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New York

President: Mrs. Rodrigues-Birkett (Guyana)

Members:

Algeria	Mr. Koudri
China	Mr. Sun Zhiqiang
Ecuador	Mr. Montalvo Sosa
France	Mr. De Rivière
Japan	Mrs. Shino
Malta	Ms. Gatt
Mozambique	Mr. Afonso
Republic of Korea	Mr. Hwang
Russian Federation	Ms. Evstigneeva
Sierra Leone	Mr. Kanu
Slovenia	Mrs. Blokar Drobič
Switzerland	Mr. Hauri
United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland . .	Mr. Phipps
United States of America	Mr. Wood

Agenda

The situation concerning the Democratic Republic of the Congo

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The meeting was called to order at 3 p.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation concerning the Democratic Republic of the Congo

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 Ms. Bintou Keita, Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, to participate in this meeting.

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

I give the floor to Ms. Keita.

Ms. Keita: I am grateful for this opportunity to brief the Security Council on the deeply worrisome situation around Sake and Goma in North Kivu province, where hostilities between the Mouvement du 23 mars (M-23) and the Congolese forces have escalated dramatically since the expiration of the ceasefire on 28 December 2023. Since 28 January, fighting between the M-23 and the Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (FARDC) has intensified in several areas, and the M-23 has expanded further south, leading to further displacement of populations towards Goma and South Kivu. On 12 February, the M-23 offensives caused the Congolese armed forces, the FARDC, to reposition themselves east of Sake town. Despite coming under fire and being targeted, the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) maintained its defensive positions west of Sake. As I speak, the town of Sake remains under FARDC control, with MONUSCO's support.

The fighting has compounded an already dire humanitarian situation. During the 12 February hostilities, two internally displaced persons' sites came under indirect fire. Three children, one woman and one man were killed, while many others were injured or newly displaced. Conditions in the severely overcrowded displacement sites in and around Goma are desperate. More than 400,000 displaced people

have now sought refuge in the city, including 65,000 in the past two weeks, triggering a dramatic increase in cases of cholera due to a lack of safe drinking water, adequate hygiene and sanitation. The restricted access to territories controlled by the M-23 is isolating Goma from inland territories and disrupting food-production supply chains. Prices of basic commodities in Goma are rising, increasing the risk of public unrest. In that challenging context, violent incidents targeting humanitarian actors increased significantly during the last quarter of 2023. Despite those challenges, humanitarian partners remain determined to stay and deliver.

The redeployment of the FARDC to the front where the M-23 is situated has exacerbated the security vacuum in other territories of North Kivu, notably Beni, Lubero and Walikale, and has drawn in new combatants, notably from South Kivu. Armed groups, such as the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF), Mayi-Mayi groups and Nyatura factions and the Forces démocratiques de libération du Rwanda (FDLR), are the direct beneficiaries of this concentration of forces, and are increasingly committing human rights violations and abuses, including summary executions, injury, abductions, the appropriation or destruction of property, forced displacement, illegal taxation and conflict-related sexual violence. It is important to point out that the FDLR remain among the worst perpetrators of conflict-related sexual violence.

I am deeply concerned about the serious violations and abuses of international human rights and international humanitarian law being committed in the areas under the control of the M-23, which is targeting civil society actors, particularly human rights defenders and journalists. The number of human rights abuses it has committed continues to rise, with at least 150 civilians killed since hostilities were resumed in November 2023, including 77 deaths in January. Furthermore, the M-23 has continued to force internally displaced persons to return to villages in areas under its control, taking over civilian dwellings and storing ammunition in them. In addition, we have documented patterns of forced recruitment, including of children in Masisi and Rutshuru territories.

MONUSCO continues to be confronted with waves of misinformation and disinformation concerning its role in the ongoing clashes. Online campaigns targeting the Mission have been carried out by Internet accounts that are mainly located outside the Democratic

Republic of the Congo. That has resulted in hostile acts against United Nations peacekeepers and restrictions on their movement imposed by local armed groups and Government soldiers. In that highly charged context, violent protests against United Nations personnel and assets and the diplomatic community erupted in Kinshasa on 10 February, fuelled by a perception of the international community's inaction and ineffectiveness regarding the situation in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo. In the course of one day in Kinshasa alone, United Nations agencies, funds and programmes and MONUSCO were targeted in 11 incidents, affecting a total of 32 United Nations staff members who had to be either extracted or rescued by quick-response teams. Besides that, two United Nations vehicles were burned and eight severely damaged by stoning. Following those incidents, I decided to restrict the staff's movements and called for remote working arrangements. After action was taken by the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Interior, those measures were gradually relaxed as of last Saturday, with critical staff returning to the office yesterday.

The Mission has to significantly step up its strategic communication efforts to counter misinformation and disinformation. The Vice-Prime Ministers of Defence and Interior have been supportive in that regard, highlighting MONUSCO's role in countering the M-23's offensive alongside the Congolese armed forces.

(spoke in French)

It is crucial to emphasize the risk that the conflict could expand into the wider region should the ongoing diplomatic efforts aimed at easing tensions and finding lasting political solutions to the current conflict fail. I would like to commend the continued diplomatic efforts of President João Lourenço of Angola and to reaffirm MONUSCO's full commitment to supporting the Luanda and Nairobi peace processes. I also urge the Security Council to throw its full weight behind the ongoing regional peace initiatives and ensure that all parties show respect for international law and their commitments and work constructively to bring the current crisis to an end.

Although the escalation of the conflict in and around Goma is a major concern, the security situation in other areas of North Kivu, Ituri and South Kivu is also of great concern for MONUSCO. In the Ituri region, a significant escalation of violence in the area of Djugu has been observed, where MONUSCO continues to provide direct physical protection to more than

100,000 displaced people. Last week alone, 26 civilians were killed as a result of the tensions between the Zaire and Coopérative pour le développement du Congo (CODECO) factions. Last weekend, on 16 February, 15 civilians returning from a funeral in the village of Tali were intercepted, brutally murdered and buried in a mass grave by CODECO. After MONUSCO forces and the FARDC were alerted, they exhumed the bodies and transferred them to the Bunia morgue. I am very worried about the possibility that the situation in Ituri could deteriorate further, jeopardizing the progress that has been made by the provincial authorities and MONUSCO in support of the ongoing peace process in the region.

In Ituri and North Kivu, the ADF continues to kill and kidnap civilians, particularly in the Tchabi area. While the joint Uganda People's Defence Forces-FARDC Shujaa operation is de facto suspended, the ADF, after avoiding any direct confrontation with security forces for almost a year, has begun to attack military targets. In South Kivu, where MONUSCO is preparing to withdraw in a few months, clashes have broken out between the Twirwaneho militias and Mayi-Mayi groups in the south of Minembwe. I will travel next week to Bukavu and Uvira, accompanied by officials of the Mission, United Nations agencies, funds and programmes and Government representatives, to consult with provincial authorities and civil society organizations, including women's groups, in order to assess the implementation of the disengagement.

In conclusion, I would like to express my deep gratitude to the troop- and police-contributing countries of MONUSCO for the courage and dedication shown by their peacekeepers in their mandate to protect civilians, despite an increasingly dangerous environment. The targeting of United Nations peacekeepers is unacceptable, and I call on the Council to ensure that those responsible are held to account.

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

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

Mr. De Rivière (France) *(spoke in French)*: I thank Ms. Keita for her briefing and reiterate France's full support to her.

