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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 [2717 \(2023\)](#), 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 previous report ([S/2023/730](#)), covering the period from 16 September 2023 to 15 March 2024.

II. Major developments

A. Security situation

2. The security situation in the Great Lakes region remained of grave concern, with several cross-border incidents and deteriorating security and humanitarian conditions in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo.

3. On 6 October, in a communiqué, the Embassy of Uganda in the Democratic Republic of the Congo rejected allegations that the Ugandan military, stationed in Bunangana, North Kivu Province, had moved border markers along the common border. The communiqué was released in the wake of media reports on the matter and shortly after the Chargé d'affaires of the Embassy of Uganda in Kinshasa was summoned by the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Christophe Lutundula. On 23 October, the Government of Rwanda stated in a communiqué that a Rwandan civilian had been injured in Rubavu District by a stray bullet, allegedly from the fighting between

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.



armed groups in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, close to the Rwandan border. On 16 January, the Rwanda Defence Force declared in a statement that three armed soldiers of the Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (FARDC) had crossed into Rubavu District on the same day. According to the statement, two FARDC soldiers were arrested, while the third was shot and killed after firing at the patrols. FARDC confirmed the incident, noting that the soldiers had entered Rwanda “by mistake”. FARDC requested the Expanded Joint Verification Mechanism of the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region (ICGLR) to investigate and facilitate the repatriation of its soldiers. On 17 February, the Goma International Airport in the Democratic Republic of the Congo was hit, reportedly in a drone strike, which damaged a civilian aircraft. In a video statement by an FARDC spokesperson, FARDC accused Rwanda of the attack. In a communiqué on 18 February, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation of Rwanda declared that Rwanda had adjusted its posture with a view to ensuring the complete air defence of Rwandan territory and degrading offensive air capabilities.

4. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the ceasefire between the Mouvement du 23 mars (M23) and FARDC, established in April 2023, collapsed in late September as fighting resumed in North Kivu Province between M23, local armed groups known as Wazalendo, and FARDC. On 9 October, the facilitator of the East African Community (EAC)-led Nairobi process and former President of Kenya, Uhuru Kenyatta, condemned the escalation of hostilities in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo. On 24 October, a Kenyan soldier of the EAC Regional Force died during clashes near Goma. In a communiqué issued on 25 October, the Regional Force called for a return to the ceasefire.

5. Fighting intensified in North Kivu Province between December and March, despite a lull in hostilities between 11 and 28 December during a ceasefire brokered by the United States of America. M23 continued to expand its area of activities and regained control of areas after the withdrawal of the EAC Regional Force in early January. On 16 January, air strikes by Congolese armed forces on M23 positions resulted in the death of M23 elements, including the M23 Chief of Intelligence, Castro Mberabagabo. Meanwhile, M23 continued to reinforce its positions in Rutshuru and Masisi territories.

6. Meanwhile, the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF) continued to target Congolese civilians and armed forces in Ituri and North Kivu Provinces while stepping up attacks in Uganda following the establishment of an ADF base in Kibale National Park, western Uganda. Between 1 October and 13 February, ADF reportedly carried out 84 attacks in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and 7 attacks in Uganda, notwithstanding the increased pressure from sustained joint operations by Ugandan and Congolese armed forces. In total, 348 persons, including 68 women and 32 children, were killed during attacks in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

7. Several ADF commanders were also reportedly killed in clashes with Ugandan military forces, including Meddie Nkalubo, who was killed by the Ugandan air force in Mambasa territory, Ituri Province, on 18 September, and Musa Kamusi, who died on 27 December in Kibale National Park. On 31 October, clashes between ADF and the Uganda People’s Defence Forces on Lake Albert reportedly resulted in 11 ADF fatalities and the capture of ADF commander Abdul Rashid Kyoto. Following ADF attacks in the Rwenzori subregion in Uganda, intensified aerial and artillery attacks against ADF positions were conducted throughout November. On 19 December, the President of Uganda, Yoweri Museveni, announced his decision to reactivate local defence structures, with the stated objective of protecting communities against ADF.

8. The Forces démocratiques de libération du Rwanda (FDLR) also remained active in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo, with several reported clashes with

other armed groups and abductions of civilians. The armed group was reportedly responsible for 12 attacks, resulting in the death of two civilians, including one woman.

9. After a lull beginning in 2021, the *Résistance pour un État de droit au Burundi* (RED Tabara) launched several attacks in Burundi in December and February, before retreating to the Democratic Republic of the Congo. On 10 December, RED Tabara clashed with the Burundi National Defence Force in Gihanga, Bubanza Province, allegedly killing three of its soldiers. On 23 December, RED Tabara announced that it had killed nine Burundian soldiers and one policeman during an attack on the Vugizo border post in Bujumbura Province. On the same day, the Burundian presidency announced in a statement that a terrorist attack had resulted in 20 casualties, including 12 children, 3 women and 5 men, 1 of whom was a policeman. RED Tabara denied having targeted civilians during the Vugizo attack. On 19 January, Burundian police and military reportedly reinforced their presence in the Kibira forest, Cibitoke Province, near the border with Rwanda. On 25 February, RED Tabara launched two attacks on Burundian military positions in Bubanza Province, near the Congolese border, which resulted in at least six fatalities and property damage.

