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United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo

Report of the Secretary-General

I. Introduction

1. The present report, submitted pursuant to paragraph 43 of Security Council resolution [2666 \(2022\)](#), covers developments in the Democratic Republic of the Congo from 1 December 2022 to 20 March 2023. It describes progress and challenges in the implementation of the mandate of the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO).

II. Political developments

2. The reporting period was marked by the beginning of voter registration for the 2023 general elections, escalating tensions between the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Rwanda and continued regional efforts to address insecurity in eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo.

3. Preparations for the general elections continued. On 24 December, the Independent National Electoral Commission launched the voter registration process, targeting 50 million potential voters in three operational zones. On 13 March, the Commission announced the registration of 70 per cent of expected voters, at least half of whom are women. The security situation has challenged voter registration in conflict areas in the three eastern provinces. Voter registration was delayed in the Kwamouth territory of Mai-Ndombe Province owing to persistent insecurity following the intercommunal violence in 2022 between the Teke and Yaka communities. On 27 February, during his address to the Human Rights Council in Geneva, the President, Félix-Antoine Tshisekedi, acknowledged that the security situation in the east could jeopardize the electoral process. Voter registration was scheduled to end on 17 March.

4. The Front commun pour le Congo (FCC), one of the main opposition political groupings, adopted a boycott stance towards the electoral process, claiming the absence of a consensual legal and institutional framework and security conditions; on 13 March, it called for the immediate suspension of voter registration. On 16 December, the leader of the Ensemble pour la République political party, Moïse Katumbi, announced his candidacy for the presidential election. The announcement



triggered the resignation of three out of the six ministers from his party's quota on 28 December. On 20 February, declared presidential candidates Martin Fayulu and Moïse Katumbi denounced the voter registration as flawed in favour of the ruling majority, decrying registration site imbalance in favour of the Kasai region to the detriment of Grand Katanga.

5. On 28 December, Mr. Tshisekedi enacted the 2023 Finance Law, with a budget amounting to \$16 billion, an increase of 45.9 per cent compared with the previous year, including \$434 million for the elections. The International Monetary Fund revised upward to 8.5 per cent the growth of the 2022 gross domestic product of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, thanks to stronger-than-expected mining production. The International Monetary Fund estimated, however, that the overall fiscal situation of the country had deteriorated as extrabudgetary military spending had increased significantly.

6. On 6 December, the third round of consultations under the Nairobi process concluded in Nairobi. Over 200 delegates representing armed groups, civil society, women and youth from North and South Kivu, Ituri, Maniema and Tanganyika participated in the consultations. Participants agreed, *inter alia*, on the need to encourage synergy between the local development programme of the 145 territories and the Disarmament, Demobilization, Community Recovery and Stabilization Programme. They also highlighted the need to create holistic care centres for survivors of sexual violence and a network of women peace mediators, at the territorial level, to support the local political processes designed to create a conducive environment for disarmament.

7. On 12 January, in Mombasa, Kenya, the Facilitator of the Nairobi process and former President of Kenya, Uhuru Kenyatta, met with representatives of the Mouvement du 23 mars (M23), who agreed to a ceasefire and withdrawal of their forces from occupied territories by 15 January, in accordance with the Luanda communiqué of 23 November. Despite that announcement, M23 resumed its offensive operations with further territorial expansions across Masisi and Rutshuru territories.

8. On 4 February, following an extraordinary summit in Bujumbura, East African Community Heads of State called for an immediate ceasefire by all parties and violations to be reported to the Chairperson of the East African Community. They observed that the security situation in eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo could be sustainably resolved only through a political process, and called upon all troop-contributing countries of the East African Community regional force to deploy immediately. On 5 February, the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo released a communiqué, recalling that the mandate of the regional force was "unequivocally offensive" and denouncing the lack of implementation of the Luanda process. In the communiqué, it rejected calls for direct and unconditional negotiations with M23 and reiterated that the only political framework supported by the Government was the Luanda road map.

