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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 paragraph 52 of Security Council resolution [2502 \(2019\)](#), in which the Council requested me to report to it 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.¹ It provides an overview of peace and security developments in the Great Lakes region since the issuance of my previous report ([S/2020/272](#)) and covers the period from 16 March to 15 September 2020.

II. Major developments

A. Spread and implications of the coronavirus disease pandemic

2. The coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic has continued to have significant consequences on the Great Lakes region. As at 15 September 2020, the 13 signatory countries of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework reported a total of 749,442 confirmed cases and 17,913 fatalities, according to the World Health Organization. Since August, the region has seen a slowdown in the percentage increase in new reported cases.

3. Most countries acted early to prevent the spread of the disease, including by temporarily imposing movement restrictions and travel bans, enforcing curfews, closing borders (except for cargo transfers), prohibiting mass gatherings and shutting down schools and places of worship. Countries and regional organizations also endeavoured to strengthen coordination and response mechanisms to alleviate 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 witnesses/guarantors of the Framework: the African Union, the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region, the Southern African Development Community and the United Nations.



socioeconomic impact of the pandemic. Despite the continued increase in confirmed cases, almost all countries in the region recently started to ease restrictions.

4. Since the outbreak of the pandemic, the countries of the region have focused their attention on curbing the spread of the virus and mitigating its socioeconomic impact. Efforts to respond to the pandemic led to a reduction in economic activity in several countries, which had a negative impact on vulnerable populations, in particular those working in the informal sector, which represents a significant percentage of employment across the region. In addition, unforeseen public expenses related to the COVID-19 response, coupled with a decrease in the ability of countries to mobilize domestic resources, further deepened the economic slowdown, affecting countries of the region to varying degrees. According to the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA), economic recovery in the region could commence as early as 2021 if the pandemic is curbed effectively. Furthermore, some initiatives pertaining to the implementation of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework also experienced some slowdowns as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, such as the convening of the tenth meeting of the Regional Oversight Mechanism, which was once again postponed.

B. Security situation

5. On 23 March, I launched an appeal for a global ceasefire to focus our fight on the common enemy of COVID-19, which was favourably received by several Member States in the region. While the security situation remained relatively stable, cross-border security incidents continued to be reported. Compared with the previous reporting period, there was an increase in allegations related to the presence of foreign troops on the territory of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. To address this issue, the countries concerned used diplomatic channels and existing regional mechanisms.

6. An example of this trend was the decision by the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Zambia to resort to diplomatic channels to resolve a long-standing border dispute, which in March had led to incidents involving the armed forces of both countries at Kibanga/Chibanga, along their common border. Following bilateral consultations, both countries referred the border dispute to the Organ on Politics, Defence and Security Cooperation of the Southern African Development Community (SADC), which succeeded in defusing the tensions.

7. On 27 June, an unidentified armed group reportedly comprising about 100 fighters attacked a Rwandan army base at the Yanze internally displaced persons model village in Nyaruguru district, along the border with Rwanda. The Rwanda Defence Force (RDF) confirmed the attack and stated that it had killed four of the attackers and captured three others, while three soldiers had been injured. RDF further claimed that the attackers had come from Cibitoke Province in Burundi and retreated there following the attack. In an official press release issued on the same day, the National Defence Force of Burundi stated that “Burundian soil cannot be the sanctuary for armed elements that disrupt the security of neighbouring countries”. In a separate incident on 7 May, Rwandan and Burundian soldiers exchanged fire at Lake Rweru, reportedly over fishing. Neither Government issued an official statement on the incident.

8. On 14 April, the vice-president and spokesperson of the civil society coalition of North Kivu Province raised concern over the alleged presence of RDF troops near the provincial capital, Goma. The Governments of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Rwanda both rejected the report. In the same vein, on 16 April, civil society groups in South Kivu Province alleged movements by elements of the

Burundian army south of Uvira town, followed subsequently by media reports alleging that the Burundian troops had retreated to Burundi.

9. Incursions into Congolese territory by troops from Angola and the Central African Republic were also reported. On 29 May, Angolan and Congolese troops reportedly exchanged fire in Kabuakala, Kasai Province, after Angolan soldiers allegedly crossed the border. On 17 July, Congolese authorities alleged the presence of Angolan soldiers at the Matungulu camp in Kasai Province. These incidents were addressed through the revived Joint Border Commission. Furthermore, incursions by Central African troops into Nord-Ubangi Province were reported, purportedly to track down anti-balaka elements operating in the area.

10. Incidents involving South Sudanese troops were reported in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo and Uganda. In Ituri Province, members of the South Sudanese army were accused by the Congolese authorities of looting and burning houses between April and June. A bilateral meeting between the concerned security services after the incident resulted in the release of a Congolese hostage and the return of looted goods by the South Sudanese authorities. The Uganda People's Defence Forces (UPDF) reported that on 1 June four South Sudanese soldiers had been shot dead in a clash with UPDF in Moyo district after illegally crossing into Ugandan territory. On 5 July, two South Sudanese citizens – one soldier and one civilian – were reportedly arrested in Amuru district, Uganda, after allegedly attacking UPDF soldiers patrolling border entry points.

11. On 9 April, UPDF exchanged fire with soldiers of the Forces armées de la République démocratique du Congo (FARDC) on Lake Albert after the latter had allegedly entered Ugandan territory. Two FARDC soldiers were reportedly killed while two others were injured and arrested. Following the incident, Congolese and Ugandan officials met and resolved the issue.