10. Regarding regional security efforts, the EAC Regional Force completed its withdrawal from the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo in January. The withdrawal was in line with the decisions of the twenty-third Ordinary Summit of the EAC Heads of State of 24 November, during which EAC Heads of State took note of the decision by the Democratic Republic of the Congo not to extend the mandate of the Regional Force beyond 8 December. Meanwhile, Burundian and Ugandan troops, deployed under bilateral military cooperation agreements, remained in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

11. On 4 January, the Southern African Development Community (SADC) announced that the SADC Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo had begun its deployment on 15 December, in line with the decision of the Extraordinary Summit of the SADC Organ Troika of 8 May 2023. Comprising troops from Malawi, South Africa and the United Republic of Tanzania, the Mission is mandated by SADC to support the Democratic Republic of the Congo in its efforts to neutralize negative forces and armed groups in the eastern part of the country, restore and maintain peace and security, and establish a secure environment, as stipulated in its mandate. On 14 February, two South African soldiers deployed with the Mission were killed by mortar fire.

B. Political developments

12. Tensions between several countries in the Great Lakes region persisted. Relations between the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Kenya and EAC were affected by the announcement, during a press conference in Nairobi on 15 December, of a new political, social and military platform, the Alliance Fleuve Congo (AFC). The establishment of AFC was announced by the former President of the Independent National Electoral Commission of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and leader of the Action pour la dignité du Congo et de son peuple political party, Corneille Nangaa. AFC is reportedly composed of several armed groups, including M23, whose leader, Bertrand Bisimwa, attended the press conference in Nairobi. In a statement on 2 January, M23 announced that it would no longer call for dialogue with the current Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, in apparent solidarity with the objectives of AFC, while also stating that it would remain receptive to ongoing regional mediation efforts.

13. In addition, tensions between the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Rwanda remained high, with continued negative rhetoric and mutual accusations over the use of armed groups as proxies. During his electoral campaign, the President of

the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Félix-Antoine Tshisekedi Tshilombo, announced that he would seek authorization from Parliament to declare war on Rwanda, should the latter not desist from supporting M23 and other “political peace spoilers” in his country. In a speech delivered on 30 January, Mr. Tshisekedi reiterated the view that, as long as the “aggressors” occupied parts of the Congolese territory, there would be no dialogue. He further called upon international and regional partners to impose sanctions on M23 and Rwandan actors. Meanwhile, Rwandan authorities, in a communiqué of 18 February, accused Mr. Tshisekedi of intending to “invade Rwanda and change its government”.

14. Relations between Burundi and Rwanda also deteriorated. On 11 January, the Government of Burundi closed its land border with Rwanda over the latter’s alleged support to “criminals who harm Burundians”. The decision followed accusations by the President of Burundi, Evariste Ndayishimiye, on 28 December of support from Rwanda for RED Tabara. The Government of Rwanda rejected these accusations and expressed regret over the unilateral decision by Burundi to close the border. On 21 January, during his visit to Kinshasa, Mr. Ndayishimiye reiterated his accusations regarding Rwanda and RED Tabara while addressing a youth conference in his capacity as African Union Champion for the Youth Peace, and Security Agenda. In response, the Government of Rwanda, on 22 January, deplored the “inflammatory statements” by Mr. Ndayishimiye, stating that the call on “young Rwandans to overthrow their government” by a leader of a neighbouring country, from an African Union platform, was “deeply irresponsible and a flagrant violation of the African Union Charter”. The Burundian presidency rejected the portrayal by Rwanda of Mr. Ndayishimiye’s remarks in a communiqué on 23 January and accused Rwanda of orchestrating “repeated acts of aggression” against Burundi, in violation of the principle of good-neighbourliness. On 3 February, in a speech to members of the diplomatic corps in Burundi, Mr. Ndayishimiye urged the international community to “oppose the violation of international norms by Rwanda” and “condemn any actions that disturb regional peace”.

15. On 12 January, EAC urged its partner States to strive to achieve harmonious cooperation to ensure the continuation of regional integration efforts. EAC further encouraged partner States to use the existing EAC Dispute Resolution Mechanism to peacefully settle any disputes and to strictly observe the Treaty for the Establishment of the East African Community, particularly with regard to peaceful coexistence and good-neighbourliness. On 22 and 23 February, the President of South Sudan, Salva Kiir Mayardit, in his capacity as Chairperson of the subregional organization, travelled to Kigali and Bujumbura, where he discussed regional peace and security matters with his Rwandan and Burundian counterparts.

16. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, on 9 January, the Independent National Electoral Commission declared the incumbent President the winner of the presidential election, with 73 per cent of the votes. Regional actors remained closely engaged throughout the electoral process, with electoral observation missions deployed by the African Union, the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS), ICGLR and SADC. The presidential swearing-in ceremony was held on 20 January.

Regional peace processes

17. Efforts to implement the decisions of the Luanda and Nairobi peace processes continued, albeit at a slower pace due to the resumption of hostilities between M23 and FARDC, the discontinuation of the military track of the Nairobi process, and the slowdown in political and diplomatic engagements during the elections in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, among other factors. Following a meeting of the ministers of defence of EAC partner States on 8 October, EAC Heads of State met on

24 November in Arusha, United Republic of Tanzania, for their twenty-third Ordinary Summit, during which they discussed, inter alia, the withdrawal of the EAC Regional Force from the Democratic Republic of the Congo. At the Summit, Mr. Kiir took over as EAC Chairperson from Mr. Ndayishimiye. On the same day, Mr. Ndayishimiye received the Minister for External Relations of Angola, Tête António, who delivered a message from the President of Angola and current Chairperson of ICGLR and SADC, João Manuel Gonçalves Lourenço. In January and February, the EAC-appointed facilitator, Mr. Kenyatta, met with Mr. Museveni in Uganda, where they reportedly discussed the way forward for the Nairobi process.

