, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Rwanda.

It is regrettable to see the continued and increasing violence by armed groups, which has further aggravated the human security crisis in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo since our most recent meeting on this subject six months ago (S/PV.9440). Tensions have been heightened between the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Rwanda, and now between Rwanda and Burundi as well. We are deeply concerned about the growing possibility of another all-out regional conflict.

The signatory countries must fully implement the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework for the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Region at the national, regional and international levels. It remains vital to bring about sustainable peace and stability in the region. Foremost among the collective commitments inscribed in the Framework, there is an urgent requirement to fulfil regional commitments, particularly to neither tolerate nor provide assistance or support of any kind to armed groups and to respect the sovereignty and territorial integrity of neighbouring countries. Reported ongoing support to armed groups only exacerbates instability on the ground and adds misery to people's lives, especially women and children. It must be stopped immediately.

We would like to reiterate that breaking the cycle of violence requires a political solution through inclusive dialogues encompassing the key demands of all sides. The meaningful participation of women and youth must be ensured in that endeavour. The Nairobi and the Luanda processes are playing a central role in the ongoing regional peace initiatives. In that regard, Japan commends Kenya's and Angola's efforts as mediators to facilitate dialogue between the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Rwanda.

All regional initiatives should be well coordinated and guided by the primacy of diplomacy. Here, Special Envoy Xia and his Office can play a significant role in promoting confidence-building among States of the region and in bringing synergy to various regional arrangements, including the East African Community,

Economic Community of Central African States, International Conference on the Great Lakes Region and Southern African Development Community. The Contact and Coordination Group should be further utilized to analyse and bridge gaps among the States of the region and promote the use of non-military measures to counter the activities of armed groups.

The complexity of the challenges that the region faces requires us to take a comprehensive, cross-border approach based on the humanitarian-development-peace nexus. Judicial cooperation is one of the areas to be prioritized through that approach for consolidating the much-needed rule of law throughout the region. We welcome the well-focused written advice submitted by the Peacebuilding Commission (PBC) in that area, and the contents should be carefully considered by all signatories of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework. We look forward to further contributions from the PBC. The revitalization of the Framework requires strong political will and tangible actions by all the stakeholders. Japan will continue to play its part for a peaceful and prosperous Great Lakes region.

Mr. Fu Cong (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): I thank Special Envoy of the Secretary-General Xia and Assistant Secretary-General Msuya for their respective briefings. I also listened attentively to the statement made by Ms. Vaweka. I welcome the presence of the representatives of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Rwanda and Angola.

Recently, there have been efforts by countries in the Great Lakes region to revitalize the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework for the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Region, jointly respond to security challenges and deepen regional cooperation. At the same time, the region's fragile security situation, escalating violence and grim humanitarian situation are truly worrisome. The Security Council and the international community as a whole should devote more attention and investment to the region and provide more support.

I would like to emphasize the following three points.

First, we call for an immediate cessation of hostilities and de-escalation of the situation. The countries in the Great Lakes region are close neighbours that share weal and woe. China applauds the leaders of Kenya, Angola and South Sudan for their good offices. However, the persistent turmoil in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo over the

recent period will erode the confidence of all parties in advancing the peace process and will jeopardize hard-won results. China hopes that all parties will seize the opportunity of the upcoming summit of the Regional Oversight Mechanism to reaffirm their solemn commitments to respecting each other's sovereignty and territorial integrity, non-interference in each other's internal affairs and not supporting armed groups. We encourage the countries of the region to implement the Nairobi and Luanda processes and urge armed groups to immediately cease violence. Differences should be resolved through dialogue, and the use of military means should be avoided.

Secondly, the international community should support regional efforts to maintain common security. China commends the efforts of the countries of the region to strengthen their cooperation in defence-related matters and border management. We acknowledge the active role of the Contact and Coordination Group in promoting disarmament, demobilization and reintegration, as well as the peacekeeping operations carried out by Uganda, Burundi and the Southern African Development Community (SADC) in eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo. The African Union will also host the second quadripartite summit with the East African Community, the Economic Community of Central African States, SADC and the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region to further enhance coordination among regional organizations and to form synergies for maintaining stability. The international community should continue to stand by efforts to solve African problems in African ways and support the improvement of relations among the countries of the region. China appreciates Special Envoy Xia's dedication and his diplomatic mediation and encourages his Office to sustain the necessary support for the regional peace process.

