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Implementation of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework for the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Region

Report of the Secretary-General

I. Introduction

1. The present report is submitted pursuant to Security Council resolution [2666 \(2022\)](#), in which the Council requested the Secretary-General to report every six months on the implementation of the commitments under the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework for the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the region and its linkages with the broader security situation in the region.¹ It provides an overview of peace and security developments since the issuance of the previous report ([S/2022/735](#)) and covers the period from 16 September 2022 to 15 March 2023.

II. Major developments

A. Security situation

2. The security situation in the Great Lakes region deteriorated as tensions mounted between the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Rwanda, with increasing cross-border incidents and persisting activities of armed groups in eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo. The Mouvement du 23 mars (M23) continued to extend its control in North Kivu Province, despite claims of withdrawal from some areas. The Allied Democratic Forces (ADF) also increased its attacks against civilians and defence forces despite ongoing joint operations by Ugandan and Congolese military forces in eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo.

3. Eight cross-border incidents were reported between the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Rwanda. On 7 November 2022, the Government of Rwanda reported that a Congolese fighter jet had violated Rwandan airspace on the same day. The

¹ In this context, the region refers to the 13 signatory countries of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework, namely: Angola, Burundi, the Central African Republic, the Congo, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Kenya, Rwanda, South Africa, South Sudan, the Sudan, Uganda, the United Republic of Tanzania and Zambia. In addition, the following four intergovernmental organizations act as guarantors of the Framework: the African Union, the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region, the Southern African Development Community and the United Nations.



Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo acknowledged the incident, stating that it was unintentional. On 19 November, the Rwanda Defence Force (RDF) announced in a statement that an individual wearing a uniform of the Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (Forces armées de la République démocratique du Congo, FARDC) crossed the border and fired at RDF guard towers in Rubavu District, Rwanda. He was reportedly killed by an RDF patrol. Rwanda requested the Expanded Joint Verification Mechanism of the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region (ICGLR) to investigate. On 28 December, the Government of Rwanda stated that a Congolese fighter jet had violated its airspace along Lake Kivu in the Western Province of Rwanda and noted that those violations were against the spirit of the Luanda process. On 29 December, the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo reacted, stating that two unarmed Congolese aircraft had undertaken routine flights in Congolese airspace.

4. On 24 January 2023, a fighter jet of the Congolese defence forces came under fire as it was landing at Goma airport. The Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo denied the claims by the Rwandan authorities that the jet had violated Rwandan airspace. The ad hoc verification mechanism is investigating the incident. On 28 January, an armed confrontation reportedly took place between Congolese and Rwandan naval forces near Ibindja island in Lake Kivu, in the border area between the two countries. The clashes reportedly resulted in the injury of one Congolese police officer and the displacement of several families from the island.

5. On 15 February, Rwanda accused FARDC of having fired at a Rwandan border post in the border area between Bukavu and Rusizi earlier the same day. Congolese authorities denied the accusations, stating that FARDC had been engaged in the pursuit of a criminal group on Congolese territory. On 3 March, RDF announced in a statement that an FARDC soldier had crossed into Rwanda and opened fire on RDF soldiers in Rubavu District. The FARDC soldier was reportedly killed in the ensuing fire exchange. The Expanded Joint Verification Mechanism was seized of the matter.

6. Other cross-border incidents between countries in the region included the arrest on 10 November, according to Congolese military authorities, of two soldiers of the Uganda People's Defence Forces (UPDF) by naval forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo in Mahagi Port, Ituri Province, after having crossed the border while pursuing a Congolese motorbike driver who allegedly lacked required documentation.

7. During the period under review, M23 expanded its area of control, while continuing to clash with FARDC. On 8 November, the Congolese National Assembly declared M23 a terrorist group and recommended prohibiting negotiations and integration of the armed group members into national defence and security forces. While M23 began to withdraw from the locality of Kibumba and the Rumangabo military base in North Kivu Province on 23 December and 5 January, respectively, the group nevertheless retained control of the surrounding areas. The withdrawal took place under the auspices of the regional force of the East African Community (EAC), which assumed control of the vacated areas. Between January and March, M23 repeatedly stated its commitment to adhere to a ceasefire, notably following engagements with the former President of Kenya and facilitator of the EAC-led Nairobi process, Uhuru Kenyatta, on 12 January and with Angolan authorities on 28 February. The ceasefire, however, did not hold. On 27 January, M23 reportedly took control of Kitchanga, Masisi Territory, claiming the need to defend itself against military pressure from FARDC. On 12 March, M23 temporarily occupied a district of the town of Sake before being repelled by FARDC.

8. Meanwhile, ADF expanded the geographic scope of its attacks in North Kivu and Ituri Provinces, despite the continued joint UPDF-FARDC operations. Between 17 September and 15 March, ADF carried out 172 attacks, killing more than 488

civilians, including 104 women and 26 children, in North Kivu and Ituri Provinces. On 12 December, UPDF soldiers reportedly exchanged fire with an ADF splinter group that had crossed into Uganda from the Democratic Republic of the Congo to allegedly infiltrate UPDF operational areas. According to UPDF, 20 ADF elements were killed and 15 elements were captured, while the Ugandan army registered one death. During the same period, two ADF attacks involving improvised explosive devices in North Kivu Province resulted in 15 fatalities and 81 injuries.

9. The Forces démocratiques de libération du Rwanda (FDLR) also remained active in eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo. Several clashes between FDLR and M23 in Rutshuru Territory were reported in November and December. On 6 December, in a communiqué, FDLR stated its commitment to fight alongside FARDC.

