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<i>President:</i>	Mr. França Danese.	(Brazil)
<i>Members:</i>	Albania	Mr. Spasse
	China	Mr. Dai Bing
	Ecuador	Mr. Pérez Loose
	France	Mr. Olmedo
	Gabon	Mrs. Ngyema Ndong
	Ghana	Mr. Agyeman
	Japan	Mrs. Shino
	Malta	Mr. Camilleri
	Mozambique	Mr. Kumanga
	Russian Federation.	Ms. Evstigneeva
	Switzerland	Mrs. Chanda
	United Arab Emirates	Ms. Alrahma
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland . .	Mr. Eckersely
	United States of America.	Mrs. Thomas-Greenfield

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/2023/730)

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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/2023/730)

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

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the following briefers to participate in this meeting: Mr. Huang Xia, Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for the Great Lakes Region; His Excellency Mr. João Samuel Caholo, Executive Secretary of the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region; and Ms. Joséphine Malimukono, President of the Concertation des Collectifs des Associations féminines de la région des Grands Lacs.

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

I wish to draw the attention of Council members to document S/2023/730, 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 thank the Security Council for the opportunity to present the most recent 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/2023/730).

Council members will recall that when I last appeared before the Council (see S/PV.9307) I expressed concern about the deteriorating security situation in the east of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the equally worrisome rise in tensions in the Great Lakes region. Unfortunately, six months on, the security and humanitarian situations have not improved. On the

contrary, in eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo, we are witnessing a resumption of large-scale hostilities in Masisi and Rutshuru in North Kivu. The risk of a direct confrontation between the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Rwanda, which continue to accuse each other of supporting enemy armed groups — the Mouvement du 23 mars, on the one hand, and the Forces démocratiques de libération du Rwanda, on the other — remains real. The military build-up in both countries, the absence of direct high-level dialogue and the persistence of hate speech are all worrisome signs that we cannot ignore. In addition, the worrisome expansion of the Allied Democratic Forces is threatening regional integrity with its terrorist connections.

We remain equally concerned by the serious deterioration of the humanitarian situation in eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo, with the ever-increasing number of displaced persons and refugees, the vast majority of whom are girls, boys, women and men whose hopes and rights have been virtually destroyed. Their suffering must end. We therefore reiterate our call to the entire international community to step up humanitarian assistance and take urgent measures to facilitate the return of the displaced persons to their homes, and above all, to ensure the education of the children, who are tomorrow's future.

I would also like to take the opportunity to commend the ongoing commitment of the actors in the region and the international community for its tireless efforts to promote peace and security in the Great Lakes region. I would like to mention, in particular President Evariste Ndayishimiye of Burundi; President João Lourenço of Angola; and the Facilitator of the East African Community, former President Uhuru Kenyatta. I would also like to pay tribute to the efforts of the African Union, which convened a quadripartite summit in June to strengthen coordination between the Luanda and Nairobi processes. That high-level meeting was followed by a meeting of the Chiefs of Staff of the quadripartite members, on 6 October in Addis Ababa, which was also aimed at coordinating the modalities for the deployment and operations of military forces in eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo. Those two initiatives are encouraging and should, in my view, be supported by the Security Council, as they reflect the determination of the States and organizations in the region to prioritize a political solution, while at the same time making military preparations for the possible use of force against armed groups that refuse to lay down their weapons.

For several months now, as part of the Secretary-General's good offices and my mandate, I have visited several countries in the region, in particular Angola, Burundi, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Rwanda and Uganda, to advocate peace, try to further strengthen confidence and mobilize all partners to find a peaceful solution to the region's challenges. In that regard, efforts to revitalize the Addis Ababa Framework Agreement provide an opportunity to mobilize all stakeholders and work further to achieve the Agreement's objectives. In that connection, my Office will be organizing a retreat from 31 October to 1 November in Durban, South Africa, in cooperation with the African Union, in accordance with the decision of the eleventh high-level meeting of the Regional Oversight Mechanism to assess the Agreement, 10 years after its adoption by the signatory countries. The Framework Agreement remains central to peace and security in the Great Lakes region.

In the same vein, I will continue to advocate non-military measures, in particular through the operational cell of the Contact and Coordination Group, which is working to complement the ongoing peace processes with a view to repatriating foreign armed groups to their countries of origin. I would also like to take this opportunity to reiterate my call to all armed groups to lay down their weapons and to the Congolese armed groups to rejoin the Disarmament, Demobilization, Community Recovery and Stabilization Programme.

I would also like to remind Council members that the United Nations is committed to strengthening peace and security in the Great Lakes region through the United Nations Strategy for Peace Consolidation, Conflict Prevention and Conflict Resolution in the Great Lakes Region, which includes 14 flagship initiatives whose effective implementation is aimed precisely at tackling the root causes of instability in the region. I therefore call on all partners to fill the funding gap for that Strategy, the comparative advantage of which has been proven.

In that respect, at a high-level forum on the implementation of the regional strategy on artisanal gold, held in September in Kinshasa and supported by my Office and the Secretariat of the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region (ICGLR), I appealed to all ICGLR member States to implement the strategy and the regional tracing mechanism arising from it, given the strong correlation between

the illicit exploitation and trade of artisanal gold and the financing of armed groups operating in eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo. In that vein, the ICGLR Executive Secretary and I have just concluded a joint mission to China aimed at mobilizing greater political, diplomatic, financial and technical support from partners for transparent governance of natural resources, in line with the recommendations of the Khartoum workshop on natural resources.

Similarly, through the flagship initiative on the involvement of women in peace and security issues, the United Nations in the region continues to promote the effective participation of women, as well as young people, in political dialogue initiatives. They have an important role to play and a responsibility to shoulder in the search for peace and security in the region. In that regard, my Office will continue to support advocacy missions by women leaders, the most recent of which took place at the end of August in Kinshasa and Goma, with the goal of strengthening the protection of women in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo and ensuring a greater role for them in peace processes.

I would be remiss if I failed to reaffirm the importance of prioritizing diplomacy and pursuing dialogue to find an appropriate solution for overcoming the current challenges to bring about for peace, stability and prosperity in the Great Lakes region. We need a political solution more than ever. We need dialogue and stepped-up efforts with the parties concerned so that they can demonstrate restraint, maintain open channels of communication and implement the steps adopted within the framework of the Luanda and Nairobi processes. Military solutions alone will not be enough to build a strong and lasting peace. Political will, good faith and a genuine desire to end the suffering of the people are the factors that will ultimately — I am certain — make the difference, in keeping with the letter and spirit of the Addis Ababa Framework Agreement.

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

I now give the floor to Mr. Caholo.

Mr. Caholo: As my colleague Ambassador Huang Xia has gone into detail on the various initiatives being taken in the Great Lakes region, I will limit my focus to what is currently happening in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo. The security and humanitarian situation in the eastern part of the country is tense and unpredictable, following the resumption

of clashes between the Mouvement du 23 mars (M-23) and local armed groups that describe themselves as Wazalendo. Those clashes have been reported in the eastern part of Masisi and the north-western part of Rutshuru, in violation of the current Rwanda ceasefire of 23 of November 2022. The security situation is also characterized by targeted assassinations and the killing of civilians by the M-23 in areas under its control. The most recent killings were verified by the regional verification mechanisms of the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region (ICGLR) and the East African Community. They took place in 15 July in Rubona, Bukombo groupment in Rutshuru territory, where the M-23 killed 12 unarmed civilians, including women and children, and in Marangara, where 11 civilians were killed on 16 August 2023. Other killings also recently took place on 9 October 2023 in Bushenge, six kilometres to the south of Rumangabo in Rutshuru territory where eight civilians were killed.