12. During the night of 23 to 24 August, the National Defence Force of Burundi reportedly clashed with the Résistance pour un État de droit au Burundi following an attack claimed by the armed group on Bugarama in Rumonge Province. The attack reportedly caused approximately 15 deaths and population displacement.

13. In the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo, armed groups continued to perpetrate attacks on civilians, despite continuing military operations by FARDC and the resultant weakening of some foreign and local armed groups. The Allied Democratic Forces (ADF) extended their activities into Ituri, while attempting to regain positions in North Kivu that they had lost during FARDC operations in October 2019. Between 14 May and 22 June, ADF killed over 60 civilians and four soldiers, mainly in Irumu and Djugu territories in Ituri, while over 40 people, including a United Nations peacekeeper, were killed by suspected ADF elements between 5 April and 23 June in North Kivu.

14. FARDC operations targeting a main stronghold of the Forces démocratiques de libération du Rwanda-Forces combattantes abacunguzi (FDLR-FOCA) in Kazaroho, in North Kivu, further weakened the group. This development followed the killing or arrest of some leaders of Rwandan armed groups. FDLR-FOCA is believed, however, to have retained operational capacity and influence with local militias, as exemplified by an attack on 24 April by suspected FDLR elements in Virunga National Park, which killed 13 game park rangers and four civilians.

15. Attacks by armed groups against several FARDC positions in North Kivu were reported between 13 and 22 July, resulting in the death of FARDC soldiers. The Expanded Joint Verification Mechanism of the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region (ICGLR) and some civil society groups attributed these attacks to former Mouvement du 23 mars (M23) members. The leadership of the group rejected

the accusation but acknowledged the presence of former M23 elements in Rutshuru territory in North Kivu.

16. The Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) remained active in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the Central African Republic and South Sudan. In April and May, the group allegedly abducted at least six civilians and temporarily detained 92 others captured during roadside ambushes and attacks on communities. Most attacks occurred in Bas-Uélé Province in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

17. Local armed groups remained agents of instability, causing widespread violations of human rights and insecurity in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo. Continued violence was observed in Ituri and South Kivu, with cross-border implications for regional peace and security. In Ituri, a loosely defined group of elements based in the Djugu territory, including the Coopérative de Développement du Congo, an armed movement claiming to defend the Walendu ethnic group, launched several attacks on civilians, including members of the Wahema ethnic group. In South Kivu, clashes between FARDC and local armed groups, and inter-communal violence, were recorded, despite a ceasefire agreement signed between the communities on 13 March. There were also allegations that local militias in eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo might have received support from armed groups, notably from former M23 combatants.

C. Political developments

18. Regional cooperation and diplomatic initiatives led by the leaders of the region continued during the reporting period and involved the activation of regional mechanisms, notably in the context of efforts to address the COVID-19 pandemic. Electoral processes, including the general elections in Burundi and preparations for forthcoming elections in Uganda and the United Republic of Tanzania, proceeded on schedule. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the situation was dominated by continuing efforts by the Government to pursue its reform agenda, amid growing tensions within the ruling coalition.

19. Consultations in the context of the quadripartite process to normalize relations between Rwanda and Uganda, facilitated by Angola and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, proceeded with the fourth meeting of the ad hoc ministerial commission on implementation, held at the level of foreign ministers on 4 June via videoconference. On 8 and 9 June, Uganda released and handed over to Rwanda 130 Rwandan citizens who had been detained in Uganda. Uganda released another 12 Rwandan citizens on 7 July.

20. Burundi and Rwanda demonstrated continued resolve to peacefully address security concerns, following cross-border incidents on 7 May and 27 June. Moreover, the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Rwanda, Vincent Biruta, expressed his country's willingness to turn a new page in its bilateral relationship with Burundi. This position was subsequently confirmed by President Paul Kagame during interviews in June and July, improving prospects for the normalization of relations following the elections in Burundi. For his part, President Evariste Ndayishimiye of Burundi, during his inauguration speech on 18 June, indicated openness to establishing partnerships with all countries that wished to cooperate with Burundi.

21. Following clashes along the border between the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Zambia in March, diplomatic engagements between the respective Ministers for Foreign Affairs contributed to easing the tensions and resulted in a joint request to Zimbabwe, as Chair of the Organ on Politics, Defence and Security Cooperation of SADC, to facilitate a diplomatic resolution of the border dispute. From 23 to 29 July, technical experts from Botswana, the Democratic Republic of the

Congo, Zambia and Zimbabwe were deployed to the affected border areas. As a result of the mission, a common approach to demarcating the border was adopted. In support of these efforts, the President of the Congo, Denis Sassou Nguesso, the ICGLR Chair, dispatched his Foreign Minister to Lusaka, Kinshasa and Harare in May to offer support for the peaceful resolution of the matter. During a meeting from 14 to 16 September in Luanda, Angola and the Democratic Republic of the Congo agreed to revive the permanent joint commission on defence and security issues.

22. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the Government continued to implement its programme, with a focus on fighting corruption and strengthening the rule of law. Tensions grew within the ruling coalition of *Cap pour le changement* and *Front commun pour le Congo* (FCC) following the designation by the National Assembly of a new president of the Independent National Electoral Commission and a move by FCC members to reform the judiciary. These developments triggered demonstrations by some political parties and civil society organizations in Kinshasa and across the country. Tensions were further heightened following appointments made by President Félix Tshisekedi on 17 July to civilian, military and judicial bodies, including of the first female judge to the Constitutional Court, a move which was described by FCC as unconstitutional as it allegedly did not follow defined procedures.

23. In Burundi, presidential and legislative elections were held on 20 May, following a campaign period that featured complaints by the opposition and civil society actors about incidents of violence and harassment and the arrest of candidates and supporters of the main opposition party, the *Congrès national pour la liberté* (CNL). The opposition also denounced the exclusion of its representatives from various polling stations. On 25 May, the Independent National Electoral Commission announced that retired General Evariste Ndayishimiye, candidate of the ruling *Conseil national pour la défense de la démocratie-Forces de défense de la démocratie* (CNDD-FDD), had won the presidential elections with 68 per cent of the vote. In the legislative elections, CNDD-FDD won 72 of 100 National Assembly seats. Presidential candidate and CNL leader Agathon Rwasa rejected the provisional results, citing widespread fraud and irregularities, and filed an appeal at the Constitutional Court on 28 May. The appeal was dismissed on 4 June.

24. Accordingly, President-elect Ndayishimiye was sworn in on 18 June following the death of President Pierre Nkurunziza on 8 June. During his inaugural speech, the President called for cooperation with the international community based on mutual respect and with a focus on the environment, economic development, regional integration and infrastructure development. Regarding domestic priorities, he stressed the need for dialogue with the opposition in the country, the return of refugees and other Burundians in exile, the fight against graft and the improvement of justice and governance to pave the way for sustainable development. President Ndayishimiye also called upon Burundians to take all necessary measures to contain the spread of COVID-19 throughout the country. A new cabinet led by Alain Guillaume Bunyoni as Prime Minister was sworn in on 30 June.

25. Preparations for elections continued in Uganda and the United Republic of Tanzania. In the latter country, the Parliament was dissolved on 15 June, ahead of the presidential and legislative elections scheduled for 28 October. The ruling party, *Chama Cha Mapinduzi*, endorsed incumbent President John Magufuli on 11 July to contest the elections. In Uganda, on 16 June, the Electoral Commission released a revised road map for the presidential and parliamentary elections scheduled for early 2021 to limit risks associated with the COVID-19 pandemic during the campaign period. On 28 July, incumbent President Yoweri Museveni was nominated by his party, the National Resistance Movement, as its candidate to run for a sixth term.

D. Humanitarian situation

26. The humanitarian situation in the region continued to be marked by population displacement as a result of violence, notably in eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo, as well as natural disasters, and was further aggravated by the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic. In addition to the 4.5 million internally displaced persons in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, over 919,000 Congolese refugees were being hosted in other countries of the region as at August 2020. Uganda hosted the most Congolese refugees (415,472), followed by Burundi (77,757), the United Republic of Tanzania (77,051), Rwanda (77,017), Zambia (52,773), Angola (23,258) and the Congo (20,687). The Democratic Republic of the Congo also continued to host over 528,000 refugees from Burundi, the Central African Republic, Rwanda and South Sudan. A total of 328,727 Burundian refugees were hosted by countries in the Great Lakes region; the largest group (160,297) remains in the United Republic of Tanzania.

27. Despite some tensions ahead of the elections in Burundi, there was no major forced displacement within or from the country. After the suspension of the voluntary repatriation of refugees during the electoral period, the technical working group of the Tripartite Commission for the Voluntary Repatriation of Burundian Refugees, bringing together the Governments of Burundi and the United Republic of Tanzania and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), met from 22 to 24 July in Kigoma, United Republic of Tanzania, and refugee returns from the United Republic of Tanzania resumed in August, facilitated by UNHCR. As at 31 August 2020, over 7,500 Burundian refugees in the United Republic of Tanzania had been registered for voluntary repatriation and a total of 11,961 refugees had been assisted to return home in the first eight months of 2020. In addition, some Burundian refugees in the Mahama camp in Rwanda asked to return to Burundi in an open letter dated 26 July. A technical meeting between the Governments of Burundi and Rwanda and UNHCR on 13 August led to an agreement to revitalize the 2005 Tripartite Agreement for the Voluntary Repatriation of Burundian refugees. Facilitated voluntary repatriation from Rwanda to Burundi started on 27 August and a total of 993 Burundian refugees were repatriated in two convoys.

28. The COVID-19 pandemic increased the vulnerability of displaced persons, in part as a result of the temporary closure of borders, which affected the admission of new asylum seekers. For example, in June, displaced persons fleeing clashes between militia groups in Ituri in the Democratic Republic of the Congo were stranded at the Ugandan border, with 3,000 of them eventually received in Uganda when the border crossing was temporarily reopened from 1 to 3 July.

E. Human rights and rule of law

29. The region has made progress in the fight against impunity. However, reports of human rights violations continued. Offences include violations committed by armed groups and other actors in areas with weak State authority and porous borders, as well as areas where access to justice is limited. Restrictions on fundamental rights and freedoms have been reported, including in pre-electoral contexts. Human rights violations, including sexual and gender-based violence, were also reported in connection to lockdowns and other measures taken in the context of COVID-19 responses.