Thirdly, it is vital to promote common development and build a solid foundation for peace. Poverty and underdevelopment are the root causes of the protracted unrest in the Great Lakes region. The international community should help the countries of the region to address development challenges, scale up humanitarian assistance and build up national capacity for growth, with a view to promoting peace through development. Recently, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Zambia, Angola, Kenya and Uganda have deepened their cooperation in such areas as transnational infrastructure, energy extraction and movement of personnel, turning

resource endowments and demographic dividends into development advantages. The development agencies of the United Nations should provide strong support to the countries of the region in implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and make more efforts in poverty eradication, food security, education and employment, to name just a few.

China has always been a staunch supporter of Africa's collective self-empowerment and integration process, and it remains committed to accompanying the continent on its path towards modernization. Within the framework of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation, China has partnered with countries in the region to implement a large number of results-oriented projects in business and trade, infrastructure, health, education and agriculture. This fall, the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation will convene its next summit in Beijing. China stands ready to work with the rest of the international community to continuously build up Africa's capacity for independent development, support the continent in accelerating its modernization and promote regional peace, stability, development and prosperity.

Mr. Hyunwoo Cho (Republic of Korea): I extend my gratitude to Special Envoy of the Secretary-General Huang Xia, Assistant Secretary-General Joyce Msuya and Ms. Petronille Vaweka for their insightful briefings. I also welcome Ms. Esmeralda Mendonça, Angola's Secretary of State for External Relations, and the Permanent Representatives of Rwanda and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. I would also like to thank the Peacebuilding Commission (PBC) for its written advice to the Council.

We remain deeply concerned about the security situation in the Great Lakes region. Recent escalations, marked by cross-border incidents, have significantly worsened tensions, pushing the region to the brink of war. Immediate de-escalation is crucial to prevent those tensions from affecting broader regional stability.

In these troubling times, the Republic of Korea recognizes the critical role of the States of the Great Lakes region in achieving stability in Africa. That is especially true of the implementation of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework for the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Region. In that context, we would like to underline three points.

First, it is vital that all nations involved adhere to their international and regional commitments to

de-escalate regional tensions and to find negotiated solutions. The revitalization of the Nairobi and Luanda processes remains central to ending the cycle of violence and establishing enduring peace in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo. In the same vein, the revitalization of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework is also essential for addressing the root causes of instability. Harmonization and coordination of ongoing regional initiatives is also of equal importance, considering the interlinkages between the countries of the Great Lakes region. We support the African Union Peace and Security Council's call for a second quadripartite summit and follow-up actions from last June's inaugural summit of the East African Community, the Economic Community of Central African States, the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region and the Southern African Development Community.

Secondly, a particular focus should be on the ongoing challenges posed by foreign armed groups, as addressing those challenges is crucial to achieving lasting stabilization and durable peace, especially in the light of the ongoing disengagement of the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. We call on signatories to the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework to renew their commitment to implementing their agreements, including the agreement to refrain from supporting armed groups. We also encourage continued cooperation among members of the Contact and Coordination Group to explore and implement non-military measures to complement military action and promote the demobilization and repatriation of foreign combatants. We also find the written advice of the PBC on judicial cooperation in the Great Lakes region relevant, and we encourage the signatories to deepen the Great Lakes Judicial Cooperation Network.

Thirdly, the Republic of Korea is particularly alarmed by the deteriorating humanitarian situation and the unacceptable levels of sexual and gender-based violence in the region. We demand an immediate stop to all such violence and call for humanitarian assistance to be accessible and responsive to the specific needs of women and girls. Respect for international humanitarian law and international human rights law is also fundamental. Moreover, enhancing women's participation in national and local political processes is crucial to making progress towards genuine peacebuilding. We commend the efforts of the Office of

the Special Envoy to advance the women and peace and security agenda, and we urge all parties to ensure the full, equal, meaningful and safe participation of women in peace processes.

In conclusion, the Republic of Korea reaffirms its support for the United Nations Strategy for Peace Consolidation, Conflict Prevention and Conflict Resolution in the Great Lakes Region. We are committed to collaborating with all stakeholders to promote sustainable peace and stability in the region.