10. In South Kivu, joint Congolese and Burundian operations continued. On 23 October, Congolese and Burundian troops clashed with the Forces nationales de libération (FNL), a Burundian armed group, resulting in three FNL fatalities. On 28 November, another operation was launched against FNL. According to FARDC, 40 FNL elements were killed while the group was dislodged from its command and logistics base in Uvira Territory. FNL denied having been dislodged.

11. The Résistance pour un État de droit au Burundi (RED Tabara) withdrew from its positions in Uvira Territory and moved to Lulenge Sector, Fizi Territory, following military pressure from Congolese and Burundian troops. RED Tabara, however, reportedly formed a coalition with several local armed groups, including Colonel Makanika's Twigwaneho group, to resist the military pressure.

12. Regarding the EAC regional force, Kenya initiated the deployment of one battalion to eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo on 12 November and Uganda and South Sudan announced their intention to send troops on 21 November and 28 December, respectively. On 30 January, FARDC informed in a communiqué that the Democratic Republic of the Congo had requested the repatriation of Rwandan officers from the regional force's headquarters in Goma, "for security reasons". In the communiqué, it was also stated that Rwanda had recalled all its officers in regional mechanisms based in the Democratic Republic of the Congo following that decision. In a letter addressed to the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Christophe Lutundula, on 1 February, the EAC Secretary-General, Peter Mathuki, requested "further and urgent clarification" from the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo on the repatriation of Rwandan officers. On 3 March, in a press statement, EAC announced the deployment of Burundian troops to eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo on 4 March. On 9 March, a joint ICGLR-EAC ceasefire verification mission, led by the commander of the ad hoc verification mechanism created under the Luanda process, visited Sake and Mubambiro in North Kivu Province to verify alleged ceasefire violations.

13. Following the announcement made on 11 March, on 17 March, at the request of President João Lourenço, in his capacity as Commander-in-Chief of the Angolan Armed Forces, the Parliament of Angola approved the deployment of a contingent of the Angolan Armed Forces to eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo to secure M23 cantonment areas and protect members of the ad hoc verification mechanism.

B. Political developments

14. In response to the deteriorating security situation and increasing tensions between the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Rwanda, leaders in the region further stepped up diplomatic outreach and dialogue initiatives, notably through the

Luanda process mediated by the President of Angola and the EAC-led Nairobi process facilitated by former President Kenyatta.

15. During the reporting period, tensions between the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Rwanda increased further, with both countries accusing each other of supporting armed groups. On 24 October, the spokesperson of the Government of Rwanda accused FARDC of continuing to operate alongside irregular armed militias, including FDLR. In response, the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo claimed in a press release on 25 October that Rwanda was backing M23. The statement further noted a “permanent interference” of Rwanda in the internal affairs of the Democratic Republic of the Congo to maintain a “climate of terror in the East, thus enabling widespread looting”.

16. On 29 October, the Democratic Republic of the Congo declared the Ambassador of Rwanda to the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Vincent Karega, as persona non grata. The Government justified the measure by “Rwanda’s persistence in attacking the Democratic Republic of the Congo and supporting the M23 terrorist movement”. On 30 October, the Government of Rwanda indicated that Rwandan security forces at the border had been placed on high alert while monitoring the “Congolese escalation”. The Government of Rwanda also reiterated its concerns over the use of hate speech against Rwandans and Congolese Kinyarwanda-speaking communities in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Between November and March, the President of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Félix-Antoine Tshisekedi Tshilombo and the President of Rwanda, Paul Kagame, as well as other senior government officials on both sides, increased accusations and counter-accusations.

17. In response, on 30 October, the President of Senegal and Chairperson of the African Union, Macky Sall, and the Chairperson of the African Union Commission, Moussa Faki Mahamat, issued a joint statement expressing concern about the deteriorating security situation in eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo. They called for an immediate ceasefire and urged stakeholders to engage in constructive dialogue.

18. In a statement issued on the same day, EAC facilitator Kenyatta expressed deep concern about the escalating conflict and humanitarian crisis. He called on armed groups to cease fighting, noting that there was no military solution to the conflict. The President of Burundi and Chairperson of EAC, Évariste Ndayishimiye, also engaged his counterparts in the region by phone on “ways and means of managing the security crisis” and dispatched an emissary to Kinshasa on 31 October.

19. In addition, on 30 and 31 October, the Minister of External Relations of Angola, Tete António, travelled to Kinshasa and Kigali to deliver a message from President Lourenço to Presidents Tshisekedi and Kagame. His mission followed earlier visits to the two capitals, on 13 and 14 October, during which he had introduced the newly appointed head of the ad hoc verification mechanism under the Luanda road map, Lieutenant-General João Nassone of Angola. On 9 November, the ad hoc verification mechanism was deployed to Goma.

Luanda and Nairobi processes

20. On 23 November, President Lourenço convened a mini-summit in Luanda on peace and security in eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo. Participants included President Tshisekedi, President Ndayishimiye, in his capacity as Chairperson of EAC, EAC facilitator Kenyatta and the Minister for Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation of Rwanda, Vincent Biruta, in representation of the President of Rwanda. Representatives from the African Union and ICGLR also attended. The mini-summit resulted in the adoption of a timetable for the implementation of priority actions related to armed group activities, notably M23, and

bilateral relations between the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Rwanda. It further acknowledged the need for permanent coordination between the Luanda and Nairobi processes. The mini-summit was preceded by President Lourenço's visits to Kigali and Kinshasa on 11 and 12 November, respectively, and a meeting in Bujumbura, Burundi, of the Chiefs of General Staff of the EAC armed forces on 9 February, at which a revised timeline for the M23 withdrawal was adopted.