30. On 20 June, the Gombe tribunal in Kinshasa found Vital Kamerhe, President Tshisekedi's Chief of Staff, and two co-defendants guilty of corruption and embezzlement in relation to the 100-day programme launched by President

Tshisekedi upon assuming office. The defendants' lawyers appealed the verdict on 24 June.

31. On 7 June, Sudanese Janjaweed militia leader Ali Muhammad Ali Abd-Al-Rahman (formerly referred to in International Criminal Court (ICC) documents as "Ali Kushayb"), under an ICC arrest warrant, surrendered to Central African Republic authorities and was transferred to ICC on 8 June.

32. Armed groups in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo continued to perpetrate serious human rights violations. A report released by the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) in July indicated that, between 1 February and 30 June, over 170 human rights abuses had been perpetrated by ADF, affecting at least 570 victims. The report also detailed violations committed by FARDC and the Congolese National Police during security operations, which had affected 109 and 137 victims, respectively.

33. In Burundi, the pre-electoral period was marked by reports of human rights violations, including reports of enforced disappearances and arbitrary arrests, as well as acts of violence, including clashes between members of rival political parties.

34. In Uganda, between March and June, opposition leaders Kizza Besigye and Robert Kyagulanyi complained of being denied access to radio or TV shows, notably by military officers. In the United Republic of Tanzania, some opposition and civil society figures denounced restrictions on political space, including on the freedoms of media, assembly and expression.

35. Human rights violations by State actors were reported in the context of COVID-19 preventive measures, including incidents of killings and maiming and allegations of arbitrary arrests in several countries of the region. Relevant national authorities and civil society organizations also denounced a reported significant increase in sexual and gender-based violence, linked to the lockdowns in response to the pandemic.

III. Implementation of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework

A. Commitments of the Democratic Republic of the Congo

36. The Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo has continued to implement its national commitments under the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework. To further consolidate State authority, the Government renewed the national stabilization and reconstruction programme for areas emerging from armed conflict. The Government and MONUSCO also pursued community-level dialogue in Ituri, in the context of the implementation of the agreement signed with the Front de résistance patriotique de l'Ituri (FRPI) on 28 February for its disarmament, demobilization and reintegration. On 1 July, the national stabilization and reconstruction programme and MONUSCO, together with the International Organization for Migration and local and international non-governmental organizations, launched two projects to support the reintegration of FRPI elements through dialogue and economic recovery activities and the reintegration of 900 FRPI ex-combatants, their dependants and 600 host community members. Further steps were taken by the monitoring committee of the national stabilization and reconstruction programme to advance the implementation of the agreement with FRPI, including the preparation of relevant draft laws and budgetary submissions.

37. To advance reconciliation and strengthen stability, President Tshisekedi, during a meeting of the Council of Ministers held on 19 June, directed that firm action be

taken to address the growing number of incidents of hate speech and ethnic division in the country. On 17 July, the President appointed civil magistrates to the country's higher courts, including two women: one as President of the Conseil d'État and another as the first-ever female member of the Constitutional Court. On 7 August, during another meeting of the Council of Ministers, the President stressed the importance of supporting transitional justice mechanisms for victims of serious crime as part of the fight against impunity. On 31 August, President Tshisekedi chaired a meeting on peace and security in eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo, including on the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration process. At the meeting, the governors of Ituri and North and South Kivu advocated for a community-centred disarmament, demobilization and reintegration programme.

38. Although the activities of the National Oversight Mechanism were affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, the leadership of the Mechanism reached out to armed groups to persuade them to lay down their weapons. It also conducted activities to promote stability and development in the eastern provinces. Leaders of the Mechanism further expressed support for the Government's commitment to restore peace in the eastern part of the country and encouraged the adoption of additional measures to strengthen cooperation between security services and the population.

B. Commitments of the region

39. Despite the constraints imposed by the pandemic, the leaders of the region remained engaged through bilateral and multilateral efforts to strengthen relations and defuse tensions, as evidenced by the continued engagement of Angola and the Democratic Republic of the Congo through the quadripartite process for the normalization of relations between Rwanda and Uganda. Leaders of the region also made progress through the efforts of SADC, with the support of the African Union and ICGLR, to find a peaceful resolution for the border dispute between the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Zambia, in line with their commitments under the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework.

40. The African Union, SADC and ICGLR, along with the East African Community and countries in the region, remained engaged in the support of peaceful elections and political transition in Burundi.

41. The leaders of the region also expressed their support for peace and security in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. During the fortieth ordinary summit of Heads of State and Government of SADC, held virtually on 17 August, the leaders reiterated the continued support of SADC for the Democratic Republic of the Congo, including through its contribution to the Force Intervention Brigade of MONUSCO, and commended the Governments of the Democratic Republic of Congo and Zambia on their commitment to resolve their border dispute amicably.

42. Subregional organizations and mechanisms took steps to facilitate cross-border coordination on measures to contain the COVID-19 pandemic. On 6 April, the Council of Ministers of SADC adopted regional guidelines to harmonize and facilitate the movement of critical goods and services across the region. A meeting with the Presidents of Kenya, South Sudan and Uganda, convened on 12 May by President Paul Kagame of Rwanda in his capacity as Chair of the East African Community, culminated in an agreement on a harmonized system to certify COVID-19 test results and a digital tracking system for drivers crossing borders. A meeting of ministers of health of ICGLR member States, held on 10 July, yielded an agreement to establish a ministerial coordination committee, supported by a network of health experts, to share best practices in tackling the pandemic. On 29 July, a joint meeting of the Council of Ministers of the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa, the East African

Community and SADC adopted harmonized guidelines on the facilitation of trade and transport during the pandemic.