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

I begin by thanking Special Envoy of the Secretary-General Xia, Assistant-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs Msuya and Ms. Vaweka for their briefings, and we welcome the representatives of Rwanda, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Angola to the Chamber.

We also thank the Peacebuilding Commission for the written advice provided on judicial cooperation.

We once again bear witness to an alarming escalation of tensions in the Great Lakes region, in particular in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo. Renewed refugee influxes and internal displacement have exacerbated already dire humanitarian needs. We must scale up funding and protection for women-led organizations so that they are able to reach those most in need.

Human rights violations and abuses, continued impunity, disinformation and misinformation, hate speech and incitement to violence only serve to perpetuate an already volatile situation. In the light of the imminent risk of a military confrontation with regional implications, it is imperative that all concerned parties honour their international and regional commitments, including those commitments made under the Luanda and Nairobi processes.

The urgency of de-escalating tensions between the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Rwanda and Burundi cannot be overstated. The sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Democratic Republic of the Congo must be fully upheld. We condemn the provision of foreign military support to the Mouvement du 23 Mars and any other armed groups operating in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and we demand that such support cease immediately. We call on all the parties to address their legitimate grievances

through negotiation. The international community and the Council must unequivocally reaffirm the fact that dialogue remains the only viable solution.

We commend the leadership of President Lourenço. We also strongly advocate for a prompt meeting between President Tshisekedi Tshilombo and President Kagame to foster dialogue and reconciliation. The implementation of commitments under the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework for the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Region, alongside the Luanda and Nairobi processes, remains crucial. We appreciate the efforts to revitalize the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework, including the recent ad hoc session in Durban, South Africa, which also gave a voice to civil society.

Malta considers the full, equal, meaningful and safe participation of women a priority. Young persons also have a key role to play. We commend Special Envoy Xia for promoting women's inclusion in regional political processes, and we welcome the recommendations on that critical priority from his recent meeting in Nairobi. Despite the disproportionate impact of the conflict on women, they have been marginal to regional peace efforts. We urge the facilitators of the Nairobi and Luanda processes to appoint women mediators and gender advisors, and to leverage the African Women Leaders Network. Women possess invaluable perspectives that have yet to be fully recognized. That is especially true in environments rife with violence and hate speech.

We support initiatives promoting the participation of women and young persons in the mining sector. We also stress the need for transparent resource management to deprive armed groups of illicit income. Non-military means remain essential in addressing negative forces in the region. We call for intensified cooperation in demobilization and repatriation efforts and for enhanced collaboration through the Great Lakes Judicial Cooperation Network.

In conclusion, Malta stands resolutely with the people of the Great Lakes region. We remain committed to amplifying the voices of women and young persons, who are at the forefront of national and local efforts towards peace and security. It is therefore imperative for relevant Member States to embrace the collaborative efforts extended by regional organizations, the United Nations system and the international community. Together, we can recalibrate our common goals

in addressing the pressing challenges facing the Great Lakes.

I now resume my functions as President of the Council.

I give the floor to the representative of Rwanda.

Mr. Rwamucyo (Rwanda): Allow me, Madam President, to express my sincere appreciation for your diligent leadership of the Council during this month. I also wish to thank Mr. Huang Xia, Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for the Great Lakes Region, and Ms. Joyce Msuya, Assistant Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs, for their briefings. I also recognize the presence of Ms. Pétronille Vaweke and Ms. Esmeralda Mendonça, Secretary of State for External Relations of Angola. Let me also commend the Council Members and my fellow colleagues for their statements.

For 100 days, starting from the 7 April 2024, we are commemorating the thirtieth remembrance of the 1994 genocide against the Tutsi in Rwanda. I wish to take this opportunity to thank one and all for continuing to stand with us during this period as we remember and honour the memory of the more than 1 million innocent people who perished in the genocide.

I invoke this tragedy because the heinous 1994 genocide against the Tutsi in Rwanda continues to have an impact on the situation in the Great Lakes region of Africa. The genocidal extremists who committed genocide in Rwanda reorganized in the former Zaire — now the Democratic Republic of the Congo — and continue to spread their genocide ideology throughout the region and specifically in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo, targeting the Congolese Tutsi. Surprisingly, some actors that are fully aware of this reality tend to ignore it and instead advance a biased narrative, targeting the Government of Rwanda in an apparent systematic denial and protection of the genocidaires.