21. Within the framework of the Nairobi process, the third round of consultations (Nairobi III) between the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Congolese armed groups, as well as representatives of civil society, took place from 28 November to 6 December in Nairobi. Participants identified key issues underlying the recurrent cycles of violence and proposed a set of recommendations to address security and socioeconomic challenges in eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo. It was agreed, *inter alia*, that a committee of representatives from the affected communities, EAC and the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo would be established to facilitate the "release of prisoners with no criminal records of atrocities or criminal convictions", that meetings would be organized in several locations in eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo to evaluate progress made through Nairobi III, and that the Demobilization, Disarmament, Community Recovery and Stabilization Programme of the Democratic Republic of the Congo would be reviewed to consider favourably the recommendation by the armed groups for their leadership to be included in the Programme. The question of disarming foreign armed groups and its impact on the disarmament of Congolese armed groups was also discussed.

22. Nairobi III was preceded by a series of stakeholder consultations. On 7 November, in the margins of the twenty-seventh session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change in Sharm El-Sheikh, Egypt, the Presidents of Burundi, Kenya, Rwanda and the United Republic of Tanzania, as well as the Prime Minister of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the EAC Secretary-General encouraged, among other things, enhanced coordination in the implementation of the Nairobi process and the Luanda road map on the pacification process in the eastern region of the Democratic Republic of the Congo adopted on 6 July.

23. On 15 December, Presidents Ndayishimiye and Lourenço convened on the margins of a United States-Africa Leaders Summit in Washington, D.C., a consultative meeting with their counterparts from Kenya, Rwanda, the United Republic of Tanzania and Uganda to jointly review the implementation of the Nairobi process and the Luanda road map.

24. On 4 February, President Ndayishimiye convened an extraordinary EAC summit in Bujumbura, Burundi. The participating Heads of State called for the strengthening of the political process, an immediate ceasefire by all parties, the withdrawal of armed groups, including foreign armed groups, and the de-escalation of tensions, as well as the use of established mechanisms to resolve disputes. The EAC Chiefs of Defence Forces subsequently met on 9 February in Nairobi to propose a revised timetable for the withdrawal of armed groups and revise deployment modalities for the EAC regional force. On 13 February, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs Minister Lutundula of the Democratic Republic of the Congo stated that the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo would review both the recommendations of the EAC Chiefs of Defence Forces and the status-of-forces agreement with EAC, the initial term of which expires in March 2023.

25. On the margins of the African Union summit in Addis Ababa, Presidents Ndayishimiye and Lourenço co-convened a mini-summit on 17 February on the peace and security situation in eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo. The final

communiqué reiterated the need for a cessation of hostilities, in line with the timelines established by the EAC Chiefs of Defence staff in their meeting of 9 February, and noted the attacks by M23 against FARDC and MONUSCO. The mini-summit further directed the full deployment and swift mandate implementation of the EAC regional force and called for the cantonment and disarmament of M23 on Congolese territory under the control of Congolese authorities, the EAC regional force and the ad hoc verification mechanism and with the support of MONUSCO. The mini-summit mandated Angola and the EAC facilitator to convey its decisions to M23. The outcomes of the mini-summit were reported at the African Union Peace and Security Council summit held on the same day.

26. In follow-up thereto, Angolan authorities initiated contact with M23 on 28 February, which resulted in the announcement of a ceasefire beginning on 7 March. In addition, on 2 March, President Ndayishimiye convened a meeting in Bujumbura of the joint coordination mechanism for the implementation of the ceasefire and withdrawal of M23. Participants agreed to put in place a joint bureau composed of representatives from the ad hoc verification mechanism, the Expanded Joint Verification Mechanism, the EAC regional force and the EAC Monitoring and Verification Mechanism to develop an action plan and road map on the implementation of the ceasefire and the withdrawal of M23.

Other bilateral developments

27. Meanwhile, several countries in the region pursued efforts to further strengthen their bilateral relations. On 22 October, the Ministry of the Interior, Community Development and Public Security of Burundi announced that all borders of Burundi with its neighbours, including Rwanda, were now opened.

C. Humanitarian situation

28. The humanitarian situation in the region worsened considerably, with large-scale forced displacement stemming mainly from resurgent armed conflict targeting civilians in parts of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and South Sudan. According to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), as at 31 December 2022, the region had registered more than 4.92 million refugees and asylum seekers who had fled violence and instability, as well as climate-related events. The situation was further aggravated by the persistent coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, an Ebola outbreak, food insecurity and natural disasters, including flooding.

29. Uganda continued to host the largest number of refugees and asylum seekers from the region (1.5 million), followed by the Sudan (1.3 million) and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (522,699). Most refugees and asylum seekers in the Democratic Republic of the Congo are from Burundi, the Central African Republic, Rwanda and South Sudan. There are over 1 million Congolese refugees, the majority of whom are hosted in Uganda (479,364), Burundi (87,485), the United Republic of Tanzania (80,043) and Rwanda (72,120).

30. In addition, as of December, approximately 9.4 million internally displaced persons were reported in Burundi, the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, South Sudan and Uganda. More than 50 per cent of those persons (5.8 million) are in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, making it the country with the largest number of internally displaced persons in Africa.