The regional verification mechanisms of the ICGLR and the East African Community requested by the East African Community regional force to conduct the verification mission were prevented from accessing the area concerned on 12 October by the M-23 at a roadblock that they had set up in Mwaro. The Luanda road map and the Nairobi process are at a standstill following the M-23's refusal to withdraw from all the areas that it occupies to precanton at Rumangabo before the Kundu cantonment, as decided by the Luanda road map. The M-23's refusal to withdraw and its reoccupation of certain areas previously handed over to the East African Community regional forces, which is part of those processes, has led to tensions between the M-23 and the armed forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo in Kanyamahoro and clashes between the M-23 and the Wazalendo local armed groups in Masisi and Rutshuru territories, causing the displacement of people, hence making the humanitarian situation even more critical. Some communication and supply routes that had already been opened are at risk of being closed as a result of the situation.

I have shared my report in which I describe the continued tense situation in South Kivu, Ituri province and Haut Uele. I have also shared with the Security Council an assessment of the current situation in the Central African Republic, Kenya and the Sudan, and called on the Security Council to pay greater attention to what is happening in those countries. The situation in the Sudan is threatening that country's existence

as an independent State, given the ongoing conflict between the two rival stakeholders — the Sudanese Armed Forces and the Rapid Support Forces.

Lastly, I draw the attention of the Security Council to the situation involving the activities of Ahlu Sunna Wal Jama'a-Islamic State in northern Mozambique, which continue to negatively impact the security situation of the neighbouring Mtwara and Ruvuma regions of the United Republic of Tanzania.

Let me conclude with the following consideration. There are currently two initiatives being spearheaded by the subregional organizations: the Luanda road map, under the leadership His Excellency Mr. João Manuel Gonçalves Lourenço, current Chair of the ICGLR, African Union Champion for Peace and Reconciliation in Africa and the mediator between the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Rwanda. The other initiative is being led by Mr. Evariste Ndayishimiye, President of Burundi and Chair of the East African Community. There is also the initiative being led by former President Uhuru Kenyatta. We call on the Security Council and the United Nations to support those initiatives in order to impress on all armed groups the importance of laying down their arms and supporting the initiatives that are in progress under the subregional leadership supervised by the United Nations and the African Union.

As I end this briefing, I want to appeal strongly to the international community to support the institutions on the ground, such as the ICGLR and the Office of the Special Envoy for the Great Lakes, in implementing all those initiatives. In the past few months we have demonstrated that strategic partnerships between United Nations bodies and local, regional and subregional organizations can have a positive impact on implementing and harmonizing the various existing initiatives.

The President: I thank Mr. Caholo for his briefing.
(*spoke in French*)

I now give the floor to Ms. Malimukono.

Ms. Malimukono (*spoke in French*): I thank the Council for this opportunity to speak on behalf of civil society on the situation in the Great Lakes region and the issues that are important to it. I have the pleasure and honour to represent the women of Burundi, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Rwanda.

The Concertation des Collectifs des Associations Féminines de la Région des Grands Lacs (COCAFEM/GL), which I have the honour to represent today, is a network that brings together 11 women's collectives from Burundi, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Rwanda — made up of 1,861 associations — and whose alliance extends to other countries in the region.

As the Council is aware, the Great Lakes region has been experiencing crises and movements of people between countries, particularly Burundi, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Rwanda and their various neighbours, for more than two decades. The high level of militarization and the recurring conflicts in the region threaten its stability and have had severe consequences in terms of deteriorating social cohesion and especially for the protection of civilians, women, children, persons with disabilities and older people. The impacts of those repeated crises on women and girls are many. Population displacement disrupts children's education at both the primary and secondary levels, and girls are twice as likely as boys to be unable to access school in conflict zones. As a result, the conflict situations in the Great Lakes region amplify the inequalities between men and women, and many children are currently living in difficult circumstances. By the end of August, our teams in Goma, in North Kivu province in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, had recorded at least 27,441 children displaced, of whom 15,158 were girls and 12,283 were boys. Of those, 250 — 148 girls and 102 boys — had disabilities and 210 — 60 boys and 150 girls, including 71 adolescent mothers — were heads of households.

Three major problems emerge from the precarious security situation in the region — the low cohesion of cross-border communities; poor protection of women and girls against sexual and gender-based violence and limited political spaces and spaces for dialogue for women's voices. The role of civil-society organizations therefore becomes crucial and should be further reinforced not only to build real bridges between communities and Governments but also to create spaces for accountability and dialogue between them, raise awareness among communities regarding a culture of peace, tolerance and non-violence and mobilize citizens as possessors of rights.

COCAFEM/GL and its allies in the region would like to take this opportunity to acknowledge the efforts made by the States in the Great Lakes region under the guidance of the guarantors of the Peace, Security and

Cooperation Framework Agreement for the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Region. However, women's movements would like to be more involved in the high-level consultation and exchange frameworks aimed at establishing lasting peace and security.

To that end, we call for the holding of a special session on the situation in the Great Lakes at which we, as women, can present our peace and security agenda; support for marginalized groups, including women, young people and persons with disabilities, through cross-border projects funded by partners to contribute more effectively to dialogue, the peace process, conflict resolution and peacebuilding; the equal, direct and significant participation of civil society, young people, women and persons with disabilities in the region in all peace processes supported by the United Nations and international partners; support for local and community peace-building initiatives based on gender-sensitive needs in line with the programme of action for women and peace and security in the Great Lakes region; support for initiatives responding to humanitarian emergencies for displaced women, particularly those resulting from the conflicts in North Kivu; support for the creation of a regional mechanism for the involvement of women in mining and women's entrepreneurship, including intra-community and cross-border trade; the promotion and institutionalization of a community psychosocial approach in peace and security efforts, conflict prevention and the fight against sexual and gender-based violence.

In order to improve the protection of displaced women and children from abuse and violence in camps and host families but also to ensure their right to education, we recommend strengthening provisions to counter all forms of gender-based violence by ensuring that the perpetrators are arrested and brought to justice and by strictly enforcing the existing laws. We also recommend restoring destroyed school infrastructure and equipment, and the implementation of mechanisms for the safe and easy integration of boys and girls into the school structures of their host communities.

Given the global context, which includes various challenges, we call for the Security Council to continue to prioritize the situation of women and girls in the Great Lakes region. That is the message that the Concertation des Collectives des Associations Féminines de la Région des Grands Lacs wishes to express in one voice, in the hopes that our plea will be heard.

In conclusion, I would like to express my appreciation for the cooperation with the Office of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for the Great Lakes Region and the support of the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region. Our gratitude also goes to Ambassadors Huang Xia and João Caholo for their continued support to COCAFEM/GL, as well as to the Special Envoy of the Chairperson of the African Union Commission on Women, Peace and Security and other women leaders from the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the region who continue to advocate loudly for the inclusion and protection of women in the Great Lakes region.

The President (*spoke in French*): I thank Ms. Malimukono for her briefing.

(*spoke in English*)

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

Mr. Olmedo (France) (*spoke in French*): I thank the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General, the Executive Secretary of the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region (ICGLR) and Ms. Malimukono for their briefings.

I wish to make three points today.

First, 10 years after its signing in Addis Ababa, the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework for the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Region remains more essential than ever to peace in the region. Indeed, violence between armed groups and against the civilian populations continues at the expense of too many lives and forced displacements. The ceasefire in force since March between the Mouvement du 23 mars (M-23) and the Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo is fragile. We call on all actors to preserve the ceasefire, which is an important achievement for security in the region. France recalls three of the cardinal principles of the Framework for the region: not supporting armed groups; respecting the sovereignty and territorial integrity of neighbouring States; and not harbouring or providing protection to people accused of crimes and violations of international law. Those principles must be respected by all parties. Yesterday, the Council adopted a presidential statement (S/PRST/2023/5) on the situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, which is a positive sign. The Council took note of the request from the authorities of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and committed to

deciding on the measures necessary for the withdrawal of the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) in the coming weeks. The Council expressed its concern about the foreign support provided to the M-23, requesting the immediate withdrawal of this support, as well as the withdrawal of military support provided to the Forces démocratiques de libération du Rwanda. France welcomes the support provided by the United Nations to regional peace processes, in particular those of Luanda and Nairobi. We encourage coordination efforts undertaken under the auspices of the African Union within the quadripartite format. Those efforts embody the spirit of African solutions to African problems, which France fully supports.