We salute the countries of the region that have continuously shown unwavering support for the political solution to the crisis in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo, in line with the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework for the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Region, and we urge the international community to support regional initiatives.

The situation in the Great Lakes region of Africa has been volatile due to the activities of various armed

groups based in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo. Most reports over the years from the United Nations and non-governmental organizations reports have documented more than 120 armed militia groups in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo. However, a more accurate figure is provided in the Democratic Republic of the Congo Government-authored Disarmament, Demobilization, Community Reintegration and Stabilization Programme report of 2023, which documented more than 250 local and 14 foreign armed groups in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

These include the Forces démocratiques de libération du Rwanda (FDLR) and its splinter groups, which poses a security and existential threat to Rwanda and are sanctioned by the United States and the Security Council sanctioned. As mentioned, the FDLR is also the mastermind of the ethnic cleansing of Congolese Tutsi and is responsible for the heinous human rights violations in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. That is a continuation of the heinous crimes that the group committed in Rwanda, which were then exported into the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo, and it is one of the root causes of the problems in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Those 250 local and 14 foreign armed groups continue to exploit governance gaps and the lack of political will by the Democratic Republic of the Congo Government to address the root causes of conflict. The fact that the genocidal FDLR and its splinter groups is embedded with the Democratic Republic of the Congo army — the Forces armées de la République démocratique du Congo (FARDC) — which arms and provides them with military, logistical, financial and political support is of serious concern to Rwanda, as the FDLR poses a direct and existential threat to Rwanda's security and territorial integrity.

The current situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, where there is a cocktail of armed groups, coupled with the Democratic Republic of the Congo Government-orchestrated proliferation of weapons and ammunition to unruly Mai-Mai militia groups, which have been dubbed Wazalendo, continues to pose insecurity in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo, destabilizes neighbouring countries and has caused a humanitarian crisis with an influx of refugees to neighbouring countries, especially Rwanda, where we have more than 100,000 Congolese refugees, Uganda and Kenya, among other countries.

The support by the Democratic Republic of the Congo Government to armed groups, including the genocidal FDLR, contradicts the spirit of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework and other regional peace initiatives.

This irresponsible militarization of the conflict has been further heightened by the deployment of the Burundi National Defence Force, the Southern African Development Community Mission to the Democratic Republic of the Congo (SAMIDRC), and mercenaries as an offensive force fighting alongside the FARDC, FDLR, and Wazalendo militia, which already have a record of human rights violations, including ethnic cleansing of Kinyarwanda-speaking Congolese. We wish to stress that any force that directly or indirectly collaborates with and supports the genocidal FDLR is considered belligerent to Rwanda, as it poses direct threat to the country's security, sovereignty, and territorial integrity.

I would like to address an issue that has been brought up in the Council. The allegation that Rwanda attacks the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) and its peacekeepers is completely irresponsible and far-fetched. It is completely fabricated. How can Rwanda attack peacekeepers when we do not have a presence in the Democratic Republic of the Congo? On the contrary, the Council has material information and facts that certain MONUSCO forces have withdrawn from their position because of constant attack and shelling by the FARDC, Wazalendo militia and the SAMIDRC. The representative of the delegation that raised this matter in the Council has possession of that information.

I also want to speak to Rwanda's role in peacekeeping. Rwanda makes significant sacrifices through its support for peacekeeping. Our young soldiers have made the ultimate sacrifice and have died in faraway lands protecting civilians and preserving world peace as Blue Helmets. We can therefore not turn around and harm Blue Helmets when we ourselves are one of the largest contributors to peacekeeping. We make tremendous sacrifices for peacekeeping, and it is not something that we take for granted.

I want to highlight that several initiatives have been undertaken to stabilize the Great Lakes region of Africa, including the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework and, recently, the Luanda and Nairobi processes. Those initiatives provide a comprehensive

solution to the crisis in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo. Rwanda signed the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework because we believe that regional cooperation can provide lasting political solutions to the conflict in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, which continues to affect the entire region. We still believe that the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework can provide a solution to this conflict, and Rwanda is fully committed to its implementation. I want to assure the Council of this.