31. The M23 offensives between October and March further exacerbated the ongoing humanitarian crisis. As of March, at least 602,000 people were estimated to have been displaced in the territories of Rutshuru, Nyiragongo, Masisi, Walikale and

Lubero and the city of Goma. The resurgence of violence also led to renewed refugee influxes into Uganda. Some 38,431 Congolese refugees crossed into Uganda, Rwanda and the United Republic of Tanzania between October and February.

32. As at 28 February, 256,297 Burundian refugees were registered throughout the region, notably in the United Republic of Tanzania, Rwanda, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Uganda, a decrease of 2 per cent compared with 31 January 2022. UNHCR facilitated the voluntary repatriation of 21,788 Burundian refugees in 2022 and 936 in 2023 (up to 13 March). In addition, on 19 and 20 December, a delegation from the Government of Burundi visited the Eastern Province of Rwanda for a refugee repatriation campaign.

33. Several countries in the Great Lakes region experienced an overall deterioration of their food security situation. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, at least 26.4 million people (nearly one fourth of the population) are acutely food insecure.

34. In terms of health emergencies, on 11 January, Uganda declared the end of an Ebola disease outbreak, nearly four months after the country's first case was confirmed on 20 September. There were 164 cases in total, with 55 confirmed deaths and 87 recovered patients.

D. Human rights and the rule of law

35. Continued human rights violations, abuses and violations of international humanitarian law remained a concern in the Great Lakes region, notably in the context of increased activities by armed groups and the volatile security situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

36. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) documented 2,585 human rights violations and abuses between September and February 2023, a 16 per cent decrease compared with the previous six months (3,063 violations and abuses). A total of 86 per cent of those were committed in conflict-affected provinces. The overall number includes 334 cases of conflict-related sexual violence.

37. Armed groups remained the main perpetrators, with alleged responsibility for 60 per cent of the overall number of abuses, while State agents were allegedly responsible for approximately 40 per cent. ADF combatants were reported to be responsible for 250 reported cases of human rights abuses, which amounted to 9 per cent of the overall number of violations and abuses combined documented in the country.

38. M23 was reportedly responsible for 174 cases of human rights abuses, including 50 killings. In addition, on 29 and 30 November, M23 reportedly committed atrocities and other crimes in Kishishe and Bambu, Rutshuru Territory. According to the preliminary findings of an OHCHR mission in December, M23 killed at least 171 civilians, including 17 women and 9 children, and raped at least 22 women and 5 girls on 29 and 30 November. FDLR combatants reportedly committed 30 abuses (1 per cent of all violations and abuses). Between September and March, there was a rise in hate speech, targeting in particular Kinyarwanda-speaking populations.

39. On 25 October, the European Union delisted three Burundian individuals, including Prime Minister Gervais Ndirakobuca, from the regime of restrictive measures established in 2015. On 13 December, the United States Department of State reimposed sanctions on Burundian individuals for alleged human rights violations committed in 2015, including former Prime Minister Bunyoni. From 2 to 4 February, the European Union Special Representative for Human Rights, Eamon Gilmore,

visited Burundi at the invitation of President Ndayishimiye. They discussed progress and challenges related to human rights in Burundi.

40. On 2 January, Floriane Irangabiye, a commentator and host for the Rwanda-based Radio Igicaniro, was sentenced to 10 years in prison by the Mukaza High Court in Bujumbura, which found her guilty of “undermining the integrity of the national territory”. Floriane Irangabiye had been arrested on 30 August 2022 upon return from Rwanda to Burundi.

41. On 14 and 15 February, five members of Burundian human rights non-governmental organizations were arrested on charges of undermining State security and the national economy as well as inciting rebellion.

III. Implementation of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework

A. Commitments of the Democratic Republic of the Congo

42. The Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo continued to implement its national commitments under the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework. On 22 September and 11 October, the National Oversight Mechanism and the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for the Great Lakes Region discussed ways to expedite the deployment of the operational cell of the Contact and Coordination Group on non-military measures. The Democratic Republic of the Congo subsequently provided support to the cell’s first two missions to Ituri and South Kivu Provinces between October and December 2022.

43. On 4 and 10 November, President Tshisekedi received representatives of Congolese Rwandophone communities to discuss security concerns as well as options for strengthening social cohesion.

44. The Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo also furthered transitional justice processes, including by organizing national consultations on transitional justice in five additional provinces, bringing to 22,178 the number of people consulted on their views and needs in respect of truth, justice, reconciliation and guarantees of non-recurrence since March 2022. The Government endorsed in January a draft transitional justice policy aimed at bolstering and coordinating ongoing transitional justice initiatives.

B. Commitments of the region and engagements by the guarantor institutions

45. Regional efforts intensified in response to the increasing insecurity and escalating tensions between the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Rwanda. In addition to the efforts outlined in section II.B. above, on 22 September, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Uganda agreed to extend their joint military operation against ADF. On 8 October and 5 February in Kinshasa and Oyo, Republic of the Congo, respectively, President Denis Sassou Nguesso of the Congo and President Tshisekedi met to discuss security and political developments in the region. On 3 February, Uganda and South Africa reviewed their bilateral security cooperation during a Joint Defence Committee meeting held in Kampala. This preceded a State visit by President Museveni to South Africa on 28 February.

46. Strengthening economic cooperation and trade remained a priority for countries in the region. Following his swearing-in on 13 September, President William Ruto of

Kenya visited successively the United Republic of Tanzania, Uganda and the Democratic Republic of the Congo to strengthen bilateral relations and promote trade and infrastructure projects. President Ruto also received the President of South Africa, Cyril Ramaphosa, in Nairobi and the two Presidents decided to expand political and security cooperation, among other areas.