18. Regarding the Luanda process, the President of Angola, in his capacity as mediator appointed by the African Union, engaged with Rwandan authorities at the Head of State and ministerial levels, respectively, on 16 September, in the margins of the Group of 77 and China Summit in Havana, and on 2 October in Kigali. At the Extraordinary Summit of SADC Heads of State and Government on 4 November, Mr. Lourenço was mandated, as the Chairperson of SADC, to intensify diplomatic efforts between the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Rwanda. On 16 February, he convened a mini-summit on the situation in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo, in the margins of the thirty-seventh African Union Summit. Between January and March, he held several separate conversations with his Congolese and Rwandan counterparts, who agreed to meet at a date to be determined and under certain conditions.

19. With a view to strengthening the coordination and harmonization of regional peace initiatives in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo, the chiefs of defence of the quadripartite process (EAC, ECCAS, ICGLR and SADC) met in Addis Ababa on 6 October, under the auspices of the African Union. They highlighted the need to avoid a security vacuum in the context of mission withdrawals and deployments, and to operationalize the Multilevel Coordination Working Group, endorsed at the first Quadripartite Summit, on 27 June. The Working Group comprises representatives of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Rwanda, as well as the African Union, EAC, ECCAS, ICGLR, SADC and the United Nations. In a communiqué from its 1203rd meeting, on 4 March, the African Union Peace and Security Council stressed the need for the implementation of the outcome of the Quadripartite Summit, underscored the imperative of enhanced coordination within the framework of the quadripartite mechanism, and requested the African Union Commission to convene a second Quadripartite Summit to follow up on the first Summit.

C. Humanitarian situation

20. The humanitarian situation in the region remained dire, with continued large-scale forced displacements linked to violence in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, South Sudan and the Sudan and to climate-related events. According to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, as at the end of December, the region had registered more than 5 million refugees and asylum-seekers fleeing armed conflict and instability, and more than 14.3 million internally displaced persons had been reported in Burundi, the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, South Sudan and the Sudan.

21. The deterioration of the security and humanitarian situation in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo led to renewed refugee influxes into neighbouring countries and internal displacements. Close to 1 million Congolese refugees and asylum-seekers were hosted by signatory countries of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework, among which Uganda continued to host the largest number of Congolese refugees. With nearly 6.2 million people displaced internally, including

5.6 million people in Ituri, North and South Kivu Provinces, the Democratic Republic of the Congo was ranked the country with the second-largest number of internally displaced persons in Africa, after the Sudan. Gender-based violence and sexual exploitation remained prevalent, with more than 113,000 cases registered in 2023. Grave violations against children also continued to be reported.

22. Meanwhile, approximately 324,000 Burundian refugees continued to be hosted throughout the EAC region, notably in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Kenya, Rwanda, Uganda and the United Republic of Tanzania. Support for durable solutions to forced displacement continued, with some 26,000 Burundians having returned home between January and mid-September 2023.

23. The conflict in the Sudan resulted in more than 1.7 million people seeking refuge in neighbouring countries. Approximately 25 million people needed humanitarian assistance, including at least 3 million children under the age of 5 suffering from acute malnutrition. As at 29 January, more than 10,000 cholera cases had been reported, resulting in 284 deaths. With 80 per cent of hospitals across the Sudan non-operational, an unprecedented health crisis is unfolding.

24. Food insecurity remained a major challenge. More than 28 million people were classified as food-insecure in Burundi, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Uganda. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo alone, approximately 25.4 million people were food-insecure, including displaced persons, returnees and people living in conflict zones or zones affected by natural disasters. In the Sudan, nearly 18 million people were facing acute food insecurity.

D. Human rights and the rule of law

25. Continued human rights violations and abuses, as well as violations of international humanitarian law, remained of great concern in several countries of the region.

26. The United Nations Joint Human Rights Office in the Democratic Republic of the Congo documented 1,570 human rights violations and abuses between September and December. A total of 85 per cent of those were committed in conflict-affected provinces. Armed groups remained the main perpetrators, allegedly bearing responsibility for 61 per cent of the overall number of abuses, while State agents were allegedly responsible for 39 per cent of violations. ADF combatants were reported to be responsible for 438 alleged incidents of human rights abuses between September and December. M23 was reportedly responsible for 243 incidents of human rights abuses, while FDLR combatants reportedly committed 18 abuses.

27. In Burundi, the human rights situation remained challenging, despite a relative reduction in human rights violations and abuses, as noted on 22 September by the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Burundi during the fifty-fourth session of the Human Rights Council.

28. On 8 December, the former Prime Minister, Alain Guillaume Bunyoni, was sentenced to life in prison by the Supreme Court of Burundi following his conviction for undermining internal State security, illegally possessing weapons and plotting against the Head of State to overthrow the constitutional regime, among other charges.

29. On 11 January, the Supreme Court of Burundi held a hearing in the case of journalist Floriane Irangabiye, who has been serving a 10-year prison sentence since her conviction on 2 May 2023 for undermining State security. The matter has been taken under advisement.