France condemns the Mouvement du 23 mars (M-23) offensive launched on 7 February against the town of Sake and the support that it receives from Rwanda, as well as the presence of Rwandan forces

on Congolese territory. That must be stopped. The sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Democratic Republic of the Congo must be respected. A threshold was crossed when anti-aircraft systems, which clearly go beyond the capabilities of a mere armed group, were deployed and used on Congolese territory. The security of Goma airport must also be guaranteed. France is convinced that support for armed groups, whatever they may be, will only contribute to escalation. That is why France, together with the United States and the United Kingdom, has proposed the inclusion on the United Nations sanctions list of six new individuals from the M-23 and the Forces démocratiques de libération du Rwanda (FDLR), a decision that all Council members have just approved. All the parties must contribute to de-escalation and do everything possible to bring the tensions under control.

For their part, the Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (FARDC) should cease all collaboration with the FDLR, as the Congolese authorities have committed to doing. France is concerned about the deterioration of the humanitarian situation and calls on all the parties to safeguard civilian populations, especially camps for displaced persons, in accordance with the principles of international humanitarian law. We reiterate our condemnation of hate speech targeting certain communities, particularly the Tutsi.

The dialogue must resume without delay. France supports the efforts of partners in the region, especially the United States and Angola. We particularly welcomed the meeting of Heads of State on 16 and 17 February on the margins of the African Union Summit. Only a path of dialogue, respect for the Luanda road map and the relaunch of the Nairobi process will enable a lasting solution to this crisis.

The M-23 must withdraw from its positions and stay within the cantonment sites. A withdrawal of the M-23 from the area around Sake should be an opportunity to restart peace efforts. Everything must be done to prevent the current crisis from spreading to the entire region. France has condemned the attacks on the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) and the diplomatic efforts being made in Kinshasa and elsewhere in the country. The use of a surface-to-air missile to attack a MONUSCO drone is unacceptable. Several peacekeepers were injured following an attack on a MONUSCO helicopter. We are also concerned

about the information manipulation campaigns that fuel this violence. We welcome the declarations of the Congolese authorities aimed at stopping them and call on them to continue to do everything they can to fulfil their obligations in this regard.

Finally, France commends the decisive action of MONUSCO and its Blue Helmets. The fighting since 7 February has made it clear that coordination with the Southern African Development Community regional force is essential and must be strengthened. France supports MONUSCO in the implementation of its mandate and will continue to stay on the alert in order to ensure that the perpetrators of attacks on peacekeepers are held to account for their actions.

Mr. Hwang (Republic of Korea): I am grateful to the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ms. Bintou Keita, for her comprehensive briefing today. I also welcome the Permanent Representative of the Democratic Republic of the Congo to today's meeting.

In the past two weeks, alarming levels of escalatory violence and sustained tension have gripped the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo, thanks in particular to the Mouvement du 23 mars (M-23) offensive in Sake. Dozens of civilians and military personnel have reportedly been killed or wounded by heavy artillery and shelling. More than 135,000 people have been newly displaced in the past week to nearby Goma, which is already inundated with large numbers of the internally displaced. The United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO), which is at a critical juncture in its disengagement, is also a constant target.

The Republic of Korea is deeply concerned about the escalating violence in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo, and calls on all parties to respect the country's sovereignty, independence, unity and territorial integrity. In this dismaying context, we would like to underline four points.

First, we strongly condemn and urge the M-23 and other armed groups to immediately cease their offensive in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo. It is imperative that all armed groups lay down their arms, cease hostilities permanently and unconditionally and engage in earnest in the disarmament process.

Secondly, all parties must engage constructively in diplomatic dialogue to find a lasting solution to the recurring violence in the eastern Democratic Republic

of the Congo. We commend President Lourenço of Angola for hosting a mini-summit on the margins of the African Union Summit and for his bilateral engagements with the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Rwanda. In that regard, we urge all the parties to reaffirm their commitment to the Nairobi and Luanda peacebuilding processes.

Thirdly, we are deeply troubled by the attacks targeting MONUSCO and condemn them strongly, as well as the recent violent protests that led to threats against United Nations staff and diplomatic corps in Kinshasa, which were fuelled by widespread public mis- and disinformation campaigns. Addressing those campaigns against MONUSCO is crucial, not only for the peacekeepers' safety but also to preserve the 25-year legacy of MONUSCO and the United Nations presence in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo. We call on MONUSCO to jointly strengthen its strategic communications with the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo to establish conditions conducive to a smooth, responsible and sustainable reconfiguration of the United Nations presence there in connection with MONUSCO's disengagement.

Fourthly, the deteriorating humanitarian situation is very worrisome. Two million people in Goma are at a growing risk of being cut off from food and essential supplies as the M-23 attempts to encircle Sake, which is a crucial link to Goma. That further exacerbates the danger for millions of vulnerable individuals who are already prey to deplorable human rights violations and abuses, sexual and gender-based violence and the recruitment and use of children. As such, we emphasize how vital it is for all parties to respect international humanitarian and human rights law.

In conclusion, the protection of civilians must be at the very forefront of efforts as the Democratic Republic of the Congo authorities endeavour to extend State authority alongside the disengagement of MONUSCO. The Republic of Korea, as a Council member and a reliable partner of Africa, reaffirms its unwavering support for the work of Special Representative Keita and MONUSCO. We are committed to continuing to work with all stakeholders to help ensure sustainable peace and stability in the region.

Ms. Gatt (Malta): I thank Special Representative Keita for her comprehensive briefing. I also thank France for calling for today's meeting, in the light of the escalating conflict in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Malta condemns the offensive by the Mouvement du 23 mars (M-23), as well as any external support and military presence. We decisively reaffirm the imperative to respect the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. We are alarmed that recent military escalations have resulted in increased casualties and displacement, heightening the risk of an open regional conflict. Notwithstanding the country's wealth of natural resources, the Democratic Republic of the Congo remains extremely vulnerable to predatory attacks. The situation has reached deplorable levels. The country is witnessing immense humanitarian needs and the largest numbers of internally displaced persons on the continent. More than 25 million people require assistance, with women and children disproportionately affected. We condemn all violations of international humanitarian law and abuses of human rights, including the increasing sexual and gender-based violence. We remind parties of their obligations under international law to ensure rapid, safe and unimpeded humanitarian access.

The activities by more than 100 armed groups underscore the urgent need to cease all support to those groups and compel them to lay down their weapons. Malta has repeatedly supported regional diplomatic initiatives aimed at de-escalation and addressing the root causes of the conflict through proper mediation. It will be crucial to resume those mediation efforts, urging the conflicting parties to address the various grievances and restore a path towards peace and stability.

The United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO), the United Nations and the rest of the international community have steadfastly supported the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The recent violent protests and attacks targeting United Nations personnel and premises, as well as diplomatic missions, are also a consequence of dis- and misinformation campaigns. Malta strongly condemns the attacks and calls for thorough investigations to hold those responsible to account. We fully support the invaluable work by the United Nations on the ground and the extraordinary work being done by its staff. With an escalating conflict in North Kivu, MONUSCO's anticipated withdrawal from South Kivu less than two months from now is a difficult scenario that we have to address. We are increasingly worried about the safety and security of peacekeepers in view of the M-23's direct attacks. Their progressive disengagement remains contingent on the

situation on the ground and the capacity of Congolese forces to step in and protect the civilian population.

To conclude, we call for de-escalation and for the countries of the region to contribute to preventing a regional conflagration.