9. From 5 to 9 February, Mr. Tshisekedi travelled to the Congo, Angola, South Africa and the Comoros, where he met with his counterparts to discuss insecurity in the eastern provinces of the country. On 17 February, on the margins of the thirty-sixth Summit of Heads of State and Government of the African Union, a special summit of the East African Community Heads of State, extended to Angola, endorsed new timelines for the M23 withdrawal from all occupied positions covering the period from 28 February to 30 March. On 17 February, the Secretary-General attended a summit of Heads of State of the African Union Peace and Security Council on the situation in eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo, during which the Peace and Security Council endorsed the decisions of the East African Community special summit, condemned attacks against MONUSCO and called upon all parties to

implement the decisions of the Luanda and Nairobi processes. The Peace and Security Council also welcomed the deployment of the East African Community regional force and decided to finance it through the Peace Fund of the African Union. On 10 March, Angola announced the upcoming deployment, subject to authorization by the National Assembly, of an Angolan contingent to eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo to secure the M23 cantonment sites and protect the members of the ad hoc verification mechanism.

10. On 27 February, the Secretary-General met with Mr. Tshisekedi and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, Filippo Grandi, on the margins of the fifty-second session of the Human Rights Council in Geneva to discuss insecurity in eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo and its humanitarian consequences, as well as cooperation between the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and MONUSCO.

11. From 31 January to 3 February, Pope Francis visited Kinshasa, where he engaged with Mr. Tshisekedi, representatives of religious denominations, victims of conflict and youth. The Pope denounced conflict-related violence, the illicit exploitation of natural resources, hate speech and corruption. He called for peace, reconciliation and the holding of free, transparent and credible elections.

III. Security situation

12. The security situation deteriorated further in the three eastern provinces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo with a steep surge in violence, perpetrated mostly by the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF), the Coopérative pour le développement du Congo (CODECO) and M23. In South Kivu, Congolese and Burundian troops continued operations against the foreign armed group Résistance pour un État de droit au Burundi (RED Tabara). Cross-border security incidents also increased between the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Rwanda.

Ituri Province

13. Insecurity in Ituri was marked by a surge in killings perpetrated mainly by ADF, Zaire and CODECO, despite the act of engagement signed by CODECO on 4 June 2022, which had initially yielded positive results. Between 1 December and 14 March, 201 security incidents involving armed groups were recorded, resulting in 485 civilians killed, including at least 82 women and 51 children, compared with 114 civilians killed in the previous reporting period. A total of 172 civilians were injured, including at least 20 women and 19 children. At least 168 civilians, including 13 women and 35 children, were reportedly abducted. The redeployment of Congolese armed forces to the Petit Nord area of North Kivu to address the threat posed by M23 created a security vacuum that contributed to persistent insecurity in Ituri.

14. Competition for control over illegal mining sites continued to fuel conflict in the Mongbwalu, Kparaganza, Kilo, Bambu, Bule and Tchomia areas of Djugu territory, where CODECO factions and Zaire militias clashed and perpetrated direct attacks on civilians, Congolese armed forces and police. In Mahagi territory, an uptick in the number of civilian casualties was recorded, notably in the gold mining areas of Katanga and Djalasiga, compared with the previous reporting period.

15. In Irumu and Mambasa territories, ADF continued to commit atrocities, mainly along the roads between Komanda, Luna and Mambasa. Between 1 December and

14 March, ADF killed 159 civilians, including at least 25 women and 9 children, and injured 15 civilians, including 1 woman and 4 children.

North Kivu Province

16. In the Grand Nord area, between 1 December and 15 March, 134 security incidents involving armed groups were recorded. ADF remained the main cause of insecurity, perpetrating at least 57 attacks, in which 187 civilians, including 69 women and 20 children, were killed and 117 others injured, including 54 women and 20 children.

17. Despite the continued joint operations of the Congolese and Ugandan armed forces in North Kivu, ADF remained active, mostly in Bashu chieftaincy, in the southern part of Beni territory, and along the northern boundary of North Kivu, mostly for resupplying and retaliation against civilians perceived as cooperating with the Congolese and Ugandan forces. Between 6 and 15 March, ADF perpetrated eight attacks in Bashu chieftaincy that resulted in 108 civilians killed, including 42 women and 14 children. On 15 and 25 January, two improvised explosive devices detonated in a church in Kasindi and a market in Beni, respectively. Islamic State Central Africa Province claimed responsibility for the explosion in Kasindi and two other attacks in Bashu chieftaincy.