30. In Uganda, there were reports of crackdowns on political dissent with excessive and arbitrary use of force, arrest and detention, and abduction, undermining the freedom of peaceful assembly and association. A mobilization campaign of the opposition National Unity Platform was obstructed by security forces in September and October, and several opposition leaders were blocked by security forces from leaving their residences to participate in a protest on infrastructure challenges on 18 January.

31. A total of 75 ex-combatants of ADF were reportedly granted amnesty by Ugandan authorities on 5 January, following the completion of a rehabilitation programme. They reportedly included nationals from Burundi, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Uganda and the United Republic of Tanzania. The pardoning was preceded by the announcement on 25 October by Ugandan authorities of an amnesty offer for ADF elements in exchange for their abandonment of armed rebellion.

III. Implementation of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework

A. Commitments of the Democratic Republic of the Congo

32. Efforts by Congolese authorities to implement national commitments under the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework continued. On 24 and 25 October, the National Oversight Mechanism brought together representatives from Congolese ministries, national defence and security forces, and civil society, as well as representatives of the guarantor institutions, to discuss the Framework's revitalization process. Participants called for equal commitments and accountability from all signatory countries. They also underscored the need to undertake an in-depth assessment of the progress made under the Framework, strengthen the coordination role of the National Oversight Mechanism within the Democratic Republic of the Congo and ensure coordinated support from the guarantor institutions for a more effective implementation of the Framework.

33. In the security sector, on 16 October, a new coordinator of the national Disarmament, Demobilization, Community Recovery and Stabilization Programme was appointed by presidential decree. On 21 November, the spokesperson of the Congolese army, General Sylvain Ekenge, stated that, henceforth, all relations between FARDC and FDLR would be prohibited, in line with the commitment under the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework to "neither tolerate nor provide assistance or support of any kind to armed groups". On 23 December, the commander of the thirty-fourth military region of FARDC, Major General Bruno Mpezo, was arrested on allegations relating to the use of resources dedicated to military operations and to a violation of the ban on collaborating with FDLR.

34. The draft transitional justice policy, endorsed by the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo in January 2023, has yet to be adopted by Parliament.

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

35. Despite continued bilateral and regional cooperation efforts, the crisis in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo persisted and tensions continued to rise between some countries. The Democratic Republic of the Congo convened bilateral permanent commissions with Uganda and Zambia in September and October, respectively, which resulted in renewed commitments to strengthen cooperation on security, border management and trade. Angola and Kenya signed 11 bilateral agreements on diplomacy, youth affairs and public affairs during the visit by Mr. Lourenço to Nairobi in October. The United Republic of Tanzania and Zambia signed eight memorandums of understanding on trade, investment, energy and defence, following high-level engagements during the same month. Several other countries also discussed ways to further strengthen bilateral relations and regional cooperation, including Angola and Rwanda, Burundi and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Burundi and Kenya, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Zambia, Kenya and South Sudan, Kenya and Rwanda, and Rwanda and the United Republic of Tanzania, among others.

36. In addition, Heads of State continued to dispatch emissaries in the region. On 3 October, Mr. Ndayishimiye received the Prime Cabinet Secretary and Cabinet Secretary for Foreign and Diaspora Affairs of Kenya, Musalia Mudavadi, who carried a message from the President of Kenya, William Ruto, on the importance of strengthening bilateral ties. The Minister of State for Foreign Affairs in charge of Regional Cooperation of Uganda, John Mulimba, travelled to Burundi, where he met with Mr. Ndayishimiye on behalf of his President on 24 October. On 6 and 14 November, the Minister of EAC Affairs, Youth, Sports and Culture of Burundi, Gervais Abayeho, travelled to Rwanda and Kenya, where he delivered messages from Mr. Ndayishimiye to the respective Heads of State. On 23 January, Mr. Tshisekedi received the Special Envoy of South Africa to the Great Lakes region, Jeff Radebe, who delivered a message on behalf of the President of South Africa, Cyril Ramaphosa, regarding that country's support to peace efforts in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo.

37. Regarding economic cooperation and regional integration, on 2 October, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Zambia launched the joint Kasomeno-Kasenga-Chalwe-Kabila-Mwenda Road project, which comprises a road, a one-stop border post, and a bridge across the Luapula River. The road is expected to shorten the road link between the Democratic Republic of the Congo (Lubumbashi) and the United Republic of Tanzania (Dar es Salaam), advance intraregional trade and facilitate access of the connected countries to international markets, through the port of Dar es Salaam. On 22 December, Angola and the Democratic Republic of the Congo signed an agreement on oil production sharing along their offshore border area. On 8 February, the President of Zambia, Hakainde Hichilema, hosted the Lobito Corridor Private Sector Investment Forum in Lusaka to discuss investment opportunities around this economic corridor linking Angola, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Zambia.

38. In addition, several countries in the region took steps to facilitate the cross-border movement of people at the bilateral and multilateral levels, including the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Kenya and Uganda. Tensions relating to commercial cooperation between Kenya and the United Republic of Tanzania, illustrated by the announcement on 15 January by Tanzanian authorities that all Kenya Airways passenger flights between Nairobi and Dar es Salaam would be suspended, were resolved following an exchange between Mr. Mudavadi and his Tanzanian counterpart, January Makamba, on 16 January.