In addition to that Framework, Rwanda also fully supports other regional efforts, especially the Nairobi and Luanda processes, which provide concrete measures to end the conflict in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Nevertheless, the region continues to see worrisome evidence of the lack of political will by the Democratic Republic of the Congo Government to end the conflict. The continued militarization and evident preference of a military solution by the Democratic Republic of the Congo Government should be a cause of serious concern for the Council.

The persistent failure to address the root causes of the conflict has allowed the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo to remain a breeding ground for armed groups, destabilizing the region for decades. The Democratic Republic of the Congo has a long history of externalizing and blaming others, including its neighbours, for its internal problems. This comes back to the issue of lack of ownership, political will and commitment to genuinely address its internal contradictions. The Democratic Republic of the Congo has had many political, security, and governance challenges for decades. Blaming its neighbours, especially scapegoating Rwanda, will not take those problems away. It is only by addressing the root causes of the conflict in the Democratic Republic of the Congo that sustainable peace, security, and stability can be attained.

I would like to emphasize that a military solution will not succeed under any circumstances. No level of militarization or State-orchestrated violence can provide a sustainable solution to the deep-rooted political problems in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and in the region. All efforts to address political problems with a military solution have previously failed and continue to plunge the region into unending security and humanitarian crises.

Rwanda is also alarmed by the growing hate speech and inhumane atrocities targeting the Congolese Tutsi community in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo. Those acts of ethnic cleansing and deliberate hounding of a targeted group from their ancestral lands and denying them inherent citizenship rights and property should not be overlooked or underestimated by members of the Security Council, especially given the history of our region.

Rwanda's position in support of a peaceful resolution to the conflict has always been clear. We have been, however, disturbed by the continued political statements by the Presidents of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Burundi calling for regime change in Rwanda. We take those threats seriously given the prevailing cooperation between those Governments and the genocidal FDLR.

I wish to emphasize that the rhetoric around the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, without evoking the sovereignty and territorial integrity of neighbouring countries affected by the conflict, is completely misplaced and aimed at fuelling conflict. I want to emphasize that every country's territorial integrity matters, so it cannot be one or the other.

In conclusion, achieving a peaceful Great Lakes region requires addressing the root causes and drivers of the conflict in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Rwanda remains fully committed to playing a constructive role in the search for peace and stability in the region. The Great Lakes region of Africa has tremendous potential, as was said in this Chamber, and strong cultural and geographical connections. We strongly believe that peace and stability is a core prerequisite for growth, prosperity and wealth creation in the region. The Security Council can fully count on Rwanda. We are committed to working with all partners and stakeholders towards a peaceful resolution of the conflict in eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo in line with regional mechanisms and the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework.

The President: I now give floor to the representative of the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Mr. Mukongo (Democratic Republic of the Congo) (*spoke in French*): As this is the first time I am participating in the Council's work this month of April, allow me to congratulate Malta on its assumption of the presidency of the Council and to wish you, Madam

President, on behalf of my delegation and on my own behalf, every success in leading the Council's work during this crucial time in the history of humankind.

I feel all the more honoured to represent my Government in this midterm review of the Addis Ababa Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework Agreement for the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Region, as I appreciate your decision, Madam President, to examine the situation in the Great Lakes region with a particular emphasis on promoting the participation of women in regional mediation efforts for peace.

I would also like to pay tribute to His Excellency António Guterres, Secretary-General, for his sustained commitment to peace in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the region. I would like to add to those introductory remarks a very special word for Ms. Joyce Msuya, Assistant Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Deputy Emergency Relief Coordinator. I would also like to welcome the presence at this meeting of Her Excellency Ms. Esmeralda Bravo Mendonça, Secretary of State for External Relations of the Republic of Angola, and Ms. Pétronille Vaweke, my compatriot, who has been a peace mediator in Ituri and is the recipient of the American peace award Women Building Peace. Finally, I would like to thank Ambassador Huang Xia, Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for the Great Lakes Region, for the quality of his briefing this morning.