Secondly, the region must mobilize, with the support of the international community, to respond to the humanitarian situation and combat the root causes of conflicts. The report of the Secretary-General (S/2023/730) is clear: the humanitarian situation in the region is worsening further. Access for humanitarian actors and for the United Nations agencies, funds and programmes must be ensured. The region can count on our support. I recall in that regard that the European Union (EU) has implemented an airlift to Goma that allows the transport of medical and food supplies. The protection of human rights and the fight against impunity are among the conditions necessary for lasting peace. We welcome the referral to the International Criminal Court to investigate the violence committed in North Kivu since the beginning of 2022. Efforts must be redoubled to prevent hate speech and incitement to violence. France also condemns the looting and trafficking of natural resources in the region, which fuels the activities of armed groups. The Great Lakes States and their partners must unite to develop responsible and sustainable value chains that benefit the populations. Regional certification mechanisms must be applied by all parties.

For my final point, I would like to reaffirm that the European Union remains strongly committed to promoting peace, democracy and sustainable development in the Great Lakes region. That is why European ministers adopted on 20 February a renewed European Union strategy for the region. That strategy seeks to address the root causes of instability. It addresses the security situation, good management of resources and regional integration. The European Union stands ready to support security sector reform.

Border management and the reintegration of former combatants are other priorities identified. This strategy is based on the Joint Vision for 2030 adopted at the European Union-African Union Summit held during the French presidency of the EU. It is aligned with the United Nations Strategy for the Great Lakes Region and, in that regard, we welcome the work led by the Special Envoy.

Ms. Evstigneeva (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): We thank Mr. Huang Xia, Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for the Great Lakes Region, and Mr. João Samuel Caholo, Executive Secretary of the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region (ICGLR), for their briefings. We have also listened carefully to Ms. Joséphine Malimukono.

The situation in the Great Lakes region is still significantly influenced by the events in the eastern provinces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The deterioration of the security situation in eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo is significantly compounding the situation broadly in the region, leading to worsening humanitarian circumstances. Of particular concern are the actions of the Mouvement du 23 mars (M-23), as well as the tensions between Kinshasa and Kigali. This worsening situation has also been exploited by other illegal armed groups, who are increasing their unlawful activity, attacking civilians, exploiting natural resources with impunity and strengthening their positions in the east of the country. Those groups include the Coopérative pour le développement du Congo, the Forces démocratiques de libération du Rwanda (FDLR), the Zaire militia, the Résistance pour un État de droit au Burundi and the Mayi-Mayi. There has also been a significant increase in the activities of the Allied Democratic Forces, an Islamic group, the fighters of which are increasingly often using terrorist methods and improvised explosive devices. We call on illegal armed groups to end this violence, hand over their weapons and participate in disarmament, demobilization and reintegration programmes, without preconditions.

We also support the efforts of the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) and its leadership to ensure peace and protect civilians. The presence of blue helmets in the conflict zone remains an important stabilizing factor. We agree with the Special Envoy's conclusions on the subject of MONUSCO whereby, with further consideration by Kinshasa and the United Nations on the reconfiguration and gradual withdrawal

of the Mission from the country, it is important to take into account the evolution of the situation on the ground and the views of the host country. We are convinced that security and stability in the east of the Democratic Republic of the Congo is in the interest of all States in the Great Lakes region.

In our view, the regional efforts undertaken through the Nairobi and Luanda negotiation processes, as well as those undertaken by the East African Community presidency are of crucial importance. We also note the intentions of member States of the Southern African Development Community to assist in the peace process in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo. It is clear that military methods will not achieve a lasting normalization in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Great Lakes region. Without direct and open dialogue between the main players in the region, and without taking into account everyone's security interests, the spiral of violence will only worsen. We call for a comprehensive cessation of hostilities and the comprehensive fulfilment of the Luanda road map in order to create the conditions to promote an inter-Congolese negotiations process and re-establish good neighbourly relations between the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Rwanda. It is also important to intensify efforts to implement the fundamental Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework in the eastern part of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Great Lakes region. We welcome the African Union's focus on revitalizing this document.

For our part, we will continue to support the stabilization of the Great Lakes region by promoting dialogue and constructive cooperation among all players. We will also continue to support the activities of Special Envoy Huang Xia aimed at reducing tensions in the region.

Mr. Eckersley (United Kingdom): I thank Special Envoy Huang Xia for his briefing. I also thank Mr. Caholo and Ms. Malimukono for their contributions.

The United Kingdom is deeply concerned about the intensifying violence and deteriorating humanitarian situation in the Great Lakes region and the recent escalation in fighting between armed groups in North Kivu. We also remain concerned about the worsening humanitarian situation in the Great Lakes region, including the large-scale displacement of people from their homes and high levels of sexual violence, including in internally displaced persons camps.

The United Kingdom fully supports the work carried out by the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO), especially in protecting civilians. We acknowledge the request made by the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo to bring forward MONUSCO's withdrawal, and we encourage it to engage constructively with MONUSCO so as to ensure a responsible, conditions-based withdrawal. A rushed departure of MONUSCO would create a significant security vacuum in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo, putting hundreds of thousands of civilians at risk and threatening further deterioration of the humanitarian situation.

We welcome the reduction in incidents of cross-border violence between the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Rwanda, but we remain concerned about heightened confrontational rhetoric by both countries. We have engaged Kigali and Kinshasa to urge them to engage in dialogue and build trust, recognizing the risk of miscalculation and the horrendous cost of further escalation.

The United Kingdom also welcomes continued engagement of the Great Lakes region, in particular the leadership of Presidents Lourenço, Ndayishimiye, Geingob and former President Kenyatta. We reiterate our support for the Nairobi and Luanda processes. We call upon the countries of the region to revitalize those processes and to turn commitments into tangible action to address the shared security challenges, improve humanitarian access and reduce violence.

The United Kingdom firmly believes that dialogue, not violence, is the only way to achieve lasting peace in the Great Lakes region. To that end, we will continue our regional diplomatic efforts and engage with all Council members to support peace and stability in the region.

Mrs. Shino (Japan): I would like to express my gratitude to Special Envoy Huang Xia, Mr. Caholo, the Executive Secretary of the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region (ICGLR), and Ms. Malimukono for their briefings. I also welcome the participation of representatives from the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Rwanda.

We continue to see with deep concern the recurrent violence by armed groups, aggravating the human security crisis in the eastern part of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and the increasing tensions

between the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Rwanda. It is critical for the signatory countries, including the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the guarantors, to 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.

Japan welcomes the communiqué of the eleventh high-level meeting of the Regional Oversight Mechanism of the Framework on 6 May. The agreement must lead to a renewed momentum in regional efforts and continue to be the guideline for the way forward. As the leaders of the region requested, an independent, frank and sincere assessment of the Framework's implementation is essential to improve our collective endeavours and follow-up actions.

The Nairobi and Luanda processes play a central role in the ongoing regional peace initiatives. All armed groups must observe an immediate cessation of hostilities and fully engage in those processes. Any support to armed groups, which would exacerbate a deteriorating regional situation, must be stopped immediately.

Close coordination is the key to maximize the effectiveness of various peace and subsequently achieve the common goal. The quadripartite summit, on 27 June, of the East African Community, Economic Community of Central African States, the ICGLR and the Southern African Development Community, under the aegis of the African Union, has laid a solid groundwork for enhanced coordination. Multilevel joint planning, as agreed, should be fully utilized for further harmonization of regional initiatives. Special Envoy Huang Xia and his Office can play a significant role to foster such efforts.