18. The security situation in Butembo and Lubero territories continued to be marked by Mai-Mai group attacks against civilians and clashes with Congolese armed forces. Between 1 December and 31 January, Mai-Mai groups killed 12 civilians, including 1 woman and 1 child, and wounded 8 others, including 1 woman and 1 child.

19. In the Petit Nord, the security situation deteriorated significantly as M23 launched new offensives and expanded its areas of control, despite claims of withdrawal from Kibumba and Rumangabo in early January. On 4 and 26 January, M23 took control of Kitshanga in Masisi territory and Nyamilima in Rutshuru territory, respectively. Fighting between M23 and Congolese armed forces persisted in northern Kitshanga and southward along the road to Sake, triggering large-scale population movements. Between 1 December and 15 February, M23 reportedly killed 43 civilians, including 2 women and 3 children, and injured 21 others, including 3 women and 2 children. On 27 February, M23 took control of Mweso following clashes with the Congolese armed forces that reportedly resulted in four civilians injured, including two children.

20. On 24 January, a fighter jet of the Congolese defence forces came under fire as it was landing at the Goma airport. The Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo denied Rwandan authorities' claims that the jet had violated Rwandan airspace.

South Kivu province

21. Insecurity persisted in South Kivu as foreign and local armed groups continued to commit violence against civilians. Between 1 December and 31 January, 71 security incidents were recorded and resulted in 26 civilians killed, including 9 women and 3 children, and 13 others injured, including 2 women and 4 children. The Twirwaneho armed group, suspected of supporting RED Tabara, was the main source of insecurity. Congolese and Burundian troops continued joint operations against RED Tabara and reached Bijombo, the Twirwaneho stronghold, which prompted the Twirwaneho to move towards Minembwe.

22. On 28 January, an exchange of fire occurred between Rwandan and Congolese naval forces near Ibindja island in Lake Kivu, after Congolese fishers were reportedly detained by Rwandan forces.

23. On 15 February, the Rwanda Defence Force announced that Rwanda would request the Expanded Joint Verification Mechanism of the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region and the ad hoc verification mechanism of the Luanda road map to investigate claims that a dozen Congolese soldiers had opened fire at the Rwandan border post of Ruzizi II on the same day.

24. The M23 conflict in North Kivu had an impact on armed group dynamics in South Kivu as some armed groups in Kalehe territory sought to reactivate, with a view to joining the fight against M23. During the reporting period, there was an influx of approximately 25,000 newly displaced persons into South Kivu from North Kivu, including approximately 4,000 people since February.

IV. Human rights situation

25. During the period under review, MONUSCO documented 844 human rights violations and abuses, similar in number to the 845 violations and abuses documented during the previous reporting period. Armed groups were responsible for 63.5 per cent of the abuses.

26. About 84 per cent of the violations and abuses were committed in conflict-affected provinces. Mai-Mai factions were responsible for most of the abuses (106), followed by ADF (88), Nyatura factions (82), M23 (58), Alliance des patriotes pour un Congo libre et souverain (APCLS) (39), Forces démocratiques de libération du Rwanda (FDLR) (6) and Nduma défense du Congo-Rénové (NDC-R) (4). At least 628 persons were victims of extrajudicial and summary killings (465 men, 111 women and 52 children), a significant increase from the previous reporting period due to an increase in deadly attacks against the civilian population by CODECO, ADF and M23 armed groups in North Kivu and Ituri. These three groups alone are responsible for the summary killing of 510 victims (399 men, 75 women and 36 children) in the course of 84 attacks and human rights incidents.

27. The intercommunal violence in Mai-Ndombe Province intensified and expanded geographically. In total, at least 286 people were arrested in connection with the violence, including 53 members of the defence and security forces. Some of these arrested persons are being tried in mobile court hearings at the Bandundu garrison military tribunal.

28. In December and January, the United Nations Joint Human Rights Office in the Democratic Republic of the Congo documented 19 violations across the country related to the restriction of civic space, with the largest number of violations recorded in Haut-Katanga Province (5). Documented violations, reportedly committed mostly by the Congolese National Police, included death threats against 3 men, ill-treatment of 16 men and 26 women, arbitrary arrest and detention of 47 men, 3 women and 1 child, two cases related to violations of the right to freedom of opinion and expression and two cases related to violations of the freedom of assembly and demonstration.