Mr. Phipps (United Kingdom): Let me begin by thanking Special Representative Keita for her comprehensive briefing and for the ongoing and important work of MONUSCO and the bravery and commitment of its peacekeepers. I would like to make four points today regarding the situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

First, let me express the United Kingdom's deep concern about the worsening violence in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo. We condemn in the strongest terms the continued advance of the Mouvement du 23 mars (M-23) armed group, which is under United Nations sanctions. We call on external actors to end their support for violent armed groups in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, including the M-23. We encourage all the parties to use their influence over the armed groups in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo to de-escalate tensions and deliver a cessation of hostilities.

Secondly, let me join Special Representative Keita in emphasizing the importance of diplomatic dialogue, including through the Luanda and Nairobi peace processes. It is vital that the parties meaningfully engage with those processes, take steps to de-escalate tensions and respect the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Thirdly, we note that United Nations peacekeepers are facing an increasingly dangerous environment. We urge all the parties to respect the Mission's freedom of movement and reiterate our condemnation of the recent attack on a MONUSCO helicopter in early February. Any attacks on civilians, MONUSCO peacekeepers, United Nations offices and diplomats are unacceptable. We support all efforts to counter mis- and disinformation, which are detrimental to our collective efforts to support peace and reach a diplomatic solution.

Finally, I want to express the United Kingdom's deep concern about the worsening humanitarian crisis in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo. Violence will just lead to further violence and pose a risk to regional security and stability. We urge all combatants, including regional forces, to respect international humanitarian law and take active measures to reduce

risks to civilians. Dialogue is key, and we encourage all parties to come back to the table.

Mr. Kanu (Sierra Leone): I have the honour to deliver this statement on behalf of the three African members of the Security Council, namely, Algeria, Mozambique and my own country, Sierra Leone, as well as Guyana (A3+1).

We would like to thank Ms. Bintou Keita, Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO), for her important briefing on the worrisome developments in the country. We acknowledge her diligent efforts once more. We welcome the presence at this meeting of the Permanent Representatives of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Republic of Rwanda.

It is with deep concern that we have been following the deteriorating situation in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo, particularly in Sake and Goma, in North Kivu province, where the already dire security and humanitarian situation has been exacerbated by the recently escalating clashes. The potential impact of those tragic events extends beyond the immediate region and must not be overlooked. That is happening in the context in which the MONUSCO disengagement plan is under way. We hope that effective measures will be taken to avoid a security vacuum and, consequently, the advancement by armed groups, such as the Mouvement du 23 mars (M-23), the Allied Democratic Forces, the Coopération pour le développement du Congo and the Forces démocratiques de libération du Rwanda. It is against that backdrop that we condemn in the strongest terms the actions of all armed groups operating in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. We urge them to refrain from actions contributing to the escalation of the situation on the ground, including the resurgence of ethnic confrontation and the risk of a regional conflict. We urge all armed groups to immediately cease hostilities and withdraw from all occupied areas, as agreed to in the East African Community-led Nairobi and Angola Luanda processes.

We condemn any support by any external party to any armed groups contributing to hostilities and unrest in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and we further call for the cessation of such support. More importantly, we call on the parties to comply with those important processes, which remain credible regional political initiatives, aimed at resolving the conflict in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo. It is

crucial to recognize that military interventions alone will not lead to a comprehensive resolution of the conflict. While they can be both useful and necessary in certain circumstances, in particular to protect civilians, addressing the underlying and root causes is crucial to achieving lasting peace. We firmly believe that investing in dialogue, diplomacy and understanding the root issues driving the crisis in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo are essential. By engaging in open conversations, involving all relevant stakeholders and seeking common ground, we can work towards a more sustainable and holistic solution. We also strongly condemn the attack on MONUSCO staff members and property in the capital of Kinshasa and call on the Congolese authorities to ensure that all those responsible for influencing such actions are held accountable.

We are deeply concerned about the reports of bombs falling on civilian areas in Sake and Goma. It is estimated that 65,000 internally displaced persons are sheltering in those areas. That is absolutely unacceptable. Furthermore, there is a reported displacement of an estimated 135,000 people from the town of Sake towards Goma, the provincial capital of North Kivu. Already-limited resources must now be further stretched to accommodate displaced persons across North Kivu. Such incidents of internal displacement exacerbate the already precarious situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the country with the highest number of internally displaced persons in Africa. In addition, the A3+ is deeply troubled by a UNICEF report according to which children in the Democratic Republic of the Congo were killed, injured and subjected to conflict-related sexual violence at record levels for the third consecutive year in 2023. Such violence is unacceptable. We call on all parties to the conflict to take measures to prevent and end all grave violations against children.

As in any other conflict, it is the many innocent civilians who bear the brunt. Our solidarity goes out to the men, women and children who continue to suffer from the humanitarian impact of the conflict, thereby adding to an already dire situation. In that connection, the A3+ echoes the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees in calling on all parties to ensure the protection of civilians, fulfil their obligations under international humanitarian law and establish safe corridors for aid. We further reiterate the call on international donors to mobilize to respond to the immense humanitarian needs in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. We highly commend the tireless efforts of the humanitarian workers, who, despite the

difficult conditions and security challenges, continue to provide much-needed aid, including clean water, health care and basic necessities, to displaced persons in North Kivu and South Kivu.

We take note of the deployment of the regional forces of the Southern African Development Community (SADC) to the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo. We hope that their support of the Congolese national army will positively contribute to the stabilization of the situation by preventing the advancement of all armed groups operating in the region. We take this opportunity to extend our heartfelt condolences to the families and to the Government of the Republic of South Africa for the untimely demise of two brave military officers in the noble service of the SADC Mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo.

In conclusion, the A3+ reiterates its full support for the independence, sovereignty, unity and territorial integrity of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. We underscore the need for strong and decisive actions at all levels to improve the security and humanitarian situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Let us strive for a future where peace prevails over conflict, with unity in diversity, in line with the African Union position. The A3+ hopes for a swift political resolution of the conflict and for the safety and well-being of the affected communities to be prioritized.

Mrs. Shino (Japan): I would like to express my gratitude to Special Representative of the Secretary-General Keita for her briefing. I welcome the participation of the representatives of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Rwanda.

The renewed offensives by the Mouvement du 23 mars (M-23) in North Kivu have been raising grave concern for all of us. Increased hostilities and violence are having horrifying impacts on people's lives, causing a massive flow of internally displaced persons and threatening human security. The M-23 and all other armed groups in the region must immediately cease hostilities and lay down their arms. Reports of the continued flow of a large amount of sophisticated weaponry into the conflict zone is highly disturbing. I reiterate that support of any kind to armed groups only exacerbates insecurity and further heightens regional tensions and must be stopped now. It is of the utmost importance to preserve the sovereignty, unity and territorial integrity of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. We have to always bear in mind the primacy of political solutions through inclusive dialogue

in order to achieve sustainable peace. All regional initiatives need to be promoted in line with political efforts. The peace support operations of the Mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo of the Southern African Development Community and other national forces should be well coordinated with one another and with the activities of the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) to achieve the common goal of achieving stability in the region. We cannot allow for any further escalation of regional tensions, let alone military confrontation among neighbouring States.

It is regrettable to see continued disinformation and misinformation against MONUSCO, alienating local people and endangering the safety of peacekeepers. The impact is far-reaching, a part of which was recently seen in Kinshasa in the form of violent protests. Those who deliberately spread such inaccurate information and worsen the community divide must be held accountable by State authorities. We welcome the increased strategic communication efforts by MONUSCO, and they should be backed up by local Governments.