43. Countries in the region also endeavoured to address challenges linked to their response to the COVID-19 pandemic. On 14 April, Burundi reopened its borders with the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Rwanda, which had been closed since 15 March to curb the spread of the virus, for vehicles transporting merchandise. On 15 May, 22 May and 19 June, respectively, Rwanda, Kenya and Uganda reached agreements with the United Republic of Tanzania on the cross-border movement of goods and services, with specific measures to be implemented for the testing and certification of truck drivers.

44. In the area of security cooperation, President Tshisekedi and President Museveni agreed, following an exchange in June, to strengthen cooperation against ADF. This led to an agreement on 20 July to establish a joint task force bringing together the security services of both countries.

45. In another positive development, the chiefs of the military intelligence services of Burundi and Rwanda met on 26 August at the Nemba border post, along their common border. At that meeting, which was facilitated by the Expanded Joint Verification Mechanism of ICGLR, the chiefs called on the authorities of both countries to resolve the long-standing issue of refugees and political exiles, encouraged the defence forces to contain and neutralize foreign armed groups operating along the border, committed to regional efforts to implement non-military measures to help neutralize foreign armed groups in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo and agreed to appoint liaison officers to facilitate regular exchanges.

46. Additional progress in the implementation of the regional commitments of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework was hampered by the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic. This was most noticeable in the disruption of the meetings of the governance mechanisms of the Framework. Neither the Technical Support Committee nor the Regional Oversight Mechanism was convened, owing to travel restrictions. Meanwhile, my Special Envoy for the Great Lakes Region continued to undertake consultations aimed at organizing the tenth meeting of the Mechanism as soon as possible.

C. International commitments

47. During the reporting period, international partners focused their attention on developments in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the electoral process in Burundi and ways to support the region in meeting challenges linked to the COVID-19 pandemic. In this context, the International Contact Group for the Great Lakes Region, during its virtual meetings held on 13 May and 28 May, welcomed progress in neutralizing armed groups and, in particular, lauded the commitment by the signatory States to improve security cooperation on non-military measures to achieve that objective. The Group also noted the slow implementation of reforms in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, compounded by rising tensions within the ruling coalition. On Burundi, the group called for a peaceful electoral process.

48. During an ambassadorial meeting on the Great Lakes region held on 11 June, the Peacebuilding Commission offered its full support for regional efforts to improve economic cooperation, development and peacebuilding in the region. The Commission noted that the COVID-19 pandemic could lead to the deterioration of regional macroeconomic prospects, the disruption of economic activities and increased pressure on national budgets, thereby affecting the countries' capacities to address peace and security challenges. The Commission also emphasized the importance of improved governance and management of natural resources to leverage

the socioeconomic opportunities for the Great Lakes region. Accordingly, it expressed readiness to support post-COVID-19 socioeconomic recovery and development efforts and committed to support the preparations for the Great Lakes Investment and Trade Conference. Addressing the meeting, my Special Envoy stressed the importance of regional and cross-border initiatives to sustain peace and development and highlighted relevant contributions of the Peacebuilding Fund, including ongoing projects between the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Rwanda on cross-border trade and food security, as well as in support of the reintegration of former combatants.

49. With regard to the Great Lakes Regional Strategic Framework established in 2016 to align United Nations regional development presences to support the implementation of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework, an inter-agency working group was established in June by the Office of the Special Envoy to review the governance structure of the Framework, as well as the funding and functioning of its secretariat, with a view to enhancing the impact of United Nations programmatic actions in the region.

IV. Implementation of the road map of my Special Envoy

A. Good offices of the Secretary-General

50. Despite the operational limitations imposed by COVID-19, my Special Envoy for the Great Lakes Region continued to actively engage with key stakeholders in the region, the co-guarantors of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework, international partners and other actors on ways to consolidate the gains achieved in the implementation of the Framework and promote regional cooperation to address challenges to peace and sustainable development in the region.

51. In this regard, my Special Envoy supported national and regional efforts to facilitate dialogue and build confidence between countries in the region. He conducted periodic virtual consultations with senior government representatives from Angola, Burundi, the Congo, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Kenya, Rwanda, Uganda and the United Republic of Tanzania to, inter alia, support ongoing processes to facilitate dialogue and build confidence, including the quadripartite process and efforts to peacefully resolve the border dispute between the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Zambia. He also consulted separately with the Ministers for Foreign Affairs of Burundi and Rwanda to discuss opportunities to improve bilateral relations between the two countries.

52. My Special Envoy encouraged signatory countries to continue to pursue confidence-building initiatives and cooperation, particularly on the neutralization of foreign armed groups, the illegal exploitation and trade of natural resources and economic integration. The promotion of judicial cooperation to fight impunity and uphold human rights, the promotion of women's participation and equal representation in peace, security and development, and the engagement of young people for inclusive development also remain at the centre of my Special Envoy's engagement.