My delegation has taken note of the Secretary-General's report on the implementation of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework for the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Region (S/2024/278) of 29 March 2024. We have a number of observations and comments on that report, to which I shall return later.

For the moment, I invite you, Madam President, to note with me that the armed aggression to which my country has fallen victim in its eastern part has led to the displacement of more than 7 million Congolese. The statistics are sickening. Over 70 per cent of them are women and girls. Deprived of their basic needs, those Congolese women have lost all human dignity, many of them having been subjected to rape, sexual violence and other cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment, in particular in mining areas.

That situation, with its a heavy toll in human lives of 15 million deaths, is the work of a neighbouring

country, Rwanda, whose obsession with and craving for the abundant strategic materials in my country's subsoil has caused it to lose all reason. That neighbouring country is stubbornly pursuing its criminal enterprise for the sake of colossal economic profits.

It is for that reason that all regional and international peace initiatives have come to nothing. That is particularly true of the peace plan resulting from the Luanda and Nairobi processes, which Rwanda has deliberately blocked in order to gain time and attempt to realize its excessive ambition of creating a zone of influence in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, which it would transform into a colony of exploitation and settlement and from which it would control Congolese institutions. Rwanda's actions are unacceptable and violate regional peace and the terms of the Addis Ababa Framework Agreement, to which Rwanda freely subscribed.

The major concern of the Congolese authorities in general and of the President of the Republic in particular remains the restoration of peace in the eastern part of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. My delegation therefore expects the Democratic Republic of the Congo's bilateral and multilateral partners to provide sincere and responsible support, not only in the restoration of the much-flouted dignity of Congolese women in general, but also in the ongoing peacebuilding efforts aimed at re-establishing the authority of the State under the leadership of the President of the Republic, His Excellency Félix-Antoine Tshisekedi Tshilombo. Restoring the dignity of Congolese women should certainly be a priority, but such action should also help to overcome prejudice and stereotypes, so that Congolese women who are victims of violent armed conflict can put their experience to good use and play a decisive role in conflict prevention and resolution.

Allow me to emphasize that the Democratic Republic of the Congo has fully endorsed the women and peace and security agenda, enshrined in resolution 1325 (2000) of 31 October 2000. As women in the Great Lakes region are the main victims of war, aggression and conflict, it is important and right that they should also be involved in conflict management.

The inclusion of women leaders in regional strategies for peace, reconstruction and mediation processes throughout the Great Lakes region is relevant because their participation in conflict prevention and resolution could have a positive impact before, during

and after a conflict. In that regard, my delegation supports the efforts made by the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for the Great Lakes Region of Africa to indeed support and strengthen the capacities of women mediators of the Regional Women's Forum of the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region.

Finally, in that connection, it should be acknowledged that the Addis Ababa Framework Agreement did not adequately include the issue of gender in its implementation. For a lasting resolution of conflicts, the concept of gender must be included and better expanded upon in peacebuilding processes in the Great Lakes. The ongoing process of revitalizing the Framework Agreement could provide an opportunity to bring it into alignment with that reality.

With respect to the implementation of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework for the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Region, all signatory countries are required to reaffirm their political will to advance the effective implementation of regional commitments, in particular the commitment not to tolerate, assist or support the armed groups in any way whatsoever.

The Democratic Republic of the Congo is actively participating in the ongoing efforts to revitalize the Framework and stands ready to support the road map that emerged from the retreat held in Durban, South Africa, in November 2023, as reviewed on 1 and 2 February by the Technical Support Committee, before it is validated at the next high-level meeting of the Regional Oversight Mechanism, scheduled to take place in Uganda.

On the other hand, with guaranteed impunity, Rwanda and the Mouvement du 23 mars (M-23) stubbornly refuse to honour any commitments to implement the peace plan resulting from the Nairobi and Luanda processes, to submit to the recommendations of the international community or to respond to the repeated appeals by the Council, the African Union, the African regional communities and bilateral partners to withdraw from the positions occupied in the Congolese territories of Rutshuru, Masisi and Nyiragongo.