39. On 4 March, the African Union Peace and Security Council endorsed the deployment of the SADC Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and requested the African Union Commission to mobilize the necessary support. Prior to the Council's meeting, on 3 March, the Minister for Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation of Rwanda, in a letter to the Chairperson of the African Union Commission, expressed concern over the planned endorsement, stating that the Mission constituted a "threat to Rwanda and the wider region" and "disregard[ed] the Nairobi and Luanda political processes, raising potential tensions between the EAC and SADC communities". On 5 March, the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Development Cooperation of Burundi, in a letter also addressed to the Chairperson of the African Union Commission, rejected the assertions of Rwanda and called upon the Chairperson to use his good offices to encourage the extradition of the alleged coup plotters from Rwanda to Burundi, and condemn their sponsors.

40. The Extraordinary Summit of SADC Heads of State and Government, convened in Luanda on 4 November, provided guidance on the deployment of the SADC Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the mobilization of resources for regional peace and security efforts. The Summit also mandated Mr. Lourenço to intensify diplomatic efforts between the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Rwanda.

41. On 30 October and 1 November, EAC organized a retreat of the technical advisory team of the facilitator of the EAC-led Nairobi process in Arusha. During the retreat, participants took stock of the progress made under the Nairobi process and explored possible options for reviving the process before and after the general elections in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

42. The ICGLR Regional Committee on the Fight against the Illegal Exploitation of Natural Resources convened its twenty-seventh meeting from 27 to 29 November in Kampala. The meeting concluded with Ugandan authorities launching an ICGLR certificate for designated minerals on 29 November.

C. International commitments

43. International partners stepped up efforts to contribute to a de-escalation of tensions and conflict in the region. Following separate calls by the Secretary of State of the United States of America, Antony J. Blinken, with the Presidents of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Rwanda on 6 November, and a visit to the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Rwanda by the Director of National Intelligence of the United States, Avril Haines, on 19 and 20 November, the FARDC spokesperson announced on 21 November a ban on all contact between FARDC and FDLR, with immediate effect. United States authorities further brokered a 72-hour ceasefire from 11 to 13 December between the parties involved in the conflict in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo. The ceasefire was extended until 28 December. In January, Mr. Blinken spoke with Mr. Kagame and Mr. Tshisekedi. During a visit to Angola on 25 January, he expressed appreciation for Mr. Lourenço's leadership of the Luanda process, noting that the moment was ripe to "try to forge forward with diplomacy". United States authorities also engaged the EAC facilitator, Mr. Kenyatta, and the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Development Cooperation of Burundi on ways to peacefully resolve the situation in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo. In a statement on 17 February, the United States condemned "Rwanda's support for the M23 ... and call[ed] on Rwanda to immediately withdraw all Rwanda Defence Force personnel from the [Democratic Republic of the Congo]".

44. The International Contact Group for the Great Lakes Region met on 8 and 27 November to discuss developments and diplomatic engagements in the region. In a statement issued on 10 November, it voiced concerns over the situation in the

eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo and the related risk to regional stability. The International Contact Group underscored the primacy of a political solution and reiterated its continued support to efforts aimed at addressing the root causes of conflict. From 26 February to 1 March, several members of the International Contact Group, including the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for the Great Lakes Region, undertook a mission to the region, together with representatives of the African Union, to advocate for a de-escalation of tensions and a new ceasefire.

45. In October and February, the European Union signed two separate memorandums of understanding on strategic partnerships in the mining sector with the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Rwanda, respectively.

D. Revitalization of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework

46. Regional efforts towards the revitalization of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework continued. In line with the decision of the eleventh high-level meeting of the Regional Oversight Mechanism, held on 6 May, the Office of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for the Great Lakes Region recruited experts to conduct an independent assessment of the Framework's implementation since 2013, in consultation with relevant stakeholders. The assessment culminated in a regional retreat organized by the Office of the Special Envoy in cooperation with the African Union and the African Centre for the Constructive Resolution of Disputes in Durban, South Africa, on 31 October and 1 November. Representatives from the guarantor institutions, the Technical Support Committee, the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) and civil society, together with external experts, discussed the findings contained in the independent assessment report and recommended the development of a road map for the revitalization of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework. The retreat was preceded by consultations with civil society representatives, organized by the Office of the Special Envoy on 16 October, and an exchange in Addis Ababa on 26 October between the Special Envoy and the African Union Commissioner for Political Affairs, Peace and Security, Bankole Adeoye. The Special Envoy and Mr. Adeoye agreed on the importance of maintaining close collaboration between the United Nations and the African Union to ensure a coordinated revitalization process. The Security Council, in its resolution [2717 \(2023\)](#), expressed the need for the Framework's revitalization and called on the signatory countries to renew their commitments under the Framework.

47. Subsequently, the Office of the Special Envoy organized the thirty-fifth meeting of the Technical Support Committee in Nairobi on 1 and 2 February. Committee members reviewed the recommendations contained in the independent assessment report and the outcome of the Durban retreat, and formulated proposals for the Framework's revitalization, for consideration by the Regional Oversight Mechanism at its twelfth high-level meeting, to be held in Kampala in 2024.