53. In the context of the elections in Burundi, my Special Envoy engaged national, regional and international stakeholders to promote dialogue and international support for a peaceful, credible and inclusive electoral process. Together with my Special Representative for Central Africa and Head of the United Nations Regional Office for Central Africa, my Special Representative to the African Union, the Assistant Secretary-General for Africa, the Resident Coordinator and the Office of the Special Envoy for Burundi, he elaborated a plan to engage Burundian stakeholders prior to,

during and after the elections, emphasizing the readiness of the United Nations to support Burundi in its efforts towards peace, reconciliation and sustainable development.

54. To address the crisis resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic and in response to requests by countries of the region, my Special Envoy advocated for a coordinated regional response and steadfast support by the international community, including multilateral financial institutions. During a meeting convened by my Special Envoy on 2 April, representatives of the co-guarantor institutions of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework discussed the impact of COVID-19 and the prospects for political engagement with countries in the region. Through his engagement with civil society organizations, non-governmental organizations and other stakeholders, my Special Envoy called attention to the impact of the pandemic, especially on the elderly, women, children and youth. In addition, he advocated support within the region for my call for a global ceasefire and for Security Council resolution [2532 \(2020\)](#).

B. Support for the neutralization of negative forces

55. The confidence-building process involving the intelligence and security services of Burundi, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Rwanda, Uganda and the United Republic of Tanzania, and efforts to start implementing the recommendations from this process regarding complementary non-military measures to neutralize foreign armed groups, were slowed down by the postponement of the tenth meeting of the Regional Oversight Mechanism. Nevertheless, my Special Envoy, together with the co-guarantor institutions, continued to engage the countries concerned to promote their sustained commitment to the process and their participation in follow-up meetings of intelligence and security services.

C. Advancing women and peace and security

56. Promoting the empowerment of women as agents of change for socioeconomic transformation and the consolidation of peace and security in the region remained a key priority for my Special Envoy. Since the outbreak of COVID-19, he has engaged regional civil society organizations to assess the pandemic's impact on the women and peace and security agenda. A joint technical coordination team, led by the Office of the Special Envoy and ICGLR, with the participation of regional women's civil society organizations, held weekly meetings to share information and identify specific concerns and needs of women and girls in terms of prevention and protection in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic.

57. Following my call on 6 April for measures to address the global surge in domestic violence directed towards women and girls, which is linked to the lockdowns, my Special Envoy engaged the signatory countries of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework, requesting them to consider specific actions to address gender-based violence. He stressed the need to increase investment that would cater for the special needs of women affected by the lockdowns, and to create safe channels for women to seek support in the event of abuse.

58. The twelfth meeting of the Advisory Board of the Women's Platform for the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework, held via videoconference on 12 May under the auspices of my Special Envoy, examined the impact of COVID-19 on women, girls and other vulnerable groups in the region. The Board proposed that priority measures be taken to economically cushion and protect women from the most severe impacts of the pandemic and called on all stakeholders to engage in

constructive support for civil society in the region, particularly women involved in small-scale businesses and in the agricultural sector. Discussing gender-based violence, the Board further called on ICGLR member States to take measures to ensure that monitoring, reporting and legal recourse systems continued to function during the pandemic.

59. My Special Envoy, in consultation with relevant stakeholders, organized three virtual round tables, on 28 July, 11 August and 20 August, bringing together women leaders, entrepreneurs, experts, civil society organizations, United Nations entities and international partners. The round tables focused on key areas of resolution [1325 \(2000\)](#), including women as promoters of social and economic transformation, the prevention of all forms of violence against women and effective measures to guarantee the meaningful political participation of women and their contribution to peacebuilding. Recommendations developed during the round tables included the strengthening of women's networks to step up the exchange of information on best practices, targeted capacity-building initiatives through requisite legal frameworks at the national and regional levels and gender-sensitive budgeting, and enhanced resource mobilization efforts through better coordination and advocacy at the highest levels. The conclusions will be presented at a forthcoming dedicated meeting of the Peacebuilding Commission.

D. Judicial cooperation

60. My Special Envoy continued to support the fight against impunity and the promotion of the rule of law to prevent conflict and build trust among the countries in the region. While the prosecution of cases identified through the Great Lakes Judicial Cooperation Network was slowed down due to COVID-19-related restrictions, the Office of the Special Envoy facilitated capacity-building initiatives with partners, to the benefit of the focal points of the Network. Virtual workshops, organized in July by the International Institute for Justice and the Rule of Law on remote access to judicial proceedings in terrorism cases and the development of standardized guidelines for mutual legal assistance in criminal matters in East Africa, enabled the judiciaries of the signatory States to deepen their collaboration, despite the restrictions imposed by the pandemic.

61. To support countries in the region in their implementation of the Nairobi Declaration on Justice and Good Governance, adopted in May 2019, my Special Envoy, together with the ICGLR secretariat, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) and the Network of African National Human Rights Institutions, organized a capacity-building workshop for national human rights institutions and other stakeholders on 22 and 23 July. The workshop developed strategies and proposed actions to enhance the effectiveness of these institutions, including their response to human rights concerns linked to the COVID-19 pandemic.