29. During the reporting period, there was an increase in hate speech, including on social media networks, exacerbated by the M23 violence, tensions between the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Rwanda and voter registration activities. MONUSCO continues to document instances of hate speech according to the Rabat principles.

30. The Mission continued to take steps to ensure compliance of its support to Congolese defence and security forces with the human rights due diligence policy on United Nations support to non-United Nations security forces. From early December to mid-February, 70 risk assessments were carried out, including 42 for transport, 10 for training, 4 for logistics, 3 for joint operations and 11 for other activities.

V. Humanitarian situation

31. Over 5.7 million people remain internally displaced in the country, representing the largest caseload in Africa. More than 80 per cent of persons were displaced owing to armed conflict, 97 per cent of whom are in the eastern provinces. In addition, over 1 million Congolese refugees and asylum-seekers are hosted across the African continent.

32. In North Kivu, the resurgence of violence in Rutshuru has aggravated an already dire humanitarian situation. At least 602,000 people are estimated to be in a situation of displacement in the territories of Rutshuru, Nyiragongo, Masisi, Walikale, Lubero and the city of Goma.

33. In Ituri, an estimated 156,000 people have been newly displaced across Djugu territory since January. Growing insecurity is generating new and urgent humanitarian needs in the province, where there are already some 1.5 million displaced people.

34. Access and security of humanitarian workers remain major constraints to delivering humanitarian assistance. In January, 30 new security incidents directly affecting humanitarian workers were recorded: at least one aid worker was abducted, one injured and another killed. During the reporting period, suspension of road traffic between Goma and Kitshanga hampered humanitarian access in several localities in the territories of Masisi, Walikale and Lubero and a dozen humanitarian organizations had to suspend their activities in Kitshanga and Mweso. On 18 and 19 February, MONUSCO set up a static combat deployment in Mweso to facilitate movements. On 24 February, a World Food Programme helicopter operated by the United Nations Humanitarian Air Service came under fire from unknown assailants near Goma while returning from Walikale, North Kivu. As a result, the World Food Programme decided to suspend all its humanitarian flights in the conflict areas of North Kivu and Ituri until further notice. On 10 March, the first air cargo delivery of the humanitarian air bridge arrived in Goma to address the immediate needs of internally displaced persons.

35. In 2022, the \$1.88 billion 2021/22 Humanitarian Response Plan was funded at 48 per cent. On 22 February, the 2023–2024 Humanitarian Response Plan was launched in Kinshasa. A total of \$2.25 billion is needed to respond to the needs of 10 million people.

VI. Protection of civilians

A. Mission strategies and political processes

36. In line with the Action for Peacekeeping Plus initiative, MONUSCO continued to implement a comprehensive, mission-wide approach to the protection of civilians under threat of physical violence, leveraging, in a coordinated manner, civilian, military and police capacities through dialogue, static presence and projection, and the fostering of a protective environment. In an increasingly difficult context, the Mission continued to engage in confidence-building measures with all relevant actors, including local communities, religious leaders, women and youth, to address

continued anti-MONUSCO sentiment. The Mission continued to be guided by area-based strategies, complemented by local or thematic plans, in coordination with the United Nations country team, Congolese authorities, and civil society. The Mission's senior leadership maintained high-level advocacy with Congolese authorities for the deployment of military and police forces to vulnerable areas experiencing shortages in State security presence.

B. Field-level responses

37. MONUSCO pursued efforts to improve its ability to respond to changing patterns in armed group activity by maintaining an agile posture. The Mission swiftly redeployed troops to Ituri in response to the acute surge in violence perpetrated by CODECO, ADF and Zaire armed groups. The Mission fostered good coordination practices with foreign troops deployed under the East African Community regional force and bilateral agreements between Congolese and Ugandan authorities.

38. In Ituri, MONUSCO liaised closely with local authorities and representatives of communities to address the drivers of violence, promote dialogue and contain further escalation. The Mission also conducted robust patrols, on its own and jointly with Congolese security forces, to ensure the physical protection of civilians. On 8 January, MONUSCO forces intervened to stop an attack by CODECO at the Blukwa market, in Djugu territory, compelling the assailants to withdraw. The Intervention Brigade conducted several patrols in the areas of Beni and Eringeti, North Kivu, to deter, disrupt and repel armed group activities. MONUSCO also established standing combat deployments in Kambala on 20 February and Bokuku on 21 February to address the spike in insecurity in Djugu territory and enhanced its coordination with local authorities and communities.