The complexity of the challenges the region faces requires us to take a comprehensive, cross-border approach based on the humanitarian-development-peace nexus. Such an approach is required especially when tackling the challenge of the illegal exploitation of natural resources, which remains one of the drivers of conflict. All stakeholders must engage in more transparent management, enhanced border-control and judicial cooperation for the promotion of legitimate trade and development.

We are deeply concerned by the worsening humanitarian situation and human rights violations and abuses in the region. The continuous grave violations against children and gender-based violence are

alarming. Japan places great importance on promoting the participation of women and youth in political and peace processes. In that regard, we welcome efforts made by international and regional entities including the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, UN-Women, the ICGLR Regional Forum for Women and the ICGLR Regional Multifunctional Youth Forum.

Japan will continue to play its part to ensure a peaceful and prosperous Great Lakes region.

Mr. Camilleri (Malta): I thank Special Envoy Huang Xia, Executive Secretary Caholo and Ms. Malimukono for their briefings. I also welcome the representative of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Rwanda to today's meeting.

In echoing the observations contained in the Secretary-General's latest report (S/2023/730), we applaud the significant strides taken to deepen regional ownership in seeking solutions to the conflict. We encourage further enhanced coordination between existing and forthcoming regional peace initiatives.

We encourage all parties to commit to genuine and good-faith dialogue, and we call for the de-escalation of tensions and for the parties to abstain from engaging in inflammatory public discourse. Particularly during the electoral process, leaders bear the responsibility of setting an example and adopting a conciliatory tone.

The security situation in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo remains concerning. It has further exacerbated the humanitarian crisis, with the perpetration of appalling human rights violations, including gender-based sexual violence and the widespread use and recruitment of children. These constitute a severe threat to the future of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and its neighbours.

The recently adopted presidential statement (S/PRST/2023/5) demonstrates the Council's commitment to work towards a responsible withdrawal of the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

On a positive note, we commend the initiatives undertaken by several countries to bolster cross-border cooperation in economic activities. That will undoubtedly be conducive to peacebuilding and fostering constructive interdependence.

We are also heartened by the initial indications from missions of the group's operational cell. They suggest that some foreign armed group members are open to disarm, demobilize and repatriate to their countries of origin, without conditions. We reiterate the Secretary-General's call for seizing this opportunity promptly and for swiftly enhancing national capacities for disarmament, demobilization and reintegration in order to effectively receive and support ex-combatants and their dependents.

Regarding the root causes of conflict, the illicit exploitation and trade of natural resources from the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo and the region continue to be significant contributors to the ongoing crisis. We support how the United Nations Special Envoy has placed this objective at the heart of his mandate. We welcome initiatives such as those mentioned in the report of the Secretary-General, particularly the support for more responsible management of the gold supply chain.

The humanitarian situation in the Great Lakes region remains of great concern. Large-scale forced displacements have resulted in increased humanitarian and protection needs for millions. Some 25.8 million people in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and 7.7 million people in South Sudan are facing acute food security. A substantial challenge lies in the return of millions of internally displaced persons to their homes. We underscore the continued efforts of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and the Office of the Special Envoy to revitalize the tripartite mechanism for the return of refugees between the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Rwanda. Concurrently, the International Organization for Migration persists in providing multisectoral assistance to individuals affected by displacement and host communities.

In conclusion, we firmly believe that the principles and commitments enshrined in the Framework for Peace, Security and Cooperation for the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Region remain pertinent. We welcome the outcomes of the eleventh meeting of the Regional Oversight Mechanism, particularly the decision to reinvigorate it. In that regard, an independent, frank and sincere assessment of the Framework's implementation and the subsequent recommendations will undoubtedly enhance its effectiveness.

Mr. Dai Bing (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): I thank Special Envoy Huang Xia and Ambassador Caholo for their briefings. I welcome the presence of the representatives of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Rwanda at today's meeting. I also listened carefully to Ms. Malimukono's statement.

For some time now, the countries of the Great Lakes region have made great strides in strengthening regional coordination, maintaining common security and promoting common development. At the same time, they face multiple challenges, such as violent conflicts and humanitarian crises. The situation in the Great Lakes region affects the overall security of Africa. The international community should provide more constructive support for regional peace and development. In that regard, I would like to emphasize three points.

First, it is vital to maintain the common security of the region. The security situation in eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo is the challenge that stands out the most in the Great Lakes region. China supports the leaders of Burundi, Kenya and Angola in their good offices. China welcomes the African Union's invitation this past June to the East African Community, the Economic Community of Central African States, the Southern African Development Community and the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region for the holding of a quadripartite summit to push for coordinated regional action in support of peacekeeping and security cooperation between regional organizations and the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

The countries of the Great Lakes region are a community of nations, the security of which is interdependent and inseparable. Given the current situation, the countries of the region should give full play to the Nairobi and Luanda processes and jointly urge armed groups to cease fighting, stop the violence and ease tension through dialogue. China appreciates the good offices of Special Envoy Huang Xia with regard to the situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The Security Council should continue to support the work of the Special Envoy and provide the necessary assistance in the regional peace process.

Secondly, it is necessary to support United Nations agencies in playing their role effectively. At present, the future of the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) has become the focus of attention of

all parties. The presidential statement adopted by the Council yesterday (S/PRST/2023/5) underscored the need for arrangements to be made in that regard. While advancing MONUSCO's transition, we should reflect on how we can improve the work of United Nations agencies, better respond to the needs of countries such as the Democratic Republic of the Congo and better support the deepening of cooperation between the United Nations and the region.

The Office of the Special Envoy for the Great Lakes Region should play an overall and coordinating role with an in-depth understanding of the concerns of the countries of the region, while strengthening coordination with the United Nations country team and other institutions and jointly supporting MONUSCO's smooth transition. China supports Special Envoy Huang Xia in his continued efforts to promote the implementation of the United Nations Strategy for Peace Consolidation, Conflict Prevention and Conflict Resolution in the Great Lakes region and to mobilize the resources of the United Nations and the international community to achieve more results.

Thirdly, we must support the common development of the region. The Great Lakes region is rich in natural resources and has great potential for development. Efforts should be made to support the countries of the region in intensifying cooperation for development and promoting development for peace. Countries such as the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Angola, Zambia, Uganda and Tanzania have recently achieved positive results in transnational and transregional infrastructure-building and economic and trade cooperation, continuously strengthening the ties of regional interests for regional integration and development.

Under the framework of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation and the Belt and Road Initiative, China has jointly implemented a large number of pragmatic cooperation projects in such fields as energy resources, infrastructure, industrial and agricultural development, science and technology and education to support the countries of the region in their independent development and regional cooperation. The third Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation is currently being held in Beijing. China looks forward to working with the relevant parties, including countries in the region, to jointly build a high-quality Belt and Road Initiative, to work together to achieve common development and prosperity and to contribute more to lasting peace and development in the region.

Mr. Spasse (Albania): I join other colleagues in thanking Special Envoy Huang Xia, His Excellency Mr. Caholo and Ms. Malimukono for their briefings.

As this is the final biannual briefing to the Security Council on the Great Lakes region in which Albania participates, I would like to share the following messages that reflect not only the latest reporting period, but also an overview of what we have seen as a member of the Council.

When Albania joined the Security Council two years ago, the region was witnessing some positive diplomatic momentum. However, back in April 2022, we warned that, despite the ongoing rapprochement between States, the root causes of the conflict were too complex to be considered redressed, and the challenges too steep to be fully overcome. Unfortunately, since then, the region has faced too many setbacks and has seen little substantial progress. In that respect, I would like to highlight three principal drivers of conflict that, if properly addressed, could become solutions.