In conclusion, Japan reaffirms its commitment to continue working together with MONUSCO and all partners for sustainable peace and stability in the region.

Mr. Wood (United States of America): I thank Special Representative of the Secretary-General Keita for her briefing today and for the great work that she and her team are doing under extraordinarily difficult circumstances. She has my Government's full support. I also wish to welcome the representatives of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Rwanda to this meeting.

The international community must take immediate steps to end the fighting in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo and de-escalate tensions between the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Rwanda. Millions of people are already exposed to a grave humanitarian crisis. The scale of displacement, human rights abuses, gender-based violence and suffering is appalling. The recent attacks by the United Nations-sanctioned, Rwanda-backed, Mouvement du 23 mars (M-23) armed group on the town of Sake and near Goma are unacceptable. The M-23 must immediately cease hostilities and withdraw from the area, as it committed to regional leaders that it would do.

Rwanda must end its support to the M-23. It must also withdraw Rwandan forces from Congolese territory

and immediately remove any and all of its surface-to-air missile systems, which credible reporting indicates have been responsible for intentionally firing on the aerial assets of the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO). The fact that Rwanda, a major troop-contributor to United Nations peacekeeping, would take such hostile action against the United Nations Mission is deeply unsettling and calls for serious evaluation by the international community.

We also call on the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo to ensure that necessary de-confliction measures are in place between the air operations of the Forces armées de la République démocratique du Congo and humanitarian delivery efforts in conflict zones. Urgent steps must be taken to reduce the risk of collision in the air and at landing sites so that humanitarian actors can safely provide relief to affected communities.

The United States has been consistent in denouncing the collaboration between elements of the Congolese armed forces and United Nations- and United States-sanctioned armed actors, including the Forces démocratiques de libération du Rwanda (FDLR). The Democratic Republic of the Congo must immediately cease its support to, and coordination with, the FDLR. We condemn any group that espouses genocide ideology and recognize that the FDLR remains a significant security threat to Rwanda. Rwanda and the Democratic Republic of the Congo must renew their commitment to the confidence-building measures agreed in December, return to a ceasefire and take swift, thorough and systematic steps to promote accountability for those responsible for human rights abuses in this conflict.

The United States is ready to provide intelligence and diplomatic resources to assist in the monitoring of any agreed pause in the fighting. We commend MONUSCO for taking offensive, proactive steps alongside the Congolese armed forces to protect the cities of Sake and Goma through Operation Springbok. We further applaud peacekeepers' efforts to continue to counter armed groups, protect civilians and provide safe transport to internally displaced persons and humanitarian workers delivering much-needed assistance. The growing violence and threats to civilians only raise the stakes for MONUSCO's orderly, responsible and sustainable disengagement from the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

The Security Council must be diligent in its assessment of MONUSCO's withdrawal from South Kivu and use the lessons we learn to inform the projected withdrawal from North Kivu. As the disengagement plan clearly states, the Democratic Republic of the Congo security forces must demonstrate the capacity to provide stability and security for civilians as peacekeepers depart. A security vacuum in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo would be calamitous, and it is not a risk that we should be willing to accept.

We are equally concerned about the protests against MONUSCO and other diplomatic installations across the Democratic Republic of the Congo, including the United States Embassy. We understand the frustrations of the Congolese people, who want and deserve peace. But let me be clear: the United States does not in any way support the M-23 and has repeatedly and publicly called for the Government of Rwanda to end its support to that group. The United States has levied multiple sanctions against the M-23 and its leaders, in addition to supporting United Nations sanctions actions against it.

We are committed to pursuing the designation of individuals and entities that threaten the peace and security of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. We are pleased that, as of today, six additional armed group leaders will be designated by the Committee established pursuant to resolution 1533 (2004). Those individuals are responsible for numerous abuses. But to counter the flow of funds and arms to those who fuel conflict in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, sanctions need to be kept up to date and to be fully implemented. Where possible, we will consider nominating additional individuals and entities for designation at the United Nations. We continue to urge other Member States to join us in this process.

The United States firmly supports the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and lasting peace for all Congolese people. Rwanda and the Democratic Republic of the Congo must walk back from the brink of war. The parties to the conflict and actors in the region should immediately resume the Nairobi and Luanda processes. Those regional diplomatic efforts — not military conflict — are the only path towards a negotiated solution and sustainable peace.

Mrs. Blokar Drobič (Slovenia): I thank Special Representative of the Secretary-General Bintou Keita for her briefing and welcome the participation of the

representatives of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Rwanda in today's meeting.

Slovenia strongly condemns the recent attacks on United Nations staff and facilities in Kinshasa, the assault on a helicopter of the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) in North Kivu and the attacks on diplomatic missions and their personnel. We urge the Congolese authorities to conduct comprehensive investigations into those violent acts and to ensure that those responsible are held accountable. The escalating violence, particularly in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo, threatens both the stability of the country and the peace and security of the wider Great Lakes region. We note with concern the rising tensions between the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Rwanda and call on both countries to exercise maximum restraint in their actions and seek a resolution through peaceful means.

I would like to emphasize the following points.

The violence must end. We call on all the parties involved in the conflict to cease hostilities immediately, to respect and uphold international humanitarian law and international human rights law and to enable safe and unimpeded access of humanitarian aid to reach those in dire need. The conflict is causing widespread displacement and exacerbating hunger and malnutrition at alarming rates.

We strongly denounce the recent increase in aggression by armed groups in North Kivu, especially the Mouvement du 23 mars (M-23), which is intensifying instability in the region and beyond. The immediate and full withdrawal of armed groups from occupied areas, including the M-23, is imperative. The sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Democratic Republic of the Congo must be respected.

We firmly believe that military actions cannot — and will not — bring about an end to the conflict. We underscore the urgency of a renewed commitment to a political and diplomatic resolution in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo and the region. Regional cooperation, facilitated by frameworks such as the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework for the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region, remains key. The significance of regional engagements and the effectiveness of the Luanda and Nairobi

processes, among others, hinges on establishing a genuine dialogue.

Lastly, the recent surge in hostilities and the withdrawal of MONUSCO demand careful attention. Ensuring that the withdrawal is executed in a manner that is safe, orderly, responsible, gradual and sustainable is paramount. The withdrawal must not lead to a security vacuum that could exacerbate the already dire situation and cause further instability. The recent attacks on MONUSCO have only confirmed how critical it is to address the widespread campaign of misinformation and disinformation. We call on all the relevant authorities to actively counter those campaigns against the Mission.

The complexity of the conflict in the Democratic Republic of the Congo makes the path to peace challenging, yet crucial for restoring stability in the country and the region. Slovenia remains committed to the peace, security and stability of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Great Lakes region.

Ms. Evstigneeva (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): We thank Special Representative of the Secretary-General Bintou Keita for her briefing. We welcome the participation in today's meeting of the Permanent Representatives of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Rwanda.

The deterioration of the security situation in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo is of serious concern. We are concerned about the violent armed clashes between the Congolese armed forces and the Mouvement du 23 mars illegal armed group. As a result of the renewed attacks, that group has regained virtually all the positions it voluntarily surrendered in March 2023 after the ceasefire. We condemn the shelling of towns and villages and camps of internally displaced persons (IDPs), where there have been civilian casualties. We call for the unblocking of the land supply routes to Goma. All those actions have already led to a humanitarian crisis and a sharp increase in the number of IDPs, which has exceeded 7 million people. It is clear that the situation in the eastern provinces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo is having a negative impact on the entire Great Lakes region.