39. In the Grand Nord, MONUSCO held several workshops with, among others, members of local protection committees, civil society and community alert networks, with a view to building capacities in participatory security governance and strengthening early warning mechanisms. The Mission continued to maintain a protective presence and conduct area domination patrols. Moreover, the Mission responded rapidly to incidents involving improvised explosive devices, including through the medical evacuation of injured civilians. MONUSCO also contributed to the creation of a protective environment through the provision of technical advice to national security actors and intelligence and judicial officials.

40. In the Petit Nord, the Mission maintained a protective presence in Rutshuru and Masisi territories. Following the seizure of Kitshanga by M23, the nearby MONUSCO base protected more than 2,000 displaced persons inside the base and in its immediate vicinity and administered first aid to 67 injured civilians. The Mission also sought, in collaboration with Congolese authorities, to facilitate freedom of movement along key axes to enable the safe passage of displaced persons and establish humanitarian corridors for the provision of critical aid.

41. In South Kivu, MONUSCO promoted dialogue by engaging with local authorities, including customary leaders, protection actors, and civil society, in particular women and youth groups. The Mission also continued to provide physical protection, including for displaced populations in Bijombo and Mikenge. Efforts to support the creation of a protective environment were maintained, including through the facilitation of mobile court hearings.

42. During the reporting period, MONUSCO engaged on a weekly basis with the East African Community regional force and the Congolese armed forces to ensure coordination, information-sharing and deconflicting of the areas of operations. MONUSCO also established good coordination with the Kenyan troops based in the

Petit Nord and maintained coordination with the Ugandan troops in the Grand Nord and the south of Ituri.

43. Between 1 December and 15 March, the community alert network system of MONUSCO received 1,072 alerts from North Kivu, South Kivu and Ituri. State security forces and MONUSCO responded to 65 per cent of the alerts.

44. Between 1 December and 5 February, MONUSCO conducted, through the Mine Action Service, 71 spot tasks in Ituri, North Kivu and South Kivu, destroying 5,049 pieces of explosive ordnance and 4,907 rounds of small arms ammunition. Battle area clearance was conducted in an area of approximately 13 km². The Mission also held explosive ordnance awareness sessions for participants, including national police officers and vulnerable displaced people, and broadcast awareness programmes over Radio Okapi. Explosive hazard assessment training and weapons and ammunition management training were conducted for members of the Congolese armed forces.

VII. Stabilization and the strengthening of State institutions

A. Disarmament, demobilization, reintegration and stabilization

45. MONUSCO continued to support the voluntary disarmament and demobilization of combatants. Between 1 December and 28 February, the Mission disarmed and provided reintegration support to 23 Congolese former combatants, including 15 children, and facilitated their return to their communities of origin. In addition, five Rwandan ex-combatants, including one woman, were repatriated, along with eight dependants. Several new conflict violence reduction projects were initiated, including one to contribute to the Disarmament, Demobilization, Community Recovery and Stabilization Programme in Bukavu, South Kivu, while two from the previous period were completed in Beni, North Kivu.

46. On 15 December, MONUSCO and the Prime Minister co-chaired a meeting of the National Steering Board of the Stabilization Coherence Fund, during which funding was approved for a new rapid response mechanism aimed at delivering quick, tangible peace dividends for demobilized ex-combatants and their communities. The National Steering Board also announced an additional donor contribution of \$2.5 million to support women and peace and security initiatives within the Disarmament, Demobilization, Community Recovery and Stabilization Programme.

47. The Government committed \$75 million to supporting the disarmament and the demobilization phase in the 2023 Finance Law. During the reporting period, an initial allocation of \$8 million was released for disarmament and demobilization in Ituri, with joint implementation by the provincial coordination team of the Disarmament, Demobilization, Community Recovery and Stabilization Programme and the Ministry of Defence.

48. During the reporting period, the operationalization of the national Disarmament, Demobilization, Community Recovery and Stabilization Programme strategy made some progress in South Kivu and Ituri. In North Kivu, the development of a provincial operational plan was delayed owing to insecurity stemming from M23 activity and violent demonstrations in Goma. On 1 March, the Programme's pilot projects were launched in the priority areas of Irumu (Ituri), Masisi-Walikale limit (North Kivu) and Uvira (South Kivu). The pilot projects mark a major milestone in the operationalization of the Programme. Funded with \$6 million, the projects will focus on democratic dialogue and cash-for-work activities in priority areas, using a community-based approach to support reintegration. The projects will target 6,000 beneficiaries for a period of nine months.