First, we could not agree more with the report of the Secretary-General in that:

“[M]ilitary solutions alone are short-lived and fail to build strong and durable peace. Political will, good faith and a genuine desire to end needless suffering are needed ... in order to make a meaningful difference”. (S/2023/730, p.16)

Albania is concerned that the continued confrontational rhetoric and accusations between the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Rwanda over the persistent activities of armed groups and support for them can only endanger the fragile cessation of hostilities between the Mouvement du 23 mars and the Forces armées de la République Démocratique du Congo. The regional peace efforts, embodied mainly through the Luanda and Nairobi processes, remain critical for regional stability. We welcome the outcome of the twenty-second extraordinary summit of the East African Community Heads of State, held in Nairobi on 5 September, which reaffirmed the importance of sustainable security solutions through political processes and dialogue among all parties. We hope that the next inter-Congolese dialogue will take place soon.

Along the political track, Albania positively notes the regional ownership in providing security guarantees in eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo. Such guarantees were ensured via the extension

of the East African Community regional force mandate to 8 December and the endorsement of the deployment of the Southern African Development Community mission during its forty-third ordinary summit, held on 17 August. We reiterate the need for all of those initiatives to be harmonized and mutually reinforcing, as noted during the quadripartite meeting held in Addis Ababa.

Secondly, Albania is alarmed by the worsening humanitarian situation in the region, combined with heinous attacks against civilians, rising conflict-related sexual and gender-based violence against women and child recruitment. We should all reflect on what that means. If we agree that children are the ones to shape our future, what future can we expect if those same children are forced to replace their pens with guns? If we agree that mothers forge the character of their children, then what characters can we expect if those same mothers undergo grave violations? We are doomed to fail, even if we make our way out of the crisis. The solution we are looking for is called accountability. In that vein, we welcome the support of the Office of the Special Envoy for the implementation of the Kinshasa Declaration on Enhancing Judicial Cooperation in the Great Lakes Region.

That leads me to my third point. The Great Lakes region is blessed with enormous natural resources but is struggling with the problem of their illegal exploitation and illicit trade. Regional cooperation should be extended and reinforced to support more sustainable and transparent management of those natural resources. We hope to see the recommendations of the regional forum held in Kinshasa in September on a regional mineral tracking or certification system implemented without delay. A fairer distribution of wealth could act as an incentive for armed groups to disarm and participate in demobilization and reintegration programmes, which should receive adequate support. Finally, I thank the Special Envoy for his unwavering support to the signatory countries in implementing the regional strategy and addressing the root causes of the conflict.

Mrs. Chanda (Switzerland) (*spoke in French*): I would like to thank the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General, the Executive Secretary of the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region and Ms. Malimukono for their briefings. I would also like to thank the Peacebuilding Commission for its written opinion and welcome the representatives of the States of the region to the Council.

There can be no question that peace in the Great Lakes region requires the cooperation of the entire region. We encourage Special Envoy Xia to continue his efforts to advance a genuine dialogue between all the parties and to ease regional tensions. For it is only together that we can achieve the common objectives of peace, security and cooperation set out in the Addis Ababa Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework Agreement for the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Region, which is currently being revitalized. I would like to emphasize three points.

First, regional diplomatic and political initiatives must remain the main means of resolving conflict. That is why we are appealing urgently for a halt to the violence and incitement to hatred that can prevent that dialogue. Switzerland reaffirms its support for the Nairobi and Luanda processes. We welcome the adoption of a joint master plan at the recent quadripartite summit and call on all actors to work to harmonize and coordinate the regional mechanisms. If they are to succeed, it is vital to ensure that all the commitments made are implemented and that women are able to participate in a meaningful and effective way. In particular, it is essential that all actors, especially the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Rwanda, cease their support for certain armed groups.

Secondly, the root causes of conflict must be addressed if lasting peace is to be achieved. That will entail strengthening the rule of law and good governance and creating economic and social opportunities. Switzerland acknowledges the considerable potential for sustainable development of the Great Lakes region. For several years now we have been involved in projects aimed at strengthening human rights, combating misinformation, promoting vocational training and creating jobs. There is also an urgent need for responsible management of the region's natural resources, which represent a source of prosperity for the people of the Great Lakes. The illegal exploitation of and trade in such resources by armed groups, particularly in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo, is jeopardizing peace and development in the region.

Switzerland also supports the Congolese authorities in advancing the Disarmament, Demobilization, Community Recovery and Stabilization Programme. We have noted the Congolese Senate's enactment of a law establishing a military reserve force. We encourage the authorities to ensure that that does not lead to the de facto integration of members of armed groups into the Forces armées de la République démocratique

du Congo, which would run counter to the spirit of the principles set out in the national strategy for the implementation of the Programme.

Thirdly, respect for international law is essential if lasting peace is to be achieved. As armed groups continue to attack civilians, Switzerland calls on all parties to respect their obligations under international human rights and humanitarian law. As communicated at the quadripartite meeting of Chiefs of Staff earlier this month, humanitarian corridors must be established to facilitate rapid and unimpeded humanitarian assistance to the population. Switzerland attaches particular importance to respect for the rights of women and girls, given the alarming number of verified cases of sexual violence in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo. We are concerned about the high levels of systematic sexual exploitation in and around camps for displaced persons, particularly in Goma, and we therefore encourage the States of the region to take every possible measure to protect the civilian population and combat impunity.

While it remains crucial to advance regional initiatives, it is imperative to ensure the implementation of commitments already made and to tackle the root causes of conflict. In a context of growing insecurity and regional tensions, and against a backdrop of the ongoing transition of the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Switzerland calls on all parties to exercise restraint and abide by international law.

Mr. Agyeman (Ghana): I have the honour to make this statement on behalf of the three African members of the Security Council (A3).

The A3 would like to express its appreciation to Mr. Huang Xia, Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for the Great Lakes region, for his briefing and for his active engagement and efforts aimed at consolidating peace in the region. We also extend our appreciation for their briefings to Mr. João Samuel Caholo, Executive Secretary of the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region (ICGLR), and Ms. Joséphine Malimukono. The A3 welcomes the presence at today's meeting of the Permanent Representatives of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Rwanda and looks forward to hearing their thoughts and perspectives as countries concerned in the region. Our statement this morning will focus on the security, political, economic and humanitarian situations.

The A3 remains deeply concerned about the unpredictable and tense security situation in the region. We reiterate our firm condemnation of all the acts of violence, human rights violations and abuse that have been perpetrated primarily against civilians by armed and terrorist 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. We reiterate our call for an immediate end to support for such groups and note that such support to armed groups operating within the Democratic Republic of the Congo destabilizes not only the country but the wider region as well. We echo the Secretary-General's call to all Congolese and foreign armed groups to immediately and unconditionally lay down their arms and engage in the disarmament process without delay. We particularly demand that the M-23 cease further advances 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 the next phase of the Nairobi IV inter-Congolese dialogue as an opportunity for the armed groups to recommit to silencing the guns in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and adhering to the ongoing peace process.

The A3 emphasizes the critical need for coordination and complementarity between political and military initiatives in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, as was highlighted, among other things, in the recently adopted presidential statement on the situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (S/PRST/2023/5); 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 Great Lakes Region; and the communiqué of the quadripartite summit that brought together the East African Community, the Economic Community of Central African States, the ICGLR and the Southern African Development Community under the auspices of the African Union. We believe that the effective alignment and coordination of all peace initiatives in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, including those that are African-owned and -led, will ultimately lead to a united and strengthened African response in the Democratic Republic of the Congo that is fit for purpose and will embody not merely African solutions to African problems but quality African solutions to African problems.

On the political front, the A3 salutes the dynamism of regional leaders, including Presidents João Lourenço of Angola, Evariste Ndayishimiye of Burundi, William Ruto of Kenya and former President Uhuru Kenyatta, who have continued to work tirelessly to ensure the full implementation of existing peace agreements by all parties. We welcome the efforts by countries in the region to further strengthen their bilateral and diplomatic relations, including through the holding of Joint Permanent Commission meetings and high-level visits, and the signing of bilateral agreements to advance cooperation in various important sectors. The A3 is encouraged by the increasing number of trade agreements among the countries of the region and urges that the bilateral and trilateral trade agreements, which serve as stepping stones towards continent-wide economic integration, be implemented. It is our belief that enhancing economic development and regional cooperation plays a significant role in promoting peace.