The Democratic Republic of the Congo continues to support regional efforts, in particular the Luanda and Nairobi processes. My country reiterates its request to the Council to support those processes by maintaining maximum pressure on Rwanda and the M-23. Strengthening judicial cooperation in the Great Lakes

region to combat impunity at the regional level through the full implementation of the Kinshasa Declaration on Enhancing Judicial Cooperation in the Great Lakes Region, signed in June 2022, is an important step. The Democratic Republic of the Congo also reiterates its appeal to the Council, in the light of the threats posed by foreign armed groups, to the effect that each country in the region must put in place mechanisms and establish conditions to deal with its own rebels within its own territory, as they have pillaged the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo for too long. At its next meeting, the Council should ask the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for the Great Lakes Region of Africa to report in detail on that specific issue.

In conclusion, I would like to reassure the Council that the Democratic Republic of the Congo, a peace-loving country that respects the provisions of international law and the values of the Charter of the United Nations, will continue to contribute constructively to regional peace efforts. The Democratic Republic of the Congo will not abandon its vision. It will seek to strengthen its economic and inclusive cooperation only with serious and sincere partners, with the aim of establishing a successful Great Lakes region that opposes all forms of brazen exploitation.

Allow me a few words to bring clarity to the confusion that the representative of Rwanda must have sown in the minds of the members of the Council about a matter that was previously quite clear. He introduced unverified concepts that amount to falsehoods.

First, he stated that the 1994 genocide had spillover effects in the territory of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. I would like to highlight a few things in that regard. It is entirely true that the Rwandan genocide had greater adverse effects on the Democratic Republic of the Congo than on Rwanda, for one simple reason — after the genocide occurred in Rwanda, the Democratic Republic of the Congo suffered repeated massacres at the hands of Rwandan troops in its territory. I would note that more than 15 million Congolese have died since then, whereas the Rwandan genocide resulted in only 800,000 deaths, and that did not include just Tutsis. Moderate Hutus and a third tribal group were also targeted in the genocide. Let us not pull our punches and call it just a Tutsi genocide — it was a Rwandan genocide.

Secondly, if we are to search out the root causes of the current conflict, our current subject of discussion,

we must address the genocide. But the genocide was not spontaneous; it began with an assassination, that of the Hutu President of Rwanda, Mr. Habyarimana. That is what started the genocide. And who was behind the assassination? That is what we mean by the root causes of the current conflict — who killed President Habyarimana? That was done in Rwanda, a Rwandan affair, and not in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Allow me to go back to a matter I have heard a great deal about in the Chamber, at the risk of upsetting the members of the Council. Some would say that the Wazalendo are part of the negative forces and allege that they are a highly dangerous movement. The Wazalendo are young Congolese patriots who have suffered the horrors of war, many of whose parents were raped by Rwandan troops in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and whose parents were killed before their eyes. These are young people who suffered the horrors of war and who today protect their country as their sole means of survival. Members heard the briefing by the representative of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs — how many children have been thrown out onto the street in the areas of Nyiragongo, Rutshuru and Masisi? Those children will become the Wazalendo of tomorrow, but they must not be called negative forces. It would be disingenuous to consider the victims of armed aggression who defend themselves to be an armed group. They are not an armed group.

Lastly, we have always contributed to peacekeeping by respecting every agreement we have signed. But Rwanda has never done that, as we see from the presence of its troops on Congolese territory as we speak. The representative of the United States did well to demand that Rwanda withdraw its troops from the territory of Democratic Republic of the Congo. They are not doing so and, instead, brandish genocide and hate speech. We will not listen to them forever.

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

Ms. Mendonça (Angola) (*spoke in Portuguese; English text provided by the delegation*): At the outset, I would like to congratulate the Republic of Malta on its presidency of the Council for the month of April. Let me also commend the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for the Great Lakes Region, Mr. Huang Xia, for presenting the report of the Secretary-General on the “Implementation of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework for the Democratic Republic of the Congo

and the Region” (S/2024/278), a document that offers a comprehensive overview of the most recent peace and security developments in that country and their regional implications. My thanks also go to Ms. Joyce Msuya, Assistant Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs, and Ms. Pétronille Vaweke, the representative of civil society, for their respective informative briefings.