49. On 27 January, in Bunia, MONUSCO participated in a meeting with the Disarmament, Demobilization, Community Recovery and Stabilization Programme provincial coordination team and Congolese armed forces to draft the operational plan for a sensitization campaign for communities and armed groups in Djugu and Irumu and for the construction of disarmament and demobilization sites in Irumu, Django and Bambu. From 3 to 10 February, a delegation of the national and Ituri provincial coordination team of the Programme conducted a field mission to Irumu and Djugu territories, Ituri, to train community members who will support sensitization campaigns of the Programme and prepare the construction of the demobilization and disarmament sites. In February, the Programme's national coordinator launched disarmament and demobilization operations in Ituri Province.

B. Security sector reform

50. During the reporting period, MONUSCO pursued efforts to develop a security sector reform strategic partnership framework with international and bilateral partners. On 13 March, the Office of the National Security Adviser and MONUSCO organized a round-table event on the development of a national security policy and implementation road map.

51. On 14 December, MONUSCO and the Committee for Monitoring Police Reform organized the twelfth ministerial meeting of the Committee, chaired by the Vice Prime Minister and Minister of the Interior and Security. The objective of the meeting was to demonstrate ministerial engagement in the implementation of the police five-year action plan for 2020–2024. Meeting participants discussed the midterm evaluation (2020–2021), the communications strategy and an operational plan to facilitate access to legislative and regulatory texts and raise awareness of police reform.

52. On 27 December, the Minister of Defence announced a new national defence policy designed to revitalize the Congolese armed forces. On 19 January, the Minister met with MONUSCO and defence attachés of diplomatic missions to solicit support for the implementation of the policy and to promote South-South cooperation in support of its implementation. On 3 March, the Council of Ministers adopted a draft ordinance-law establishing an armed defence reserve, including local armed groups as reservists, to support the Congolese armed forces.

53. MONUSCO continued to support the women and peace and security agenda by providing financial and technical support for the inclusion of women in recruitment and security sector reform efforts, as well as supporting mentoring sessions for women police and military officers and the rehabilitation of a dormitory for women army recruits. Following the roll-out of the first phase of the Congolese armed forces recruitment campaign, over 800 young women between 18 and 25 years old have received basic training. On 10 February, the Congolese armed forces, in collaboration with MONUSCO and the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women), launched the second phase of the recruitment campaign with awareness-raising sessions for women community leaders and focus groups in six communities around Kinshasa.

54. MONUSCO supported the drafting of the prison draft law adopted by the National Assembly on 1 December. Three other laws on prison reforms have been tabled at the Council of Ministers for approval. On 15 February in Kinshasa, MONUSCO and the Minister of State for Justice co-chaired the annual meeting of the Joint Justice Reform Support Programme Steering Committee. The four-year programme supports the implementation of the national justice reform policy at the national and provincial levels and has been extended from the initial three provinces (North Kivu, Tanganyika and Kasai Central) to include South Kivu and Ituri. In

February, MONUSCO agreed to contribute \$384,526 to the joint programme for capacity-building of justice actors, improving working conditions and supporting the prosecution of serious crimes.

VIII. Women and peace and security

55. From 21 to 23 December, MONUSCO supported a round-table event organized by the Ministry of Gender, Family and Children, in collaboration with UN-Women and the African Women Leaders Network. The event provided an opportunity to discuss the gender dimensions of the Disarmament, Demobilization, Community Recovery and Stabilization Programme and strategies to enhance women's participation in the ongoing peace processes.

56. On 19 and 25 January in Ituri, MONUSCO organized two workshops on gender-sensitive media coverage in Bunia and in Mahagi, respectively. A total of 50 journalists, including 15 women, participated in the workshops and committed to broadcasting sensitization materials to fight sexist stereotypes against women politicians during the electoral period.

IX. Integrated United Nations activities

A. Electoral process

57. Following an official request from the Government on 20 December, MONUSCO started providing logistical support to the Independent National Electoral Commission by airlifting 50 tons of electoral material from Goma to Bunia and Beni. An additional 73 tons of material were transported by road and air to electoral sites from Bunia, Ituri, to Bukavu, South Kivu.