As instability has persisted in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo, countries in the region have not acted as mere bystanders, despite their own internal challenges. Those countries, acting within the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework for the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Great Lakes Region, have continued to rally around the Democratic Republic of the Congo and provided their unwavering support for peace efforts in the country. Ten years after the signing of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework, we hold the view that it is imperative for the 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, during the eleventh high-level meeting of the Framework's Regional Oversight Mechanism, to conduct an independent and frank assessment of the Framework's implementation to date. It is essential to ensure the revitalization of the Framework, with genuine political will by all signatory countries to respect their commitments.

The development of the natural resource wealth of the Great Lakes region offers the countries of the region an opportunity to structurally transform their economies and build an area of shared prosperity. It is therefore imperative for countries in the region and in Africa at large to reverse the age-old paradox whereby the abundance of our mineral resources causes our demise but benefits other societies. We therefore encourage continued efforts, under the auspices of the

ICGLR, with the support of the Special Envoy, among other stakeholders, to address the illicit exploitation and trade of natural resources in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and in the region.

Behind the figures and statistics on the humanitarian situation in the region are real people — men, women, boys and girls — who live in deplorable physical conditions and in emotional turmoil stemming from atrocities they have been subjected to, including sexual violence and the killing of their loved ones by armed groups. We urge the international community to continue to mobilize funding for the humanitarian response plans of the countries of the region in order to alleviate the suffering of refugees and displaced persons. Meanwhile, we encourage those countries to continue to display their solidarity in dealing with that serious matter.

In conclusion, the A3 wishes to thank Special Envoy Huang Xia for his support to the 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 firmly supportive of the planned revitalization of the Framework and reaffirm our commitment to the independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity of the countries of the region.

Ms. Alrahma (United Arab Emirates) (*spoke in Arabic*): I thank Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for the Great Lakes Region Huang Xia for his valuable briefing. I also thank Mr. João Samuel Caholo, Executive Secretary of the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region, and Ms. Joséphine Malimukono for their contributions to today's discussion. I welcome the participation of the representatives of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Rwanda in today's meeting.

The United Arab Emirates recognizes the critical role of the States of the Great Lakes region in achieving stability on the African continent, including in the implementation of the 2013 Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework for the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Region. In that context, I would like to stress three points with a view to realizing security, stability and prosperity in the region.

First, it is important to reiterate the commitment to a political solution to the current regional crisis and to continue strengthening coordination among

regional initiatives, including the Luanda and Nairobi processes, which aim to support peace efforts in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. We look forward to the recommendations that will be presented ahead of the high-level meeting of the Regional Oversight Mechanism of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework, to be held in Uganda next year, as a follow-up to the previous meeting in Burundi. Revitalizing the Framework is important to supporting stability in the region.

We believe that efforts to evaluate the progress made in the implementation of the Luanda road map commitments, including those undertaken by President Lourenço of Angola to hold periodic meetings with parties in the region, will be important to ensuring its implementation. The success of all those efforts and continuing to build on them requires enhancing coherence among ongoing initiatives. The quadripartite summit on peace and security in eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo, held in June, which included 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, is a clear example of how strengthening coordination among all the parties concerned can help to pave the way towards peace in the region.

There is no doubt that finding a lasting solution in the long term requires addressing the root causes of insecurity in the region. That is why it is important for regional actors to continue their efforts to encourage dialogue and to take preventive measures to enhance trust and tolerance within and among communities. The role of the Special Envoy, through his good offices, is also equally vital in terms of supporting efforts to de-escalate tensions and facilitate dialogue.

Secondly, civilians must be protected from attacks by armed groups, and ensuring their safety must remain at the core of all efforts aimed at achieving peace in the region. It is concerning that the activities of armed groups continue in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo. That poses a serious threat to the safety of civilians, in addition to obstructing development efforts. In that context, we condemn the hostile actions committed by the Mouvement du 23 mars and all other armed groups and call on them to lay down their arms permanently and unconditionally. All actors should also prioritize the protection of civilians, especially women and children, and stop all forms of

violence against them. The parties need to adhere to international humanitarian law and cease all forms of violence against civilians. We reiterate the importance of accelerating the implementation of the disarmament, demobilization, social reintegration and stabilization programme in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Thirdly, special attention must be paid to the serious and dire humanitarian situation in the region, especially with the continued displacements due to armed conflicts and the instability exacerbated by climate change. According to the most recent report of the Secretary-General (S/2023/730), there are more than 4.7 million refugees and asylum-seekers in addition to more than 11.6 million internally displaced people in the Great Lakes region. It is also important to reduce food insecurity, a serious challenge in the region. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo alone, more than 25 million people suffer from acute food insecurity. In that context, we stress the importance of facilitating the work of humanitarian organizations that provide basic and relief services, and for all actors to ensure that humanitarian workers and humanitarian facilities are protected, as guaranteed under international humanitarian law.

In conclusion, the United Arab Emirates reaffirms its commitment to supporting regional efforts and those of the United Nations and all other partners, and to backing the Great Lakes region in its quest to achieve peace and stability. My country also stresses the importance of ensuring that United Nations agencies work together to achieve a consistent, integrated and strategic approach that can help the region overcome the challenges it is facing. It is important that they work in close cooperation with the relevant authorities in the region in order to preserve the gains achieved in peacebuilding, particularly in the context of the withdrawal of the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo from the country. In that regard, we should not fail to commend the efforts of the Peacebuilding Commission and its continued involvement in the region.

Mrs. Thomas-Greenfield (United States of America): I thank Special Envoy Xia for his informative briefing. I also thank Mr. Caholo and Ms. Malimukono for their briefings and welcome the participation of the Permanent Representatives of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Rwanda in today's meeting.

The United States appreciates all that the Special Envoy has done to generate international support for the East African Community (EAC)-led Nairobi process and the Luanda process. Despite those efforts, the security situation in the Great Lakes region remains dire and has continued to deteriorate as tensions between the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Rwanda have grown. Six months ago, during our last briefing on the Great Lakes region (see S/PV.9307), we called on all the parties to act expeditiously to meet their commitments under the Luanda communiqué in full, including the withdrawal of the Mouvement du 23 mars (M-23) to the Sabyinyo line, followed by cantonment and disarmament. While the States of the region have stepped up to help with the process, the M-23 has blocked access to pre-cantonment sites, hampering disarmament, demobilization and reintegration efforts and interfering with the important work of the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO).

Once again, I repeat our call for Rwanda to immediately end its support for the M-23, which is under United Nations sanctions, and to withdraw from the territory of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. And we call on the Forces armées de la République démocratique du Congo to cut ties with the Forces démocratiques de libération du Rwanda, which are also under United Nations sanctions. We call on troops from the region deployed to the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo, whether bilaterally or through the East African Community, to coordinate with each other and MONUSCO. They must also avoid human rights violations and abuses and illicit activities, including illicit mineral extraction. I want to once again urge all Council members to avoid endorsing greater support on the part of MONUSCO to the EAC regional force without appropriate safeguards, in line with United Nations policies aimed at addressing human rights, accountability and command-and-control concerns. Those safeguards are vital to ensure that we do not inadvertently worsen an already dangerous security situation.

As we heard today, because of the region's instability, the humanitarian situation has deteriorated alarmingly. Conflict has displaced more than half a million people in 2023 alone, many of whom are being forced to live without access to adequate food, water or medical care in camps filled far beyond capacity. Thousands of women and children are being

exploited by organized sex-trafficking operations. I want to thank Ms. Malimukono once again for her extraordinary efforts to bring attention to their needs. According to the World Food Programme, the ongoing political instability has devastated food production and distribution, resulting in widespread food shortages. Some 1.5 million people are facing emergency levels of food insecurity, and that is simply unacceptable in the twenty-first century — a human-made political crisis has become a human-made humanitarian crisis, and it must end.