We call on all illegal armed groups operating in the Democratic Republic of the Congo to end the violence, lay down their weapons and participate in the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration programmes without preconditions.

We note the support that the Southern African Development Community is providing to Kinshasa in order to overcome the crisis. The joint efforts reflect a commitment to the principle of African solutions to African problems. It is important to ensure the necessary level of coordination with the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) and to identify effective modalities for joint work to overcome the instability. We are ready to discuss the parameters whereby the Mission could provide regional forces with a certain level of assistance.

At the same time, we believe that only political solutions will lead to a comprehensive cessation of hostilities and the creation of the real conditions for lasting stabilization. Achieving tangible results within the framework of the Luanda process is crucial. It is important to intensify regional mediation to overcome tensions between Kinshasa and Kigali. We also believe it necessary to continue to pool complementary efforts and initiatives for regional assistance. It is clear that security and stability in eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo is in the interest of all countries of the Great Lakes region. Any State cooperation with illegal armed groups is completely counter to those interests.

We support the work of MONUSCO and its leadership. We express our concern with regard to the events in Kinshasa on 10 February, when a series of attacks against MONUSCO personnel were carried out. We trust that the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, in coordination with MONUSCO, will take all necessary measures to stabilize the situation and ensure the safety of United Nations personnel. We also expect the Secretariat to analyse the reasons for those developments.

We are convinced that MONUSCO's presence in the conflict zone is an important stabilizing factor. When withdrawing peacekeepers, it is crucial to take into account the evolution of the situation on the ground and act in a responsible step-by-step manner. We must not allow a security vacuum to emerge. Premature withdrawal of peacekeepers could have a negative impact on the situation of civilians.

Russia, as a permanent member of the Security Council, will continue to do everything necessary to assist in resolving the crisis in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo, including at the crucial stage of MONUSCO's withdrawal.

Mr. Hauri (Switzerland) (*spoke in French*): I would like to thank the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Bintou Keita, for her briefing and for all the work accomplished by the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) under difficult circumstances. I welcome the presence of the representatives of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Rwanda at this meeting.

The escalation of violence and the humanitarian situation in North Kivu is alarming. The resumption of clashes between the Forces armées de la République démocratique du Congo (FARDC) and the Mouvement du 23 mars (M-23) is heightening tensions in the Great Lakes region. It is leading to a general destabilization both within and beyond the borders of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Switzerland condemns the M-23 offensive in and around Sake. It calls on the M-23 to immediately cease its operations and to withdraw from the occupied zones, as agreed in the Luanda road map. We express our full support for the sovereignty, unity and territorial integrity of the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

In the space of a few days, more than a hundred thousand people have been displaced, intensifying the already disastrous humanitarian crisis. The situation is exacerbated by massive displacements linked to human rights violations by all parties, intercommunal violence and the spread of hate speech, in particular against Rwandophone populations. Guarantees of unhindered access for humanitarian actors and their protection are essential.

The new escalation of violence, directly or indirectly affecting the civilian population, must end. In that context, the proliferation and use of new military means in the fighting in North Kivu, such as combat drones and mobile air defence systems, are a cause for concern. We recall the obligation of all parties to respect international humanitarian law, in particular the principles of distinction, proportionality and precaution.

We condemn the direct attacks against MONUSCO, including those against civilian personnel. Under those conditions, the Mission's peacekeepers cannot effectively protect the civilian population. In that respect, we are concerned by reports of attacks by multiple actors, including the Wazalendo, on MONUSCO positions in the Sake region. In that regard, we recall the responsibilities of the host State to bring

the perpetrators of such acts to justice, in accordance with resolution 2589 (2021).

Only a negotiated political solution involving all parties can lead to lasting peace. Diplomatic efforts at the national, regional and international levels are therefore essential to address the root causes of the conflicts in eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo. The Nairobi and Luanda processes remain central and must be revitalized as a matter of urgency. We therefore welcome the extraordinary mini-summit on the situation in the eastern region of the Democratic Republic of the Congo on the margins of the ordinary session of the African Union, at the initiative of President Lourenço.

In that context, we call on all parties to respect the ceasefire. We reiterate our call on Rwanda to immediately cease all support for the M-23 and to withdraw its soldiers, which according to the report of the Group of Experts on the Democratic Republic of the Congo, are present on the territory of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. At the same time, we call for the support given to armed groups, including the Forces démocratiques de libération du Rwanda, by certain elements of the FARDC to cease.

I would like to conclude by reiterating Switzerland's full support for MONUSCO. Switzerland welcomes the statements made by the Congolese Minister of Defence, reaffirming the Democratic Republic of the Congo's support for MONUSCO. We encourage the Democratic Republic of the Congo to continue its collaboration with MONUSCO to ensure an environment conducive to the implementation of its mandate, to protect its personnel and to combat misinformation about it.

Faced with the risk of regional unrest, and in the context of MONUSCO's gradual withdrawal from eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo, the Security Council has a responsibility to show unity and send a strong signal of its commitment to peace and security in the region.

Mr. Montalvo Sosa (Ecuador) (*spoke in Spanish*): I recognize the presence of the representatives of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Rwanda. I thank Special Representative of the Secretary-General Keita for her briefing, which paints a worrisome picture of worsening violence in the north-east of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the risk of regional escalation.

The increase in tensions and the deterioration of the security situation have led to a new wave of displacement of thousands of people, including women

and children, with a consequent increase in the already dire humanitarian needs. The situation also demands that allegations of possible war crimes, serious human rights abuses and sexual and gender-based violence be investigated. International humanitarian law and international human rights law must be upheld.

There must be an urgent de-escalation of tensions. We therefore support the call by Under-Secretary-General for Peace Operations Jean-Pierre Lacroix for an immediate cessation of the fighting in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and for all parties to respect the Luanda road map focused on ending hostilities between the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Mouvement du 23 mars (M-23). The call for a ceasefire was also made on the occasion of the mini-summit on peace and security in the eastern region of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, held in Addis Ababa on 17 February, which was convened by the East African Community and attended by the Heads of State and Government of the region and representatives of the African Union and the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region. Regional efforts should be supported, particularly the Luanda and Nairobi processes.

We join in condemning the attacks perpetrated against United Nations peacekeepers and the M-23's public threats against the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO), and we reject the dissemination of false information with the aim of discrediting the Mission.

In conclusion, my delegation believes that the work carried out by MONUSCO, particularly with regard to its mandate of protecting civilians, deserves to be supported and strengthened and that any eventuality or report of sexual exploitation and abuse must be duly analysed, investigated and, if appropriate, punished so that the Mission's work is not unfairly discredited or compromised.

Mr. Sun Zhiqiang (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): I thank Special Representative of the Secretary-General Keita for her briefing and welcome the Permanent Representatives of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Rwanda to this meeting.

Recently, there has been an escalation in violence in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo. Fighting occurred in the area surrounding Sake, and Goma airport was attacked, resulting in deaths, injuries and

displacement. China is concerned about the situation and urges the Mouvement du 23 mars (M-23) and other armed groups to immediately cease fire and withdraw from the occupied area. The recurrent unrest in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo threatens the peace and stability of the entire Great Lakes region. China hopes that the parties concerned will resolve their differences through dialogue and consultation in order to de-escalate the situation as soon as possible and to maintain common security in the region.