47. The Democratic Republic of the Congo sustained efforts to strengthen cooperation with countries in the region, including Angola, Burundi, the Congo, Kenya, South Africa, the United Republic of Tanzania and Zambia. On the occasion of the visit of President Ruto of Kenya in Kinshasa on 20 and 21 November, a joint committee to strengthen bilateral cooperation on security, trade and investment was established. The Democratic Republic of the Congo also signed two trade agreements with Angola in the context of their bilateral joint commission, which convened in Kinshasa from 27 to 29 October, followed by a visit of President Tshisekedi to Luanda in late November. In addition, the Democratic Republic of the Congo signed two memorandums of understanding on transport and telecommunications with the United Republic of Tanzania during a State visit by President Tshisekedi to Dar-es-Salaam on 23 and 24 October.

48. Several joint permanent commissions convened during the reporting period, including those of Burundi and South Africa and of Rwanda and Uganda. The meetings resulted in agreements in areas such as political and security cooperation, energy, infrastructure and trade and investment. Furthermore, Angola and Zambia as well as Angola and the United Republic of Tanzania agreed in January and February, respectively, to establish bilateral cooperation commissions.

49. Efforts were also pursued to advance regional integration. On 19 November, President Ruto launched the construction of a cross-border road linking Kenya and the United Republic of Tanzania. The road is part of the EAC coastal road corridor sponsored by the African Development Bank in partnership with other regional partners and the Government of Kenya.

50. On 17 February, at its 1140th meeting, the African Union Peace and Security Council, under the chairpersonship of President Cyril Ramaphosa of South Africa, discussed the situation in the Great Lakes region. According to the communiqué, the meeting endorsed the final communiqué of the EAC-ICGLR mini-summit held earlier the same day and instructed the African Union Commission to work on the modalities for mobilizing the Peace Fund to support the deployment of the EAC regional force. The Council further reaffirmed that the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework remained a viable instrument to achieve peace and stability in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the region and emphasized the need to fully implement the national and regional commitments made by signatory countries. The Council requested the African Union, in collaboration with EAC, the Economic Community of Central African States, the Southern African Development Community (SADC), ICGLR and the United Nations, to urgently work on its revitalization and report back to the Council within six weeks.

51. From 15 to 18 November, the Regional Committee on the Fight against the Illegal Exploitation of Natural Resources reviewed progress made in the implementation of the regional initiative against the illegal exploitation of and trade in natural resources. The meeting resulted in a set of recommendations for a more transparent and responsible management of natural resources and enhanced peer-learning programmes among ICGLR member States.

52. The ICGLR Regional Women's Forum held a retreat in Entebbe, Uganda, from 12 to 15 October, which focused on women's economic empowerment. On 2 and 3 November, the ICGLR Regional Youth Forum convened its third General Assembly in Nairobi and elected a new Executive Committee.

53. On 1 November, the Chairperson of the SADC Organ on Politics, Defence and Security Cooperation, President Hage Geingob of Namibia, exchanged with Presidents Tshisekedi and Kagame by phone. He reaffirmed the support of SADC to the Luanda process and called for an immediate ceasefire and for M23 and FDLR to disarm. In the communiqué of the Extraordinary Organ Troika Summit held in Windhoek on 31 January, the SADC Heads of State and Government strongly condemned the upsurge of conflicts and activities of armed groups, including M23, and “the support provided to armed groups by foreign forces”. They further resolved to initiate dialogue among the member States of different regional economic communities that have deployed forces in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, with a view to effectively coordinating their interventions in the country.

54. On the occasion of the tenth anniversary of the signing of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework on 24 February, the guarantor institutions issued a statement in which they noted with profound concern the serious security and humanitarian crisis facing the region. While calling on signatory countries to build on the momentum of the past decade and step up efforts to address the current crisis, they reiterated their readiness to enhance support to the effective implementation of the Framework and called on all partners of the region to remain steadfast in their support to the signatory countries on their path towards stability and development.

55. Meanwhile, the eleventh summit of the Regional Oversight Mechanism of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework, initially scheduled to be held in Bujumbura on 24 February, was postponed to 6 May.

C. International commitments

56. During the reporting period, the international community maintained its support for regional efforts, notably the Luanda and Nairobi processes. On 21 September, in the margins of the seventy-seventh session of the United Nations General Assembly in New York, the President of France, Emmanuel Macron, facilitated a meeting in support of the Luanda process between Presidents Tshisekedi and Kagame. A meeting between Presidents Tshisekedi and Kagame, reportedly planned by the Government of Qatar in Doha on 23 January with the participation of other leaders of the region as well as the African Union and EAC, was postponed sine die.

57. The International Contact Group for the Great Lakes Region convened on 20 October and 26 January to discuss regional developments, as well as options to provide support to the Nairobi and Luanda processes.

58. The European Union adopted a new strategy for the Great Lakes region on 21 February, centred on the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Burundi, Rwanda and Uganda, which makes provisions for the deployment of a special envoy to the region and funding for prevention efforts.

IV. Implementation of the action plan of the United Nations Strategy for Peace Consolidation, Conflict Prevention and Conflict Resolution in the Great Lakes Region

59. The Special Envoy and his Office continued to lead efforts to implement the United Nations Strategy for Peace Consolidation, Conflict Prevention and Conflict Resolution in the Great Lakes Region. During the reporting period, efforts continued towards enhancing coordination and ownership among United Nations entities, notably by establishing an integrated secretariat to support the implementation of the Strategy and its action plan.