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

48. The Office of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for the Great Lakes Region continued to lead efforts to advance the implementation of the United Nations Strategy for Peace Consolidation, Conflict Prevention and Conflict Resolution in the Great Lakes Region, in line with the letter of the Secretary-General to the President of the Security Council of 3 December 2020 ([S/2020/1168](#)). On 3 October, the Office

of the Special Envoy briefed members of the Peacebuilding Commission on progress made under the Strategy's action plan.

49. On 11 and 12 December, the Office of the Special Envoy and the Office of the Resident Coordinator in Uganda organized, in Kampala, the second retreat of the Senior Policy Group on the implementation of the Strategy. Participants discussed recent political, security and humanitarian developments in the region and next steps for joint resource mobilization, as well as envisaged activities for 2024. The retreat was preceded by a virtual meeting of the Implementation Support Mechanism on 14 November.

50. The Office of the Special Envoy also continued to engage with external partners on their complementary regional strategies for effective coordination and synergy. On 15 and 16 January, the Office of the Special Envoy participated in the launch in Bujumbura of regional programmes funded by the European Union in the context of the renewed European Union strategy for the Great Lakes.

A. Promoting dialogue and strengthening trust

51. In view of the deteriorating situation in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo and rising tensions, the Special Envoy undertook a series of good offices missions in the region. In his meetings with senior government officials in or from Angola, Burundi, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Kenya, Rwanda, South Africa, Uganda and the United Republic of Tanzania, the Special Envoy advocated for restraint on the part of the concerned parties and called for renewed efforts to advance regional peace initiatives, notably the Nairobi and Luanda processes, as well as the quadripartite process under the aegis of the African Union.

52. Following the closure of the border between Burundi and Rwanda, the Special Envoy undertook a joint mission with the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Central Africa and Head of the United Nations Regional Office for Central Africa (UNOCA) to Burundi and Rwanda from 12 to 16 February. They expressed their profound concern over the continuing security situation in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo and the tensions in the region, stressing the importance of dialogue and adherence to the commitments under the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework.

53. The Special Envoy continued to engage with representatives of Burundi and Uganda on the preparations for the twelfth high-level meeting of the Regional Oversight Mechanism and the follow-up to the decisions adopted at the Mechanism's eleventh high-level meeting. He also engaged with the National Oversight Mechanism to further strengthen collaboration on the implementation of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework.

B. Reducing the threat posed by foreign armed groups

54. From 24 to 29 September, the Office of the Special Envoy organized a workshop in Naivasha, Kenya, for members of the operational cell of the Contact and Coordination Group. The workshop was supported by the Office of Rule of Law and Security Institutions and the Folke Bernadotte Academy and was aimed at training operational cell members on the Integrated Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration Standards, mediation and negotiation, as well as operational planning.

55. On 15 December, the Office of the Special Envoy supported the sixth meeting of the heads of intelligence and security services of Burundi, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Rwanda, Uganda and the United Republic of Tanzania in Dar es Salaam.

Participants adopted a new action plan for the Contact and Coordination Group, which covers the period from 2024 to 2026, prioritizing continued engagement with negative forces towards voluntary disarmament and repatriation, support to national disarmament, demobilization and reintegration programmes, and efforts to prevent terrorism and violent extremism in the region. The meeting was preceded by Contact and Coordination Group consultations on 13 and 14 December.

56. In an effort to support the demobilization and repatriation of Burundian armed group elements from the Democratic Republic of the Congo to their home country, the Contact and Coordination Group deployed to Burundi from 7 to 12 March and to the Democratic Republic of the Congo from 13 to 16 March.

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

57. The Special Envoy continued to support regional efforts towards a more transparent management of natural resources. In follow-up to the high-level workshop on natural resources held in Khartoum in September 2021, the Special Envoy undertook a joint advocacy mission with the ICGLR Executive Secretary, João Caholo, to China from 20 to 28 September. The authorities and stakeholders of the mining sector committed to strengthening partnership with the Great Lakes region through technical assistance, training for national and regional stakeholders, and cross-border projects on renewable energy.

58. On 31 December, the Office of the Special Envoy, in collaboration with ICGLR, implemented a pilot project for the promotion of women and youth in the mining sector in the Great Lakes region. This included support for the development of a strategic document for Burundi on mainstreaming gender and youth in the mining sector.

59. As part of efforts to mobilize the private sector in regional peacebuilding efforts, the Office of the Special Envoy supported a meeting of the General Assembly of the ICGLR Private Sector Forum in Lusaka on 16 and 17 November. The meeting served to strengthen the operational effectiveness of the Forum through the election of a new Bureau and the renewal of commitment by Forum members, including the decision to develop a road map for the next five years.

D. Finding durable solutions to forced displacement

60. On 13 December, during a high-level event on fostering conducive conditions for safe and dignified return through peacebuilding and conflict prevention at the Global Refugee Forum held in Geneva from 13 to 15 December, ICGLR presented a joint pledge bringing together the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, the Regional Durable Solutions Secretariat and the Office of the Special Envoy. The pledge involved the development of a regional strategy for durable solutions to displacement in the Great Lakes region.

61. In accordance with flagship initiative 13, promoting durable solutions to displacement, under the Strategy's updated action plan, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) continued to support the reintegration and rehabilitation of Burundian refugees repatriated from the United Republic of Tanzania, including through the construction of community infrastructure and provision of livelihood opportunities. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, IOM provided life-saving assistance and contributed to efforts aimed at improving access to education and vocational skills training in villages of return. In Uganda, IOM supported efforts to

strengthen national and subnational institutions to address the challenges of forced displacement and migration.