E. Management of natural resources

62. My Special Envoy remained engaged with relevant stakeholders on the critical issue of addressing the illicit exploitation of and trade in natural resources in the region, a main driver of instability and violence in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo and a source of mistrust and tensions between countries in the region. Pursuant to Security Council resolutions [2389 \(2017\)](#) and [2502 \(2019\)](#), and to support the implementation of the ICGLR Regional Initiative on Natural Resources, he consulted the countries of the region, subregional organizations, development

partners and resource-importing countries, advocating for a holistic approach involving national, regional and international stakeholders. During the virtual “Mining Week” conference organized by the Democratic Republic of the Congo from 17 to 19 June, my Special Envoy called for broader regional cooperation, including between mining industries and artisanal miners to tackle the illegal exploitation and smuggling of minerals.

63. On 15 July, my Special Envoy briefed the Arria formula meeting of the Security Council on the illegal exploitation of natural resources in the region. He called for increased support by development partners for regional efforts and highlighted options for conflict prevention and peacebuilding related to artisanal and industrial mining in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

64. Furthermore, preparations have been launched to convene a workshop with ICGLR on the transparent management of natural resources. It is envisaged that the workshop will be held before the end of the year, circumstances related to COVID-19 permitting.

F. Economic cooperation

65. To explore options to reduce the economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, my Special Envoy convened on 18 June a virtual round table on collective actions, which he co-chaired with the Executive Secretary of ECA. The meeting brought together representatives from Burundi, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Rwanda and Uganda. Participants included multilateral and regional financial institutions, United Nations agencies, development partners, guarantor institutions of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework and private sector representatives. The meeting identified gaps and opportunities for support and highlighted the need to foster synergy and coherence to mobilize needed resources for the region. The meeting also urged ICGLR to explore, with the support of the Office of the Special Envoy and ECA, the establishment of a platform to promote greater coherence of interventions and to track progress by Member States, regional economic communities and businesses in accessing available financial support packages.

66. In addition, my Special Envoy continued to support preparations for the second Great Lakes Investment and Trade Conference, which remains a key vehicle to promote regional economic integration and cooperation as pathways towards a more peaceful, stable and prosperous region. The Conference is expected to be held in early 2021 in Rwanda, circumstances related to COVID-19 permitting.

G. Youth and peace and security

67. On 28 May, the Office of the Special Envoy participated in a consultative meeting of the Executive Committee of the ICGLR Regional Multifunctional Youth Forum, aimed at reinvigorating the platform for youth engagement in the region. Participants included senior officials from ministries in charge of youth affairs and national youth representatives from ICGLR member States. My Special Envoy encouraged the young people in the region to contribute to collective efforts to combat the COVID-19 pandemic and invited Member States to seize the opportunities presented by resolution [2250 \(2015\)](#) on youth and peace and security, and the contents of the first progress report on the implementation of that resolution, released in March 2020.

H. Regional strategy

68. In line with my peace and security reform agenda, my Special Envoy organized a series of consultations between May and September with national, regional and international stakeholders to develop a United Nations strategy for peace consolidation and conflict resolution and prevention in the Great Lakes region. Stakeholders consulted included officials from signatory countries of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework, guarantor institutions, civil society organizations, women and youth representatives, academics and experts, representatives of the private sector, international partners and representatives of United Nations entities, both from the field and at Headquarters. The strategy will build on the positive momentum witnessed recently in the region, and will seek to harness the comparative advantage of the Organization's multifaceted presence to support the countries and people of the Great Lakes Region towards more durable peace, security and sustainable development.

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

A. Regional organizations and mechanisms

69. To promote a shared understanding of key regional developments and facilitate a harmonized approach, my Special Envoy held regular consultations with the African Union Special Representative for the Great Lakes region. He also discussed regional developments with the Executive Secretary of SADC on 5 June. On 9 June, my Special Envoy and the Executive Secretary of ICGLR examined options to further enhance collaboration. These meetings helped enhance coordination on peace and security issues and support for efforts to mitigate the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and maximize synergy among the four guarantor institutions of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework. The Office of the Special Envoy also carried out numerous activities in collaboration with ICGLR, including joint meetings on the sustainable management of natural resources, on judicial cooperation and on women and peace and security.

B. Other United Nations entities

70. My Special Envoy regularly engaged other senior United Nations officials in the region to support United Nations efforts to deliver as one, including my Special Representative for the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Head of MONUSCO, my Special Representative for Central Africa and Head of the United Nations Regional Office for Central Africa, and the Assistant Secretary-General for Africa. He consulted and coordinated his actions with the Resident Coordinators in the region, the United Nations Development Programme, OHCHR, UNHCR, the United Nations Office to the African Union, the United Nations Global Compact, ECA, the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, the World Food Programme, the World Bank and the African Development Bank.

71. Prior, during and after the elections in Burundi, my Special Envoy facilitated a coordinated approach among the United Nations presences in the region through regular coordination meetings at the principals and technical levels, which afforded the opportunity to develop a shared assessment of the evolving situation and to collectively determine concerted approaches, plans and actions by the United Nations to support the unfolding process in Burundi.

72. At the technical level, the Office of the Special Envoy for the Great Lakes Region also continued to engage on a regular basis with MONUSCO on peace and security developments in the region and on ways to enhance cooperation towards improved information-sharing, coordination and analysis with regard to the situation in the region. Similarly, in monthly interactions, the Office of the Special Envoy, together with United Nations Regional Office for Central Africa, the Office of the Special Envoy for Burundi and MONUSCO, explored options for shared analysis and enhanced regional political engagements.