60. On 23 September, the Office of the Special Envoy and the Regional Office for East and Horn of Africa of the International Organization for Migration (IOM) brought together regional directors of United Nations agencies, funds and programmes in Nairobi with the aim of enhancing synergies between efforts already undertaken by agencies, funds and programmes in support of the implementation of the Strategy. On 31 October, the Special Envoy briefed the Peacebuilding Commission and donors in New York and Washington, D.C., on the flagship initiatives of the Strategy. His engagements resulted in several financial contributions, including for flagship initiative 1 on support to political processes in the region.

61. The Special Envoy also briefed regional stakeholders on progress made in the implementation of the Strategy, while encouraging continued support and ownership of the Strategy action plan.

62. On 28 February, members of the Senior Policy Group met to review the status of implementation of the Strategy action plan and provide guidance for the preparation of a donors conference to support the flagship initiatives, among other issues.

A. Promoting dialogue and strengthening trust

63. In response to the heightened tensions between the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Rwanda and the deteriorating security situation in eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo, the Special Envoy undertook a series of good-offices missions in the region. In his engagements with senior government officials from Angola, Burundi, the Congo, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Kenya, Rwanda and Uganda, the Special Envoy continued to advocate for a political solution to the current crisis based on dialogue, while urging maximum restraint and adherence to the decisions made through the Luanda and Nairobi processes. In two statements issued on 22 November and 26 January, the Special Envoy called for an immediate end to violence in eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo and a renewed commitment by all signatory countries to the full implementation of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework.

64. The Special Envoy continued to support the Nairobi and Luanda processes. In addition to participating in Nairobi III, his Office provided political, technical and financial support to the joint secretariat of the Nairobi process, in close collaboration with MONUSCO. The Special Envoy also facilitated joint engagements in November between the international community and the Special Envoys of the Presidents of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Kenya for the Nairobi process, which focused on options for enhanced support to the process. He discussed similar matters with the President of Burundi in his capacity as EAC Chairperson and with the EAC Secretary-General on several occasions.

65. The Special Envoy also visited Luanda to consult senior government officials on progress made in the Luanda process, encourage enhanced coordination with the Nairobi process and offer his support to efforts aimed at encouraging a rapprochement between the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Rwanda.

66. As part of his regional tour, the Special Envoy further underlined the role and potential contribution of the operational cell of the Contact and Coordination Group to address the threat posed by foreign armed groups.

B. Reducing the threat posed by foreign armed groups

67. The operational cell of the Contact and Coordination Group conducted two reconnaissance and contact missions to South Kivu and Ituri Provinces from 20 to 28 October and 9 to 15 December, respectively. Through the missions, the cell initiated contact with armed groups towards their disarmament and repatriation without political conditions and prepared the ground for cooperation with communities and FARDC. The cell further identified civil society organizations and other local actors willing to support the implementation of local non-military approaches to the disarmament and repatriation of foreign armed groups. The missions were preceded by an inspection visit by a delegation of the Contact and Coordination Group to Goma on 28 and 29 September. From 27 February to 2 March, the Office of the Special Envoy further engaged Congolese stakeholders on the deployment of the operational cell in Kinshasa.

C. Promoting a sustainable and transparent management of natural resources, as well as trade and investment

68. Inclusive sustainable development that leaves no one behind is humanity's ultimate prevention tool and the only way to address the underlying drivers of conflict and fragility. The Special Envoy continued to promote the transparent management of natural resources, in close collaboration with ICGLR. During the tenth Dubai Precious Metals Conference, on 21 and 22 November, the Office of the Special Envoy and the ICGLR secretariat called attention to the destabilizing effects of the illicit trade of artisanal gold from the Great Lakes region and advocated for strengthened cooperation between countries of the region and gold transit and destination countries, as well as multinational companies, in support of a more responsible management of the gold supply chain.

69. From 23 to 25 January, the Office of the Special Envoy participated in the regional economic conference organized by the ICGLR Private Sector Forum and the Kenya National Chamber of Commerce and Industry in Kinshasa. The conference focused on options for deepening economic integration and fostering sustainable development in the region.

D. Finding durable solutions to forced displacement

70. On 2 November, the Office of the Special Envoy took part in a high-level round table on the return and reintegration of Burundian refugees convened by UNHCR in Bujumbura. Bringing together representatives of the Government of Burundi, United Nations agencies, funds and programmes, the diplomatic community and international financial institutions, the round table focused on options to improve livelihood opportunities for returnees. Recommendations included efforts to strengthen institutional coordination, the elaboration of a road map for comprehensive solutions for returnees and the development of a concerted regional approach to durable solutions for refugees and displaced persons.

71. The Office of the Special Envoy participated in a peer-learning event on comprehensive solutions for refugees in the Great Lakes region organized by ICGLR, the Regional Durable Solutions Secretariat for the Great Lakes and UNHCR and held in Bujumbura on 31 January and 1 February. Participants also called for the development of a regional strategy on comprehensive durable solutions for refugees and a plan of action, in line with the conclusions of the 2019 ministerial meeting on refugees in the region organized by the Office of the Special Envoy in Kampala.

E. Promoting regional preparedness to public health crises

72. Further to the priorities of the regional strategy, IOM strengthened the capacity of Governments and partners to prevent, detect and respond to the Sudan strain of the Ebola virus disease in Uganda and neighbouring countries, including Burundi, Kenya, Rwanda, South Sudan and the United Republic of Tanzania.