The Republic of Angola is very concerned about the persistent instability in the Great Lakes region, in particular the continuing deterioration of the security and humanitarian situation in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo since December 2023. The increase in military action by the Mouvement du 23 mars (M-23), including the occupation of new areas in Congolese territory, the resumption of attacks against civilian populations and the violation of human rights, constitutes a serious and flagrant violation of the Luanda and Nairobi Processes, thus undermining diplomatic efforts and initiatives for peace and stability in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the region. We therefore call on States and other relevant actors to exert their political influence on the M-23 and other negative forces in the region with a view to pushing for the immediate cessation of all hostilities on the ground and reinforcing their commitment to peace.

The Republic of Angola remains committed to actively contributing to reaching a political and diplomatic solution aimed at achieving sustainable peace in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the region, as evidenced by the report of the Secretary-General. In fact, in his capacity as African Union Champion for Peace and Reconciliation in Africa and President of the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region, His Excellency Mr. João Manuel Gonçalves Lourenço, President of the Republic of Angola, has been developing a series of diplomatic initiatives with the aim of promoting peace and stability, reducing political tension in the region and re-establishing an environment of trust between the parties concerned through the Luanda and Nairobi processes.

Based on the African Union’s mandate to mediate the current political crisis between the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Rwanda, the Angolan President called for a mini-summit on the sidelines of the Summit of Heads of State and Government of the African Union in Addis Ababa on 16 February. The event, which was attended by the Presidents of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Rwanda, regional leaders and His Excellency Mr. Moussa Faki

Mahamat, Chairman of the African Union Commission, discussed ways of restoring the cessation of hostilities and facilitating direct talks between the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Rwanda to prevent the current political crisis from spreading into a regional conflict.

On 17 February, His Excellency President João Manuel Gonçalves Lourenço followed up his diplomatic mediation efforts by holding two separate bilateral meetings with his counterparts from the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Rwanda in Addis Ababa. Continuing his diplomatic initiatives, he met once again in the Angolan capital, Luanda, with His Excellency Félix-Antoine Tshisekedi Tshilombo, President of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, on 27 February and with His Excellency Paul Kagame, President of the Republic of Rwanda, on 11 March. Both leaders expressed their willingness to hold direct talks soon. It was in that context that Angola promoted and facilitated the holding of a ministerial meeting in Luanda on 21 March between the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Rwanda, which took place in an atmosphere of mutual trust. Consultations are currently under way for a second meeting to address concrete proposals for the future summit of the Presidents of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Rwanda.

The implementation of the Luanda road map is strategically important for achieving peace, stability and security in the east of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, as it provides clear paths for a ceasefire and the disarmament, withdrawal and demobilization of armed groups in the region. Another relevant factor is the involvement of neighbouring countries and regional and international organizations to ensure the successful implementation of the road map.

Efforts to achieve lasting peace in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Great Lakes region must continue to be based on the following assumptions: first, the effective implementation of the decisions resulting from the Luanda and Nairobi processes, as complementary regional reference mechanisms; secondly, redoubling diplomatic efforts to promote and deepen direct dialogue between the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Rwanda, with a view to restoring mutual trust; thirdly, the resumption of joint verification mechanisms for the normalization of political relations between the two countries; fourthly, the complete suppression of support to negative forces that threaten the stability of the States in the region; fifthly, the implementation of a monitored ceasefire

accompanied by a process of disengagement of forces; and sixthly, the revitalization of the regional and international partnership, including the African Union and the United Nations, to provide the necessary assistance and support for the effective implementation of the region's peace initiative.

The Republic of Angola attaches particular importance to implementing the results of the quadripartite summit of the East African Community, the Economic Community of Central African States, the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region and the Southern African Development Community, held under the auspices of the African Union in Luanda on 27 June 2023, the aim of which was to coordinate and harmonize actions and initiatives for peace in the

region. It is important to stress that the relatively long ceasefire period in the east of the Democratic Republic of the Congo for much of 2022 and 2023 was the result of the combined coordination efforts among all the relevant parties in that process. In that regard, we believe that it would be appropriate to hold a second quadripartite summit as soon as possible to monitor the progress achieved in implementing the commitments made at the first summit.

In conclusion, the Republic of Angola will continue to prioritize dialogue as one of the main political and diplomatic instruments for reaching a political and sustainable solution to the complex problem of conflict and insecurity in the Great Lakes region.

The meeting rose at 12.20 p.m.