We must pursue diplomatic solutions. To that end, I call on leaders in the region to maintain an open dialogue, especially as the national elections of the Democratic Republic of the Congo approach. The elections must be free and fair for everyone, including women and minority communities. All Congolese civilians deserve the right to live in peace and to have their voices heard at the polls. I again thank Special Envoy Huang Xia for his efforts. It is my sincere hope that the next time he briefs the Council, we will have made strides towards achieving peace. There is no time to waste.

Mr. Pérez Loose (Ecuador) (*spoke in Spanish*): I would like to begin by thanking the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for the Great Lakes region, Mr. Huang Xia, for his briefing. I also want to take this opportunity to thank him for the support he provides for the implementation of the existing agreements that promote peace and regional integration and contribute to regional dialogue and peace. I also thank Mr. João Samuel Caholo, Executive Secretary of the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region, and Ms. Joséphine Malimukono, President of the Concertation des Collectifs des Associations Féminines de la Région des Grands Lacs.

According to the Secretary-General's report (S/2023/730), the situation in the Great Lakes region remains volatile and unpredictable. In that regard, my delegation reiterates the need to stop the advance of the armed groups that operate on the borders and in the eastern Democratic Republic of Congo, and specifically of the Mouvement du 23 mars. Similarly, we encourage the continuation of regional and subregional efforts aimed at creating confidence-building measures as part of the mediation, as those are key to overcoming the stalemate. The Luanda and Nairobi processes underscore the importance of coordination and

complementarity between the political and military initiatives, for which the support of the Secretary-General, through his Special Envoy, is crucial.

The efforts under way are positive developments aimed at harmonizing and coordinating existing peace initiatives to address the situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, such as 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. The summit was convened in Luanda under the auspices of the African Union on 27 June, and it should continue and be strengthened. Progress on the tenth summit of the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region provides for regular meetings of the ad hoc verification mechanism to review the implementation of the Luanda road map. And in the context of the Nairobi process, it shows a willingness to resume an inter-Congolese dialogue and dialogue with armed groups.

The deteriorating humanitarian situation requires the international community's immediate attention. We therefore welcomed the high-level tripartite meeting held on 15 May by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Rwanda to address the return of refugees of those nationalities. In that regard, it is relevant to support the building of institutions and capacities that will enable the implementation of national plans on women and peace and security, in accordance with resolution 1325 (2000). We encourage the consolidation of regional policies to ban the recruitment and use of minors and ensure that they are treated in accordance with international laws on prevention and on the protection of the rights of children.

Ecuador believes that, in order to consolidate peace, it is necessary to address the root causes of conflicts, one of them being the illegal exploitation of natural resources. That is why we must strengthen capacities to combat this scourge.

The strengthening of women's participation in national and local political structures is essential to make progress towards genuine peacebuilding. In that regard, it is appropriate to welcome the written advice of the Peacebuilding Commission, which addresses the issues mentioned and which also expresses the need to support the capacity of the countries of the region to conduct peaceful, inclusive and transparent elections.

Finally, it is worth mentioning in particular the United Nations Strategy for Peace Consolidation, Conflict Prevention and Conflict Resolution in the Great Lakes Region, and I highlight its initiatives 3 and 9 which focus on women and peace and security, as well as responsible mining, with a view to reducing the threats to peace and which require strengthened financing for their implementation.

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

I thank Special Envoy Huang Xia, Executive Secretary João Samuel Caholo of the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region and Ms. Joséphine Malimukono for their briefings. Their perspectives certainly provide important input for the Security Council on the situation at hand. I also welcome the representatives of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Rwanda to this meeting.

I duly appreciate the most recent 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/2023/730), as well as the Peacebuilding Commission's written advice on the Great Lakes region. I commend the work of Special Envoy Huang Xia.

The security situation in the Great Lakes region is of continuing concern. Although the ceasefire between the Congolese armed forces and the Mouvement du 23 mars is still holding, the clashes among armed groups impose a heavy price on the population.

We reiterate the call for all armed groups to lay down their arms. We also call for all external support to illegal armed groups to cease. We hope that the coordination of regional efforts will be able to advance in the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR) process. A successful DDR strategy is essential to pave the way towards reconciliation.

We are following closely the deployment of regional forces, and we hope that they continue their engagement with the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. We also took note of ongoing bilateral military cooperation between the Democratic Republic of the Congo and its neighbours with a view to curbing the attacks of armed groups and helping to stabilize eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo.

The political dimension of the regional cooperation is of paramount importance. We support the leading role played by the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region and the Regional Oversight Mechanism. We also highlight the quadripartite summit that took place in Luanda, in June, aimed at coordinating and harmonizing existing peace initiatives.

Brazil attaches great importance to inclusivity in political processes. The fact that youth and women are active participants in the regional dialogue in the Great Lakes region is essential to ensure the sustainability of those processes.

The United Nations Strategy for Peace Consolidation, Conflict Prevention and Conflict Resolution in the Great Lakes Region is centred on its communities and peoples. Their aspirations for peace, stability and sustainable development should guide diplomatic efforts in the region. Improving their livelihood, especially reducing the burden that the most vulnerable have to bear, should be at the heart of our actions.

We call for the continued implementation of the women and peace and security agenda in the concerned countries. As shown by our briefers, women in the region are champions for peace, and they should be included in all peace initiatives.

I now resume my functions as President of the Council.

I give the floor to the representative of Rwanda.

Mr. Kayinamura (Rwanda): Allow me also to join others in thanking the briefers and especially the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for the Great Lakes Region of Africa.

This year marks the tenth anniversary of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework for the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Region. Yet we see gaps in the implementation of the Framework and in the commitments contained therein. When Rwanda signed the Framework, it was because it believed in it, and Rwanda still believes in it.

In addition to the Framework, Rwanda has fully supported and greatly lauds the regional efforts — the Luanda and Nairobi processes — whose outcomes provide concrete measures to end the crisis in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo.

On the other hand, the political will of the signatories, in particular the Democratic Republic of the Congo, is lacking, as exemplified by either its failure or refusal to diminish the threat posed by foreign armed groups, among other issues. Moreover, the agreements made in Luanda and Nairobi have not been implemented in word and spirit, because the political will to do so is still lacking.

Persistent failures to address the root causes of the problems in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo have been the driving force of the continued conflict for the past three decades, and the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo has remained a breeding ground for armed groups, which destabilizes not only the Democratic Republic of the Congo but also the neighbouring countries. Presently, more than 120 armed groups operate in eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo, including the Forces démocratiques de libération du Rwanda (FDLR) and all its splinter groups now integrated into Wazalendo, as well as the Mayi-Mayi, who have been rebranded as Wazalendo. Local armed groups known as Mayi-Mayi and rebranded as Wazalendo, which are established now as a reserve force, are a threat and counterproductive to the operationalization of the Peace and Cooperation Framework, as well as the road maps for peace and security in our region.

The implementation of Luanda and Nairobi mechanisms, particularly after the deployment of the East African Community regional force, initially provided hope for a peaceful solution. However, the recent hostilities in North Kivu by all the armed groups, rebranded as Wazalendo, with the FDLR, now pose a new threat to the peace processes and set back again the Peace and Cooperation Framework.

The recruitment of thousands of mercenaries into the national army, which contravenes international conventions, combined with the refusal to implement signed agreements, further demonstrates a lack of political will to address the root causes of the problems in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo.

The alarming and growing hate speech and xenophobia, in particular the calls for the expulsion of Congolese Rwandan speakers or the Tutsis or the “snakes”, as they have been branded, are being overlooked by the Security Council. Those issues form the political and principal cornerstones of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework for the

Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Region. The violations of human rights mentioned in this Chamber hinge on the use of hate speech.