F. Advancing the inclusion, participation and empowerment of women and youth

73. On 7 October, the Special Envoy exchanged with the co-chair of the Network of African Women in Conflict Prevention and Mediation (FemWise-Africa), Catherine Samba-Panza, on the need to further strengthen efforts on women and peace and security in the region, including with regard to women's resilience and economic empowerment. From 21 to 23 October, the Office of the Special Envoy, together with the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women), regional organizations and national partners, facilitated a workshop in Dar-es-Salaam on best practices and lessons learned in the implementation of the women and peace and security agenda. On 28 October, the Office of the Special Envoy, the African Centre for the Constructive Resolution of Disputes, ICGLR and other United Nations entities convened a webinar on multitrack approaches to peacebuilding and the role of women and young people in addressing inclusive political participation, peace, security and confidence-building in the region. The webinar highlighted the need for improved synergies between institutional oversight and grassroots activities and between the youth, peace and security and women and peace and security agendas.

74. From 17 to 24 November, the Office of the Special Envoy and ICGLR facilitated three peer-learning workshops in Nairobi on gender equality and women's leadership in electoral management bodies. The workshops provided a platform for reviewing legislative, regulatory and policy frameworks for women's representation in electoral management bodies and promoting measures to protect women and young people from sexual and gender-based violence. The Office of the Special Envoy, in collaboration with the Regional Research and Documentation Centre for Women, Gender and Peacebuilding, facilitated a meeting on sexual and gender-based violence held on 9 December. Participants agreed to pursue technical consultations at the national level to develop a gender barometer.

75. The Office of the Special Envoy and the United Nations Population Fund jointly organized a youth, peace and security workshop involving youth networks from the region, which was held in Nairobi from 17 to 20 October. Participants discussed good practices in promoting youth engagement in regional peace efforts and persistent challenges related thereto. In addition, the Office of the Special Envoy and the United Nations Population Fund facilitated the third General Assembly of the ICGLR Regional Youth Forum, held in Nairobi on 2 and 3 November. During the General Assembly, members elected a new executive committee and bureau and adopted the Forum's strategic action plan.

G. Promotion and protection of human rights and the fight against impunity

76. In follow-up to the 2022 Kinshasa Declaration on Enhancing Judicial Cooperation in the Great Lakes Region, adopted by the Ministers of Justice of ICGLR member States on 16 June, the Office of the Special Envoy supported consultations

on judicial cooperation with Congolese interlocutors held from 24 November to 2 December in Kinshasa. As a result, several cross-border priority cases were identified for subsequent exchanges between Congolese judicial authorities and those of neighbouring countries with the aim of fighting impunity, notably for crimes related to the illicit exploitation of natural resources.

77. The Office of the Special Envoy and ICGLR organized the inaugural meeting, held on 13 December, of the review committee on the implementation of the 2019 Nairobi Declaration on Justice and Good Governance and the 2022 Kinshasa Declaration. The committee aims to facilitate exchanges among members of the Great Lakes Judicial Cooperation Network on progress, challenges, good practices and lessons learned in the implementation of the two Declarations. At the meeting, participants agreed on measures to accelerate efforts in follow-up to the Kinshasa Declaration, including with regard to mutual legal assistance, as well as related capacity and training needs. The meeting was preceded by an extraordinary meeting of the Great Lakes Judicial Cooperation Network on the same day, at which the terms of reference of the review committee were adopted.

V. Partnerships with regional organizations and mechanisms, international partners and United Nations entities

A. Regional organizations and mechanisms

78. The Office of the Special Envoy continued to collaborate closely with the guarantor institutions. The Office provided support to the ICGLR Executive Secretariat through joint initiatives on judicial cooperation, women and peace and security and the fight against the illicit exploitation of and trade in natural resources. On 7 December and 1 February, the Special Envoy met with the newly appointed African Union High Representative for the Great Lakes Region and Head of the African Union Liaison Office in Burundi, Sghair Ould M'Barek. They agreed to work closely in support of a de-escalation of tensions, ongoing regional peace processes and the implementation of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework. The Office of the Special Envoy also continued to engage with EAC on support to the Nairobi process.

B. International partners

79. The Special Envoy continued to engage international partners during his regional missions and his visits to Brussels, Geneva, Paris, New York and Washington, D.C. In all his meetings, the Special Envoy called for enhanced support to the Luanda and Nairobi processes, while also advocating for support to the operational cell and the implementation of the regional strategy. As part of those efforts, his Office organized, together with the Government of Switzerland and the Conflict Prevention and Peace Forum, a retreat for special envoys held in Nairobi on 10 and 11 November. Participants formulated recommendations on mobilizing further support for the Nairobi process, advancing dialogue and non-military measures to stabilize eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo and fighting the illicit exploitation of and trade in natural resources.

C. Other United Nations entities

80. The Special Envoy continued to collaborate closely with the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for the Democratic Republic of the Congo

and Head of MONUSCO, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Central Africa and Head of the United Nations Regional Office for Central Africa, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General to the African Union and Head of the United Nations Office to the African Union, the Assistant Secretary-General for Peacebuilding Support, the resident coordinators of countries in the region and other United Nations entities to ensure the alignment of ongoing initiatives. On 10 November, the Special Envoy discussed with the Special Representative and Head of MONUSCO, Bintou Keita, and the Special Representative and Head of the United Nations Regional Office for Central Africa, Abdou Abarry, the coordination of their respective messages and engagements with key stakeholders in relation to the current crisis in eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo and the region. He also engaged the Special Adviser to the Secretary-General on the Prevention of Genocide on 13 November with a view to strengthening collaboration in the fight against hate speech in the region.