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

62. To further promote the women and peace and security agenda in the region, the Office of the Special Envoy, in partnership with ICGLR, the United Nations Population Fund and the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women), facilitated a workshop in Dar es Salaam from 13 to 15 November on data management for the development of a gender barometer for the Great Lakes region. Participants agreed on the need to identify indicators in order to help monitor compliance with regional commitments and progress in the implementation of the women and peace and security agenda.

63. On 27 and 28 November, the Office of the Special Envoy organized, with ICGLR, an awareness-raising campaign and stakeholder event in Kampala marking the 16 Days of Activism against Gender-based Violence. The event promoted positive masculinity as a preventive and responsive mechanism to address gender-based violence in the region's mining sector.

64. On 9 January, the Office of the Special Envoy hosted a virtual coordination meeting with women leaders and civil society representatives on women and peace and security, which was focused on recent dynamics in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo and their impact on women. The Concertation des collectifs des associations féminines de la région des Grands Lacs issued a statement on behalf of the participants, calling upon regional leaders to put an end to the ongoing conflict in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo and to strengthen protection measures to ensure the safety of women and girls.

65. With regard to the empowerment of youth in the region, the Office of the Special Envoy, together with the United Nations Population Fund, supported ICGLR in the organization of a skills-building dialogue for the Regional Multifunctional Youth Forum in Dar es Salaam from 22 to 24 November. The Office of the Special Envoy also took part in a dialogue on youth, peace and security and Innovation Week, organized by the Government of Burundi on 14 and 15 December with the support of the African Union and the United Nations Development Programme. The event contributed to information exchange among youth representatives on matters of regional peace and security, job creation and education.

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

66. In October, MONUSCO, in collaboration with the Office of Rule of Law and Security Institutions and the Office of the Special Envoy, supported Beni military justice authorities in the investigation of six priority cases that would benefit from international judicial cooperation under the Kinshasa Declaration on Enhancing Judicial Cooperation in the Great Lakes Region, adopted in 2022.

67. On 3 November, the Office of the Special Envoy and ICGLR organized the second review committee meeting on the implementation of the Nairobi Declaration on Justice and Good Governance, adopted in 2019, and the Kinshasa Declaration on Enhancing Judicial Cooperation in the Great Lakes Region. The committee encouraged members who had not yet done so to establish a designated national central authority to ensure the effective execution of mutual legal assistance requests,

put in place national working groups and action plans for the implementation of the Kinshasa Declaration, and identify related capacity and training needs.

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

A. Regional organizations and mechanisms

68. The Office of the Special Envoy continued its close collaboration with regional and subregional organizations. In addition to the exchanges between the Special Envoy and the African Union Commissioner for Political Affairs, Peace and Security and the regional retreat in Durban to revitalize the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework, the Special Envoy pursued engagements for collaboration with the African Union High Representative for the Great Lakes Region, Sghair Ould M'Barek, to ensure the continued strong involvement of the African Union in the revitalization efforts and ongoing regional peace processes.

69. From 9 to 12 October, the Special Envoy embarked on a joint mission to Burundi with the Coordinator of the National Oversight Mechanism, Alphonse Ntumba Luaba. The purpose of the visit was to facilitate engagement between the recently appointed Coordinator and Burundian authorities in view of the country's current role as Chair of the Regional Oversight Mechanism, and to facilitate interactions between the National Oversight Mechanism and the Executive Secretariat of ICGLR.

70. Through joint initiatives on judicial cooperation, women and peace and security, and youth, peace and security, as well as a joint advocacy mission on natural resources management, the Special Envoy sustained strong collaboration with ICGLR, guided by the focus on strengthening complementarity and synergies between the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework and the ICGLR Pact on Security, Stability and Development in the Great Lakes Region.

71. The Special Envoy, through his Office, also provided sustained technical support to the EAC secretariat by funding experts for the Nairobi process.

B. International partners

72. The Special Envoy continued to engage with international partners through visits to Beijing, London, Oslo, Paris and New York. At all his meetings, he called for enhanced support to the Luanda and Nairobi processes and appealed for support for the de-escalation of the tensions and conflicts in the region, as well as support for the implementation of the United Nations Strategy for Peace Consolidation, Conflict Prevention and Conflict Resolution in the Great Lakes Region.

73. On 4 and 5 March, the Office of the Special Envoy, together with the Government of Switzerland and the Conflict Prevention and Peace Forum, organized the sixth Great Lakes stakeholders and experts retreat in Bujumbura. The retreat was focused on facilitating a shared understanding of peace and security dynamics in the region, during which the ongoing revitalization process of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework was discussed and entry points identified for advancing initiatives towards a more transparent and sustainable management of natural resources.

C. Other United Nations system entities

74. The Special Envoy continued to collaborate closely with other United Nations entities in the region. Regular meetings were held with MONUSCO, UNOCA and the United Nations Office to the African Union. In addition to the joint mission of the Special Envoy and the Special Representative mentioned previously, the Special Envoy participated in the fifty-sixth meeting of the United Nations Standing Advisory Committee on Security Questions in Central Africa, held in Kigali from 20 to 24 November. Participants adopted two declarations, one on the prevention and fight against unconstitutional changes of government and the other on the humanitarian situation in Central Africa. He also participated in the meeting of heads of United Nations presences in Central Africa, organized virtually by UNOCA on 15 February.