China appreciates the mediation efforts of such regional organizations as the African Union (AU), the East African Community and the Southern African Development Community (SADC), along with the efforts of countries in the region, such as Angola, to that end. China also notes that a meeting was held during the recent AU summit to discuss that issue. The countries in the region are aware of the historical and practical challenges of the issue in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo. Under the current circumstances, the international community should support the efforts of the relevant regional organizations in finding a political solution and facilitate the effective functioning of the Nairobi and Luanda processes.

Recently, the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for the Great Lakes Region, Mr. Huang Xia visited several countries in the region to promote constructive dialogue among the countries concerned. China appreciates that effort and hopes that Special Envoy Huang Xia and Special Representative of the Secretary-General Keita will combine their respective mandates to support the political process in the region. China has noted the recently deployed SADC peacekeeping operation in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo and hopes that that operation will help promote the maintenance of regional stability and that its coordination with the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) and countries in the region will be strengthened.

MONUSCO is faced with an even more challenging task in the complex current situation. China supports MONUSCO, led by Ms. Keita, in continuing to fulfil its mandate to protect civilians and working with the Forces armées de la République démocratique du Congo to maintain peace and stability in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo. MONUSCO should ensure the safe and orderly implementation of the disengagement plan, in South Kivu and other areas, and

a proper handover to the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo in order to avoid a security vacuum. Recently, demonstrations against the United Nations broke out in the capital of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and other areas. China hopes that MONUSCO will strengthen communication with the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and other parties in order to maintain mutual trust and cooperation, while taking effective measures to ensure the safety of United Nations peacekeepers.

The President: I now give the 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 that I address the Security Council under your presidency, Madam President, allow me at the outset to discharge the pleasant duty of congratulating you and thanking you for having taken the initiative of convening this urgent meeting on the current situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. I also cannot help but express my satisfaction to you, Madam President, and that of my delegation, at seeing you preside over this open meeting of the Security Council. At the same time, I would like to acknowledge the excellent work done by the Permanent Representative of France during his presidency of the Council last month.

Please allow me to extend a warm greeting to all the newly elected members of the Council, in particular to the two new representatives from Africa, namely, Algeria and Sierra Leone. The Democratic Republic of the Congo wishes them all a fruitful Security Council mandate.

Lastly, allow me to express my gratitude to Ms. Bintou Keita, Special Representative of the Secretary-General, for the briefing she has just given and for her commitment, together with all the staff of the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO), to serving the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

I cannot conclude this introduction without paying a heartfelt tribute to the two valiant heroes of the Southern African Development Community (SADC) forces who have just fallen victim to the barbarity of the forces of aggression. Their sacrifice will not be in vain. The goal will be achieved, and the east of the Democratic Republic of the Congo will be freed from this oppression, which has lasted too long.

Please bear with me as I begin my remarks with a very brief digression, concerning the demonstrations of 10 February 2024 in Kinshasa. In doing so, I want to reassure the Council that my Government, which has deplored and clearly denounced those unfortunate incidents, has taken the necessary measures to ensure and guarantee the security of MONUSCO and that of the personnel and diplomatic facilities in Kinshasa.

We convene this meeting against the backdrop of war raging between the Rwandan army coalition — composed of the Rwanda Defence Force (RDF) and the Mouvement du 23 mars (M-23) — and the Forces armées de la République démocratique du Congo (FARDC) on Congolese soil, 30 kilometres from the city of Goma, in the vicinity of Sake in the Masisi territory. The information that we have reflects that, for the past two days, there has been a reinforcement of RDF troops along the border between the two countries around the town of Gisenyi on the Rwandan side, and along the great barrier going up towards the small barrier up to milestone 11.

That is the situation as it stands now, in the aftermath of the attacks carried out by that RDF/M-23 coalition against MONUSCO drones on 12 February, followed by the bombing of Goma International Airport on 17 February. The bombings took place at the same time that an important meeting on the situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo was being held in Addis Ababa. The meeting took place on the initiative of the facilitator designated by the African Union, the President of Angola, His Excellency Mr. João Lourenço Gonçalves, on the margins of the Summit of Heads of State and Government of the African Union.

That umpteenth act of Rwandan aggression constitutes a State crime under international law and a grave violation of the sovereignty, territorial integrity and political independence of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. That situation is the reason behind a major security crisis that has forced almost 7 million women and children to be displaced from their homes in the territories of Rutshuru, Masisi and Nyiragongo. The international community in general, and the Security Council in particular, must acknowledge that that aggression is a reality and act to preserve peace and security in the subregion.

I would now like to review some of the sweeping, fabricated arguments that Rwanda has put forward to clear its own conscience in the light of its crimes and its posture as an aggressor country, and I will begin with

the question of the Forces démocratiques de libération du Rwanda (FDLR).

My Government notes that the Group of Experts on the Democratic Republic of the Congo was, this time, able to unravel the mystery surrounding the FDLR, revealing in black and white in paragraph 30 of its midterm report published on 30 December 2023 (see S/2023/990) that, since early October 2023, RDF soldiers and M-23 deployed in the territories of Nyiragongo, Rutshuru and Masisi were supported by several combat support and reconnaissance teams totalling 250 former FDLR combatants and operating under the command of the Rwanda Defence Intelligence Department. Moreover, witness accounts collected from fighters shortly after the publication of the report of the Group of Experts show that Mr. Bimenyimana, alias Cobra, a former FDLR combatant who was repatriated to Rwanda several years ago, is currently leading an RDF battalion deployed around the city of Sake in Masisi territory.

One therefore has every right to wonder who among the RDF or the FARDC is really benefiting from the presence of this residual FDLR force on Congolese soil. Why is Rwanda using these FDLR soldiers, recycling them as it pleases, while it describes them as genocidal. The findings of the Group of Experts mandated by the Council demonstrate that the FDLR in no way pose a threat to Rwanda's security. The RDF and the FDLR are, in reality, allies serving one single cause — laying their hands on the Democratic Republic of the Congo's strategic minerals. That complicity can be explained by the fact that, so far, for more than two decades, no FDLR attack against Rwanda from Congolese territory has been recorded. Moreover, seeing as the members of this nefarious force are not Congolese citizens, my Government proposes that the Security Council, the African Union and the regional communities create an ad hoc mechanism or a special force to be dispatched into the field in North Kivu to identify those individuals and to expel them from Congolese territory. The Democratic Republic of the Congo is ready to join such an initiative in order to bring a definitive end to the controversy surrounding this issue.

Rwanda will say that it is in the Democratic Republic of the Congo because there is discrimination and hate speech there, because there is a risk of genocide being committed and because it must protect the Congolese Tutsi. The question arises, then: who gave Rwanda a mandate to act in such a way? That is proof of Rwanda's

illusion of grandeur. My delegation would like to underscore the lack of consistency in the so-called hate speech allegedly propagated by some Congolese people regarding Rwandan speakers and to point out that the isolated cases of violations of Rwandan speakers' rights have been severely punished by the competent services, including via judicial decisions. Furthermore, the Government has not waited to take measures to protect Rwandan speakers whenever necessary, in line with the laws of the Republic. In any case, Congolese problems, regardless of their origins, will only be resolved by Congolese people and within our national borders, without any external interference.

Rwanda's illusion of grandeur leads it to believe that it has acquired a natural right to meddle with impunity in the domestic affairs of its neighbours. With the Democratic Republic of the Congo, it has taken its audacity too far, to the point of opposing the deployment of MONUSCO and the SADC — which are supporting the armed forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo — as if it were co-running my country. My delegation would like to make it clear that, by virtue of the sovereignty of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, its Government is free to resort, according to its security needs, to a bilateral or multilateral partnership, and no one has the right to prevent it from doing so or to criticize its sovereign choices. Rwanda therefore has no right to oppose the choices made freely by the Democratic Republic of the Congo in any field, unless it is seeking to violate its sovereignty, as it has been doing for 30 years now.