81. On 30 November and 1 December, the Special Envoy took part in Luanda in a high-level meeting of special representatives and envoys working in the Central Africa region, convened by the Special Representative for Central Africa. The meeting focused on ways to ensure a more coherent response to common challenges in the Central Africa region, including with regard to regional peace initiatives and natural resources as well as women and peace and security and youth, peace and security.

82. At the 54th meeting of the United Nations Standing Advisory Committee on Security Questions in Central Africa, held in Kintele, Republic of the Congo, from 12 to 16 January, participants discussed political and security challenges, including tensions between the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Rwanda. Two declarations were adopted on the current crisis in eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo and on the fight against hate speech in the region, respectively.

83. The Office of the Special Envoy and the Office of Counter-Terrorism organized a meeting on the threat of terrorism and violent extremism in the Great Lakes region, which was held on 5 and 6 October. The participating United Nations entities developed a set of recommendations for preventive action in the context of the regional strategy. The meeting was preceded by a technical-level exchange among United Nations entities based in the region on recent political and security developments and trends as well as options for concerted action in support of ongoing regional peace efforts.

VI. Observations

84. Ten years ago, the leaders of the Great Lakes region signed the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework for the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the region with the aim of urgently ending the scourge of recurrent violence and instability in the eastern part of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and its impact in the region. Since then, some progress has been achieved: diplomatic outreach has increased, regional economic integration and cooperation between countries has improved and the hopes of a peaceful and prosperous future have taken root. Regrettably, in late 2021, the resurgence of M23 plunged the region once again into a serious security and humanitarian crisis, eroding the advances recorded during the past decade. I am deeply alarmed by the significant deterioration of the security situation in eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo in recent months, as well as the heightened tensions between the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Rwanda.

85. I strongly condemn the violence perpetrated by armed groups in eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo, including the ADF, Coalition of Congolese

Democrats, FDLR, Zaire, M23, RED Tabara and Mai-Mai groups. I urge all Congolese and foreign armed groups to immediately and unconditionally lay down their arms and engage without delay in the disarmament process. The fighting must stop. I call on the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Rwanda to exercise maximum restraint and use the available regional mechanisms and peace initiatives to decrease tensions and normalize their relations, as peace, security and prosperity across the region depend on it.

86. I am alarmed by the deteriorating humanitarian situation in the region, which has left millions of civilians in humanitarian need, with women and children disproportionately affected. Reports of continued violations of human rights are deeply concerning. I strongly condemn all forms of hate speech and incitement to violence and reiterate that all those responsible must be held to account.

87. I salute the leadership of Presidents Lourenço, Ruto and Ndayishimiye, as well as former President Kenyatta, for the ongoing regional peace initiatives aimed at finding a negotiated solution to the crisis. I commend President Lourenço, whose efforts in leading the Luanda process are helping the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Rwanda to address their differences. I also commend President Ndayishimiye of Burundi, as well as EAC facilitator Kenyatta, for their continued leadership in the Nairobi process to broker a solution between the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Congolese armed groups operating in the eastern parts of the country. I also welcome the deployment of the EAC regional force and reiterate the commitment of MONUSCO to strengthening coordination with the force.

88. Both the Luanda and Nairobi processes are inextricably linked, and I therefore welcome the decision of the leaders of the region at the joint ICGLR-EAC mini-summit on the situation in the region, held in Addis Ababa on 17 February, to enhance the convergence of the two processes.

89. In the same vein, I welcome the mobilization of the African Union Peace and Security Council to recognize the urgency of the situation in the region. At its 1140th meeting, held in Addis Ababa on 17 February, the Peace and Security Council committed to revitalizing the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework, the aims and commitments of which remain the centrepiece for durable peace and sustainable development in the region. The commitments contained in the Framework have taken on renewed urgency and must be implemented fully and without delay. I reiterate my call for an urgent de-escalation, continued engagement with the Nairobi and Luanda processes, and a renewed commitment to the full implementation of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework. Peace, security and prosperity depend on the ability of the countries of the region and their partners to successfully complete those steps.

90. The Special Envoy will continue to support such efforts through his good offices and technical assistance where needed. He will also continue to promote the participation of women in these political processes, as more needs to be done to ensure that their voices are heard.

91. Laying the foundation for a stable and lasting peace requires addressing the persistent challenge of foreign armed groups, which remain a key driver for insecurity. I welcome in that regard the missions undertaken by the operational cell of the Contact and Coordination Group aimed at engaging foreign armed groups on non-military measures. I encourage the cell to pursue its efforts with a view to exploring opportunities for the effective disarmament and repatriation of members of some foreign armed groups in eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo, in collaboration with national disarmament, demobilization and reintegration structures in the region, including through the Great Lakes Judicial Cooperation Network.

92. I also encourage continued efforts aimed at enhancing transparency and at curbing the illicit trade of artisanal gold and other natural resources from eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo and the region, which continue to provide revenues to negative forces destabilizing the region.

93. Lastly, I wish to thank the Special Envoy for the Great Lakes Region and the Special Representative and Head of MONUSCO for their continued advocacy for dialogue and support to regional peace efforts. I acknowledge the commitment of the Special Envoy and his Office in support of the implementation of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework and the United Nations Strategy for Peace Consolidation, Conflict Prevention and Conflict Resolution in the Great Lakes Region.