It is therefore regrettable that there has been no condemnation of such acts and atrocities in the outcomes of the Council, including the presidential statement (S/PRST/2023/5) that was adopted yesterday. We believe that attitude and silence on the part of the members of the Security Council send a loud and clear message to the international community. Furthermore, the inflammatory rhetoric used by politicians, which represents documented evidence of hate speech targeting Congolese Kinyarwanda speakers, particularly the Tutsi communities, in Masisi territory and other areas, calls for the Council to intervene to prevent such acts from continuing. The Council must break its silence and condemn in the strongest terms the persecution of Rwandaphones, especially the Tutsi communities, in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo.

We deplore the external Powers that are reigniting the conflict and encouraging impunity in order to satisfy their economic interests by advancing the selective implementation of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework and regional peace and security agreements. Cantonment is not intended for one armed group alone but must apply to all local and foreign armed groups.

When the rhetoric around the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Democratic Republic of the Congo is allowed to continue without taking into account the sovereign rights of neighbouring countries affected by the conflict, it is completely misplaced and is aimed at fuelling conflict. Every country's territorial integrity matters. Furthermore, selective implementation of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework and regional agreements must be avoided.

In conclusion, achieving peace in the Great Lakes region requires addressing the root causes and drivers of the conflict in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Rwanda, together with other stakeholders, remains committed to a peaceful solution in line with the regional mechanisms and the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework.

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

Mr. Mukongo (the Democratic Republic of the Congo) (*spoke in French*): My delegation already had an opportunity to congratulate you, Sir, on your

assumption of the presidency of the Security Council for the month of October. We would like to once again acknowledge your presidency and say how pleased we are to see you leading the work of the Security Council. We have every confidence in your ability to guide the Council's deliberations successfully, given the ambitious programme of work that was submitted at the beginning of the month. I would also like to take this opportunity to once express the gratitude of the Government and the people of the Democratic Republic of the Congo for the efforts by the United Nations to safeguard the sovereignty and territorial integrity of our country and its often-voiced desire for lasting stability and peace. I would like to pay well-deserved tribute to the Secretary-General for his 3 October report (S/2023/730), which is before the Council, and for his continued and unwavering concern and personal involvement in working to build peace in the Great Lakes region and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Lastly, I welcome the presence via video-teleconference of the Executive Secretary of the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region, Mr. João Samuel Caholo, and I thank our sister Ms. Malimukono for her briefing.

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, presented by his Special Envoy for the Great Lakes Region, Mr. Huang Xia, whom I am pleased to see here today. The report, which provides a midterm assessment on compliance with the commitments made under the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework for the period from 16 March to 15 September, raises several issues that my delegation believes warrant the Council's careful attention in its capacity as the principal organ of the United Nations responsible for the maintenance of international peace and security.

As we meet here today, the Rwandan Defence Forces, the regular army of Rwanda, a signatory to the Addis Ababa Framework Agreement, and its Mouvement du 23 mars (M-23) terrorist auxiliaries continue to occupy positions within the Democratic Republic of the Congo, in flagrant violation of the Charter of the United Nations, the Constitutive Act of the African Union and the agreements governing the subregional organizations to which that country belongs. Ten full years after its signing, the Addis Ababa Framework Agreement, whose provisions my country

has conscientiously implemented, has seen no signs of implementation on the part of certain parties, including Rwanda, despite their status as signatories. That regrettable observation necessarily raises the question of the need to revisit the Framework Agreement, an approach that my Government has supported. In that regard, it should be pointed out that the National Oversight Mechanism established in the Democratic Republic of the Congo to ensure the implementation of the country's commitments under the agreement will hold consultations in Kinshasa from 24 to 25 October. Their outcome will help us draw up a road map enabling the Democratic Republic of the Congo, together with the signatory countries to the Addis Ababa Framework Agreement, to participate meaningfully in the Durban retreat to be held from 31 October to 1 November. My delegation welcomes that initiative and commends the efforts of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General in that regard.

In the immediate term, with elections on the horizon, my country's priority remains the restoration of peace in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo. Among other things, that requires the end of Rwanda's aggression, which will be determined by the verified withdrawal of all its troops, including the members of its army surreptitiously embedded within the M-23, the cantonment of the M-23, the return of displaced persons to their homes and the restoration of their freedom to exercise their civic rights by 20 December, the return of children to school and to their right to an education, which they have been deprived of since the aggression of Rwanda and the M-23. The Democratic Republic of the Congo continues to support regional efforts, in particular the Nairobi and Luanda processes, and calls on the Security Council to further support those processes by maintaining maximum pressure on Rwanda and its M-23 proxy to comply with the provisions of the Nairobi and Luanda peace plans. For the M-23, that means laying down their arms, accepting cantonment, demobilizing and joining the Disarmament, Demobilization, Community Recovery and Stabilization Programme, in line with the recommendations from the Luanda peace plan.

Paragraphs 4 and 8 of the report before us refer to the Forces démocratiques de libération du Rwanda (FDLR), as have some members. This tired mantra, which Rwanda repeats day in day out and in every forum, even if it were verifiably true, could under no circumstances serve as an excuse for the aggression of

a sovereign country, under international law and the international and regional commitments of our States. That is why I wish to reiterate here the constructive proposal by my Government, which was presented to the Council on 28 September by His Excellency Mr. Christophe Lutundula Apala Pen'apala, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs and la Francophonie (see S/PV.9427). The members of the FDLR are not citizens of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and the Security Council could therefore implement a plan to eradicate the FDLR, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo would be happy to participate in it. Such an approach would certainly remove any excuse from our aggressors, who are nevertheless waging an economic war, fraudulently and shamelessly exploiting natural resources they do not own and of which they have become global exporters.

In terms of the illegal exploitation of my country's natural resources, my Government urges the Council to apply the threat of severe sanctions against the actors and entities operating throughout the chain, from production right through to destination. Beyond sanctions, my Government, which aligns itself with the recommendations of the Khartoum workshop on natural resources in the Great Lakes region, held on 2 September 2021, also wishes to participate in debates and reflections on the creation of a process similar to the Kimberley Process to manage gold coming from conflict zones.

To conclude, I would like to reaffirm the importance that my country attaches to the good relations with its neighbours and all countries of the region, as our Head of State, His Excellency Mr. Félix-Antoine Tshisekedi Tshilombo, has so clearly shown since he assumed office. The Democratic Republic of the Congo

will continue to cooperate with dedicated and sincere partners with a view to the flourishing and prosperity of the Great Lakes region, our common heritage.

If I may also respond briefly to some concerns that were expressed here, I would like to say that the Wazalendo, who are starting to keep Rwanda awake at night, are simply an organization of young patriots from the Democratic Republic of the Congo who are outraged by the massacres of the M-23 and who have organized in order to repel the enemy. They are not an armed group in the way that they are being presented here. We have spoken of dialogue, and the path for dialogue has been mapped out by the Luanda and Nairobi processes. The Luanda road map is clear, and it describes the steps leading to dialogue, which we all know. First, there is the cantonment of M-23, which we are talking about. Then there is the disarmament of the M-23, the return of displaced people — and we have spoken here of the severity of that humanitarian catastrophe. That is the way towards a resumption of dialogue with Rwanda. Lastly, there is also the Nairobi process, which is also being discussed here. I was one of the delegates at that process. The M-23 was part of that dialogue process in Nairobi. They left the room to go start the war while we were talking with the other armed groups. We are speaking to the armed groups, and I recommend that Rwanda also be brave enough to enter into discussions with those armed groups, including the FDLR. That would be a positive development for the region.

The President: There are no more names inscribed on the list of speakers. I now invite Council members to informal consultations to continue our discussion on the subject.

The meeting rose at 12.05 p.m.