Moreover, the M-23 is not an ordinary armed group; it is Rwanda's armed wing in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Rwanda has been using it as it pleases for almost three decades to destabilize the Democratic Republic of the Congo from the east. That is why, after the *Rassemblement congolais pour la démocratie*, a movement that it created and supported uncompromisingly in 1998, Rwanda created the *Congrès national pour la défense du peuple* in 2006, and then finally the first iteration of the M-23 in 2009. Defeated in 2013, that armed group resurfaced in November 2021, when fighters who were well equipped by Rwanda launched a series of deadly attacks against positions of the FARDC and the *Institut congolais pour la conservation de la nature*, occupying the corner of the shared border between the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Uganda and Rwanda, thereby aggravating tensions in the region at a time when the President of the Republic, His Excellency Mr. Félix-Antoine Tshisekedi

Tshilombo, had just begun political consultations with local armed groups on their return to their own country, in accordance with the communiqué of the East African Community's Heads of State Conclave in April 2021. Since then, this movement, supported by the RDF, has increased the number of its attacks and has taken over several positions that it has occupied for almost two years, thereby defying the entire the international community.

I have spoken at length about the evolution of the security situation in the east of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, which is controlled by our aggressors. I have also spoken about the illusion of grandeur of our aggressor neighbours and their macabre campaign on the ground. Allow me, at this point, to summarize.

The aggression against the Democratic Republic of the Congo carried out by Rwanda, whose army is illegally occupying part of the Congolese province of North Kivu and is also providing various types of support to the M-23 terrorist group in order to destabilize the Democratic Republic of the Congo, is probably one of the main causes of the security crisis, both in the eastern part of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and in the Great Lakes region. Several peace initiatives have been undertaken by the international community, and a plan for resolving the crisis has emerged from the Nairobi and Luanda processes. So far, those initiatives and that plan have remained at a standstill because Rwandan leaders are deliberately blocking them with various kinds of excuses in order to gain time to realize their outsized ambitions of creating in the Democratic Republic of the Congo a zone of influence that they would then turn into an exploitation and settler colony in order to control Congolese institutions.

In principle, a country such as Rwanda, which constantly tramples the basic rules of international law and the values and principles of the Charter of our Organization, should be deprived of its right to speak at the United Nations until its reprehensible conduct stops, which means Rwanda's total withdrawal of its troops from the territory of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. My delegation urges the Security Council to demand that Rwanda unconditionally withdraw its troops from the territory of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and cease all support to the M-23 terrorists to allow for a way out.

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

Mr. Rwamucyo (Rwanda): As this is the first time I address the Security Council this month, allow me to first congratulate you, Madam President, and your team on your country's assumption of the presidency of the Council. I also want to thank the briefer, Special Representative of the Secretary-General Bintou Keita, for her briefing, and I thank Council members for their statements.

The conflict in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and particularly in the eastern part of the country, has a history. There are underlying and immediate causes that must be addressed for a sustainable solution. The failure to address those underlying and immediate causes of the conflict is what brings us to the current state.

The situation in eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo today is volatile, following the violation of the ceasefire by the Forces armées de la République démocratique du Congo (FARDC) and its allied armed groups, including the genocidal Forces démocratiques de libération du Rwanda (FDLR) and its splinter groups, and the expulsion of the East African Community regional force, which had managed to secure a ceasefire.

Indeed, the recent advances by the Mouvement du 23 mars (M-23) are due to the acts of the FARDC and the allied groups after the expulsion of the East African Community regional force, which had been overseeing the ceasefire and withdrawal process under a regionally brokered initiative. In addition, the regional peace initiatives, including the Nairobi and Luanda processes, have been totally rejected by the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, which has decided to pursue only a military solution.

Rwanda is therefore deeply concerned about the abandonment of the Luanda and Nairobi processes by the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and, moreover, about the international community's indifference to the dramatic military build-up of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The current trend is worrisome and risks aggravating the already dire situation in the eastern part of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, especially North Kivu.

The Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo maintains the option of a military solution to a political problem that we believe is easy to resolve by addressing the root causes and the basic demands of the Kinyarwanda-speaking Congolese, including basic rights of citizenship, respect for human rights and the

right to live on their ancestral lands. The continued military build-up is an indication that the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, working with the Rwandan genocidal force, the FDLR, intends to expel the M-23 and, in general, the Kinyarwanda-speaking Congolese civilian population from the territory of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, force them to become refugees and join those other Kinyarwandophone refugees who have been in refugee camps in neighbouring countries for the past almost 30 years.

Militarization and the Democratic Republic of the Congo's State-orchestrated proliferation of weapons, by arming the genocidal FDLR and the so-called Wazalendo militia mercenaries and Mayi-Mayi groups against their fellow Kinyarwanda-speaking citizens, do not address the root causes of the problem, but serve only to add fuel to the fire, unnecessarily worsening the already dire situation.

Rwanda wants to make it clear to the Council that protecting the rights of the Kinyarwanda-speaking Congolese and other minorities is the primary responsibility of the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. That is very important to note. As the Council is aware, the consistent failure to meet that obligation has exposed the whole region to almost three decades of conflict and instability.

The situation in North Kivu is of concern to Rwanda and other States in the region, given the build-up of the military coalition comprised of the FARDC, mercenaries and the genocidal FDLR and its splinter groups. There is also an unruly militia, rebranded as Wazalendo, which include armed extremist Hutu groups, known by the name of Nyatura, formed by the FDLR and the Burundian army, the Force nationale du Burundi.

The Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo therefore continues to provide logistical, operational and financial support to these armed groups, especially the genocidal FDLR, to fight alongside the FARDC against the M-23. It is clear that the genocidal FDLR has been fully integrated into the Congolese army as a matter of Government policy, and that has been repeatedly reported by the United Nations Group of Experts. It is a matter of serious concern to Rwanda that a force that annihilated more than 1 million Rwandan Tutsi has been integrated into the Congolese armed forces, and that must be addressed.

That alliance continues to target innocent Kinyarwanda-speaking Congolese and has caused widespread violence, hate speech and ethnically motivated murders, which have been increasing in number and could degenerate into another genocide in the region. We are on the brink of a very serious catastrophe in the region as a result of that armed group.

Hate speech and crude tribalism have become the currency of Congolese politics under the current Administration. Currently, in eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo, ethnic discrimination and targeted killings have become the order of the day. Rwanda appeals to the Council to hold accountable the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo for peddling and encouraging the spread of hate speech targeting part of its population. Rwanda will continue to call for accountability. The Council cannot continue to normalize hate and its consequences.

The recent deployment of the Southern African Development Community Mission to the Democratic Republic of the Congo (SAMIDRC) further complicates the already dire situation. SAMIDRC is not a neutral force, as evidenced by the selective application of its mandate, whereby it is targeting only one armed group, the M-23, and at the same time fighting alongside other armed groups embedded within the FARDC, including the genocidal FDLR. Joint operations between the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the FARDC with the allied groups, among them the genocidal FDLR, are also a matter of concern to Rwanda. Rwanda takes this alliance and its intended goal very seriously.