VI. Observations and recommendations

73. I am encouraged by progress in regional cooperation in the Great Lakes region, despite the unprecedented challenges caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. The commitment and leadership of the signatories and guarantors of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework are more important than ever, as the pandemic risks exacerbating instability and undoing hard-won gains. I encourage the countries of the region to think creatively in order to turn the challenges arising from the COVID-19 pandemic into opportunities to enhance collaboration and solidarity and to deepen cooperation on issues central to peace and development. I express my solidarity with the people and the Governments of the region and assure them of the steadfast support of the United Nations in their efforts to respond to and recover from the COVID-19 pandemic.

74. I commend the actions taken by countries, organizations and mechanisms to limit the spread of the virus. I am concerned, however, by the slow response of international partners in the face of what could be a major driver of social and economic distress in the region. I call on the international community to step up its support for national and regional institutions tasked with responding to the pandemic, bearing in mind the urgent needs of the most vulnerable populations. I call on these institutions to discharge their responsibilities in a transparent manner to ensure that steady support is received by the populations in need.

75. Cordial relations between countries are central to achieving peace, stability and development in the region. I therefore welcome the continuation of the quadripartite process to normalize relations between Rwanda and Uganda under the auspices of Angola and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. I encourage Rwanda and Uganda and the facilitators to bring the dialogue to a swift and successful conclusion.

76. I welcome the decision by the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Zambia to peacefully resolve their border dispute. I salute the commitment of SADC to facilitate a political settlement, with the support of ICGLR and the African Union. I further welcome the progress made towards the resumption of security cooperation between Burundi and Rwanda, as demonstrated by the meeting of the chiefs of the military intelligence services of the two countries held on 26 August. I also commend Angola and the Democratic Republic of the Congo on their commitment to dialogue through the revival of the permanent joint commission on defence and security. My Special Envoy stands ready to continue to support all regional initiatives aimed at building trust and confidence among the signatories of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework.

77. The political transition in Burundi constitutes an important milestone for the country and the region. I encourage Burundians to take decisive steps towards national reconciliation and the improvement of the country's relations with its neighbours. The United Nations will continue to support the Government and the people of Burundi on the path to political and socioeconomic stability and inclusive and sustainable development.

78. I am concerned by the increasing tensions within the governing coalition in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, which risk jeopardizing progress on some critical reforms that would contribute, among other things, to enhanced security in the eastern provinces and a continued weakening of armed groups. I therefore reiterate my call on all Congolese stakeholders across the political spectrum and civil society to work together to continue laying the foundations for peace, stability and sustainable development.

79. While the COVID-19 pandemic has had an adverse impact on the implementation of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework, causing, inter alia, the postponement of important meetings of its governance mechanisms and of the Great Lakes Investment and Trade Conference, I commend the signatories and co-guarantors of the Framework for remaining engaged in these processes through virtual meetings. In this regard, I express my hope that the tenth meeting of the Regional Oversight Mechanism can be held as soon as the circumstances permit.

80. Efforts to advance regional economic cooperation and integration should continue, especially at the present time, to help mitigate the economic and social consequences of the pandemic. In this regard, and in the context of tackling the root causes of instability, I welcome efforts by ICGLR, supported by my Special Envoy, to facilitate a comprehensive solution to the illicit exploitation of and trade in natural resources. I call upon the countries of the region, along with transit and destination countries of illegally sourced natural resources, to fully engage in this process to help usher in an era of regional cooperation on natural resources conducive to shared prosperity.

81. The continuing activities of armed groups, particularly in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo, pose a major threat to regional stability and development. I welcome the ongoing confidence-building process bringing together the intelligence and security services of the core Great Lakes countries, along with the consensus among the leaders of the region on the importance of non-military measures to complement military operations against armed groups. I encourage the leaders of the region to pursue and intensify these efforts, with the support of my Special Envoy and the co-guarantors of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework. In particular, I urge the Governments of the region to expedite the establishment of critical national and regional disarmament, demobilization and reintegration frameworks.

82. Despite some progress in improving the human rights situation, more must be done to ensure that the people of the Great Lakes region are protected from abuses and that the rule of law prevails across the region. The sharp increase in gender-based violence, partly linked to lockdown measures related to the COVID-19 pandemic, is worrisome. I call upon the leaders of the region to ensure that the protection of human rights and the fight against impunity remain priorities. My Special Envoy stands ready to work with national and regional partners to promote this agenda and to help implement additional measures to mitigate the impact of the pandemic on human rights.

83. I note some progress in promoting the women and peace and security agenda in the region. I encourage all stakeholders to address the disproportionate impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the safety and livelihoods of women and to take further steps to empower them socially and economically. I call upon all countries in the region to mark the twentieth anniversary of resolution [1325 \(2000\)](#) by guaranteeing, once and for all, the full participation and representation of women in political and electoral processes.

84. I am deeply concerned by the continued displacement of populations and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on refugees and internally displaced persons.

I call on all stakeholders to take urgent measures to ease the plight of these vulnerable populations and redouble efforts to find durable solutions for them.

85. It is my hope that that the United Nations strategy for peace consolidation, conflict prevention and resolution in the Great Lakes region will lead to more effective support by the United Nations for the region and will contribute to progress towards the attainment of the Sustainable Development Goals in the region.

86. I thank my Special Envoy and his team for their unwavering support for the signatories in the implementation of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework for the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Region.