75. The Office of the Special Envoy organized four political coordination meetings with peace and development advisers and political affairs officers from the region to discuss peace and security dynamics, the impact of the gradual disengagement of MONUSCO, the regional implications of the electoral process in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and ongoing regional peace initiatives.

VI. Observations

76. I am deeply concerned about the deteriorating situation in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo. The escalation of tensions between several countries, notably the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Rwanda, as well as renewed tensions between Burundi and Rwanda, illustrate the growing crisis. To reduce the risk of a military confrontation with regional implications, it is imperative that all countries concerned comply with their international and regional commitments, including those undertaken under the Luanda and Nairobi processes. They must cease support to and collaboration with armed groups and refrain from any actions that undermine the safety, security, livelihoods and well-being of civilians in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo. Sustained diplomatic efforts are urgently needed to secure a durable cessation of hostilities and ensure a de-escalation of tensions, while preserving the hard-won peace gains in the region. This requires, *inter alia*, renewed commitment by all parties to a revitalized Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework, accompanied by fresh impetus and political will to address the drivers of conflict and advance the ongoing regional peace processes.

77. I call upon the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Rwanda to exercise maximum restraint, urgently maintain channels of communication within existing bilateral and multilateral mechanisms, avoid military confrontations, and pursue lasting solutions in the spirit of their respective commitments under the ongoing Nairobi and Luanda processes. I also encourage Burundi and Rwanda to address differences through dialogue and to sustain progress on the commendable rapprochement achieved by both countries in recent years.

78. I commend regional leaders for their continued efforts in pursuing sustainable peace, stability and prosperity, including recent efforts by Messrs. Lourenço and Kiir to facilitate dialogue in the context of the Luanda and Nairobi processes. I call for intensified actions towards the implementation of all the commitments made under the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework, concomitantly with the Luanda and Nairobi processes.

79. The advancement of regional peace processes requires that the concerned parties revamp efforts in generating renewed political momentum for the Luanda and Nairobi processes, especially following the conclusion of the general elections in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the progressive withdrawal of MONUSCO.

Renewed regional diplomatic engagement is needed now more than ever. My Special Envoy, in close coordination with my Special Representatives for the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Central Africa, will continue to support such regional efforts through good offices, advocacy and other support mechanisms.

80. My Special Envoy will continue to promote the inclusive participation of women and youth in regional political processes to ensure that their voices are heard. The empowerment and involvement of women and youth are critical to durable peace and development across the region. I therefore call upon all stakeholders to redouble their efforts to ensure the meaningful involvement of women and youth in conflict prevention, conflict resolution and peacebuilding, as well as the removal of all impediments in this regard.

81. I welcome the ongoing efforts to coordinate and harmonize regional initiatives, including in the context of the quadripartite process, involving EAC, ECCAS, ICGLR and SADC. I welcome in this regard the call by the African Union Peace and Security Council for a second quadripartite summit and follow-up to the first such summit.

82. I welcome the continued efforts towards the revitalization of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework, in line with the decision of the eleventh high-level meeting of the Regional Oversight Mechanism. The revitalization of the Framework provides a critical opportunity for renewed consensus among all signatory countries to effectively strengthen efforts in support of lasting stabilization and durable peace in the region, at such a critical moment. As recognized by the Security Council in its resolution [2717 \(2023\)](#), the Framework remains a vital mechanism to achieve durable peace and stability in the Great Lakes region.

83. I commend the efforts of international partners to address the persisting security challenges in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo, including the brief ceasefire brokered in December. At the same time, the overall situation in that part of the country has remained alarming and highly volatile amid reports of continued fighting, including sustained activities of armed groups, including ADF, the Coopérative pour le développement du Congo and M23. Much more needs to be done to support regional efforts.

84. Addressing the persisting challenges posed by foreign armed groups remains key to achieving lasting peace and stability in the region. I therefore reiterate my call upon all signatory countries of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework to demonstrate renewed political will to advance the effective implementation of the regional commitments, including not to tolerate nor to aid or provide support of any kind to armed groups. I also stress the importance of advancing the implementation of non-military measures in addressing negative forces in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo. The member countries of the Contact and Coordination Group are encouraged to continue their cooperation in identifying and implementing complementary non-military measures in support of military efforts to neutralize negative forces. I urge these countries to intensify their cooperation in the demobilization and repatriation of foreign combatants and foster collaboration through the Great Lakes Judicial Cooperation Network, in view of the ongoing disengagement of MONUSCO.

85. The humanitarian situation in the region remains deeply concerning. Millions of people are in dire need of humanitarian assistance. I am also concerned by reports of continued human rights violations and abuses, as well as the continued use of misinformation, disinformation, hate speech and incitement to violence. I reiterate that all those responsible for such acts must be held to account.

86. I note steady progress made in the implementation of the Khartoum workshop's recommendations on the illegal exploitation of natural resources, illustrated by the

national efforts to implement the Regional Initiative against the Illegal Exploitation of Natural Resources, with the launch by Uganda of the ICGLR “certificate for 3TG” with the aim of formalizing the exploitation and trade of artisanal gold, identified as one of the main sources of revenue for armed groups in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo.

87. I commend my Special Envoy for the Great Lakes Region and his Office for their continued support to regional peace efforts and for the implementation of a revitalized Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework for the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Region.