Rwanda believes that the solution to the conflict in eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo is very simple and should be addressed only by the political will of the Democratic Republic of the Congo to address the basic demands of the Kinyarwanda-speaking Congolese, including recognizing their basic and inherent citizenship rights and, as nationals of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, granting them political and civic rights, repatriating Congolese refugees, who have been in Rwanda, Kenya and Uganda for more than two decades, totalling almost 30 years for some of them, and repatriating the genocidal FDLR armed groups back to Rwanda.

Rwanda's position on the problem of the M-23 has been very clear since the resumption of hostilities. This issue must be resolved politically among Congolese. We will not accept the problem being externalized into

Rwanda by force once again. It should be well noted that any solution that does not cater for the root causes of the conflict in eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo will not last. As the Council might be aware, in 2012 and 2013, the M-23 was defeated militarily. However, 10 years later, the rebel group re-emerged, demanding protection for its people who were being persecuted. They were chased from their ancestral lands. Their animals were killed; homes destroyed, and women and girls raped.

During the just-concluded presidential elections in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, we witnessed high-level anti-Rwanda rhetoric. Although we have been used to the Democratic Republic of the Congo authorities using anti-Rwanda rhetoric as their political campaign tools, President Tshisekedi Tshilombo this time went beyond and declared his intentions to cause regime change in Rwanda. This is a matter that we take very seriously. The same threats and intentions to cause regime change in Rwanda were echoed by the Burundian President Evariste Ndayishimiye during his trip to Kinshasa in January. The recent escalation of the conflict in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo comes in the context of those public declarations by the Presidents of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Burundi to support regime change in Rwanda and heightened ethnic tensions in the region.

We need to bring to the attention of the Council that, in the interest of peace, Rwanda has been cautious and has avoided responding to the provocative acts by the Congolese Government, including shelling on Rwandan territory, violation of Rwandan airspace by Congolese fighter jets, cross-border shooting by FARDC soldiers and parading of armed FDLR and Wazalendo elements at the border between Rwanda and the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Make no mistake, Rwanda takes seriously the statements by the Presidents of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Burundi to cause regime change, and the direct support to the FDLR genocidal force. As a result of those direct threats, Rwanda has adjusted its posture accordingly. We wish to stress that any force that directly or indirectly collaborates and supports the genocidal FDLR is considered belligerent to Rwanda.

I wish to reiterate that Rwanda believes that the solutions to the security challenges in the Democratic Republic of the Congo cannot be found in blame games or externalizing the Democratic Republic of the Congo's internal problems. The solutions lie in inclusive and

constructive dialogue meant to address the root causes of the conflict.

In conclusion, the security challenges in our region are complex, but they are also solvable. Amplifying the false allegations of the Democratic Republic of the Congo Government while never holding it accountable for allying itself with armed groups, which have committed and continue to commit serious human rights abuses against civilians, cannot lead to solutions. The Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo's support to the genocidal FDLR is a matter of State policy, and not the choice of individual actors as claimed. Ending Congolese Government support to the FDLR and ensuring their demobilization and repatriation to Rwanda is a non-negotiable requirement. If Kinshasa continues to support the genocidal FDLR and other anti-Rwanda elements, Rwanda's defensive and preventive mechanisms will remain in place to guard against violations of our borders and airspace and counter any spillover into Rwanda to ensure total security for our territory. Territorial sovereignty for the Democratic Republic of the Congo is also territorial sovereignty for Rwanda. Both matter; it cannot be one or the other. It has to be both. Rwanda will never allow the FDLR and their backers, directly or indirectly, to cause any harm to Rwanda or our people.

Before ending this statement, I wish to emphasize four key points.

First, protecting the rights and lives of Kinyarwanda-speaking Congolese is a primary responsibility of the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The international community cannot be a bystander when hate speech and persecution are normalized. That has happened before in Rwanda — in 1994. We should not allow it to happen again.

Secondly, the Democratic Republic of the Congo's support for the genocidal FDLR is State policy, and not the choice of individual actors. This is a very serious threat to Rwanda's security and territorial integrity and must be addressed.

Thirdly, Rwanda takes very seriously the threats by the Congolese Government to cause regime change in Rwanda using force.

Fourthly, the root causes of conflict in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and particularly in eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo, must be addressed honestly, justly and transparently to stop the cycle of violence and achieve sustainable peace in the

region. We cannot repeat the same mistakes and expect a different outcome.

Rwanda appreciates and fully supports the tireless mediation efforts of regional leaders, notably President João Lourenço of Angola. We wish to stress that Rwanda is committed to taking extraordinary steps to achieve security and stability in our region by addressing the root causes of the conflict.

The President: The representative of the Democratic Republic of the Congo has asked for the floor to make a further statement. I now give him the floor.

Mr. Mukongo (Democratic Republic of the Congo) (*spoke in French*): I will be brief. I just have three points to make.

First, in his statement the representative of Rwanda has shown the Council that Rwanda is afraid of genocide, which is normal. We are all afraid of genocide. However, this genocide is perpetrated in Rwanda among Rwandans. I would remind the Council that there are only two ethnic groups, perhaps three, in Rwanda. We have 450 in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and we live together.

Rwanda cannot claim that it is coming to our country to resolve ethnic problems being faced in Rwanda. The Tutsis are opposed to the Hutus in Rwanda because, although the Tutsis are a minority, they hold the power in Rwanda and wish to hold that over the Hutu. Rwanda will never do that in my country. The Congolese Tutsis are Congolese, not Rwandan. Rwanda has no right to claim that it is coming to resolve ethnic problems in the Democratic Republic of the Congo by crossing the border. We will never allow that. Take note that the problems of the Congolese Tutsis will be resolved by the Congolese within our borders. Rwanda should stay home.

Secondly, the representative of Rwanda is afraid of rhetoric. He speaks of rhetoric, statements and threats made against Rwanda, which he takes seriously. But

they have invaded the territory of a country. They are on the territory of that country with weapons, troops and missile and rocket launchers, and they are afraid of rhetoric. We have taken due note of that. Rwanda should withdraw its troops from the Democratic Republic of the Congo; then it would no longer have to fear rhetoric.

As far as the blocking of the Luanda peace process is concerned, everyone — the Council in particular — has been a witness to the fact that Rwanda, as part of its delusions of grandeur, has continued to arm the Mouvement du 23 mars (M-23) to block the Luanda process, which we were all engaged in. The process has stages: a cessation of hostilities, the cantonment of the M-23, the withdrawal of Rwandan troops from Congolese territory, and so on. But they have not obeyed any of that. Everyone knows the truth. It is an open secret. Rwanda is in the Democratic Republic of the Congo to pillage our wealth, the strategic minerals that lay in the subsoil of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. It is nothing more than that. We all know.

They are producing so many alibis. Where has anyone seen a Tutsi mistreated in the Democratic Republic of the Congo? Where? We have 450 ethnic groups. Why would we mistreat the Tutsi? Are they the most important group in the world? Not at all. Rwanda has two ethnic groups in its territory, and it does not know how to manage them. They should stay where they are. Rwanda should not believe that it can project its Hutu-Tutsi conflict onto our country. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo we have more than 450 ethnic groups. We have Nilotic, Bantu, Pigmy and Sudanese. We all live together in harmony. Why would we only have problems with the Tutsis? Rwanda's alibi for coming to exploit the wealth of my country does not hold water. Rwanda has been putting forward that argument since 1996, and it does not hold water. The Council is tired of hearing Rwanda saying the same thing. Rwanda must leave the territory of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Rwanda has grown rich enough. Everything must come to an end.

The meeting rose at 4.40 p.m.