58. In January, MONUSCO and the United Nations country team established an integrated electoral task force to streamline and coordinate electoral support. On 2 February, the United Nations Development Programme and the Independent National Electoral Commission signed the electoral support project, which foresees support, inter alia, in the areas of capacity-building, civic education and election observation as well as financial support for the transport and delivery of voters' registration kits.

59. MONUSCO and the United Nations country team engaged with youth from political parties and civil society to encourage them to register and raise awareness among their peers and supported efforts to promote the participation of Indigenous Peoples in the electoral process.

B. Support to the judicial system and fight against impunity

60. Between December and February, MONUSCO continued to provide technical, logistical and financial support to military justice to fight impunity, which resulted in the convictions of 24 State agents (19 soldiers and 5 police officers) and 10 ADF members for serious conflict-related crimes, including rape, manslaughter and murder. On 26 December, in Bunia, the High Military Court acquitted Major Bindu Sandoka, who had been convicted of war crimes in August 2022. Following improvised explosive device attacks in Kasindi and in Beni, MONUSCO provided technical advice to the military justice authorities in Beni, including crime scene protection. As at 2 February, the population in the 12 priority prisons had increased by 1,125 to reach 25,856 (25,234 males and 622 females, including 777 juveniles),

with 72 per cent in pretrial detention. The significant number of new admissions and limited holding capacity increased the overcrowding rate from 458 per cent in the previous period to 477 per cent. The number of convicted prisoners rose by 1,062 to reach 7,200, and that of pretrial detainees reduced slightly, by 203, to 18,656 following MONUSCO advocacy for quick disposal of pretrial cases.

61. As at 2 February, 15 deaths had occurred in four priority prisons, compared with 37 in the previous reporting period, owing to the reinforcement of health-care initiatives. The deaths are attributed largely to overcrowding, with the highest death toll recorded in Makala (11). On 11 February, the Minister of State for Justice announced the conditional release of 501 detainees, including 11 women, in Makala, which currently has a population of 11,450 and a holding capacity of 1,500.

62. During the reporting period, MONUSCO and the national prison administration conducted several joint prison conditions evaluation missions to Tanganyika, North Kivu and Ituri and started discussions on the national plan for the construction of 11 central prisons.

63. In Kirungu, Tanganyika, trials supported by MONUSCO resulted in 31 convictions for various offences, including sexual violence. MONUSCO also supported the functioning of the justice system with the handover of a courtroom to the Court of Appeal of Ituri and the provision of information technology equipment, office furniture and vehicles to military justice partners. MONUSCO continued to support consultations for the transitional justice process in Haut-Uélé in December. As at 28 February, at least 22,178 people had been consulted.

64. MONUSCO supported the drafting of the framework law laying down the fundamental principles on protection and reparation for victims of conflict-related sexual violence and of crimes against peace and security, which was enacted by the Head of State on 26 December. MONUSCO also supported the drafting of the national transitional justice policy handed over to the Minister of Human Rights on 10 January.

65. In Kasai Central, from 23 to 27 January, MONUSCO continued to provide technical support for the operationalization of the provincial truth, justice and reconciliation commission, notably with the training of 10 commissioners.

66. On 22 February, the Assistant Secretary-General for Human Rights concluded an official visit to Kinshasa, Goma and Bunia, during which she expressed alarm at the situation in eastern Democratic Republic of Congo and appealed to all partners of the country to prioritize support for the transitional justice process.

C. Child protection

67. MONUSCO continued to monitor and report on grave violations against children with the support of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF). Between 1 December and 28 February, the Mission verified 674 grave violations perpetrated against 547 children (303 boys and 244 girls), including 158 children who were abducted (113 boys and 45 girls). M23 was responsible for the largest number of verified violations (151), followed by CODECO factions (135) and ADF (132). State security forces were reportedly responsible for 12 grave violations, including 7 cases of killing and maiming, 4 cases of sexual violence and 1 case of abduction.

68. Between 3 December and 11 February, at the invitation of the Congolese armed forces, MONUSCO and UNICEF conducted joint age-verification assessments of 7,233 candidates (including 210 female candidates) for recruitment into the army. Among them, 277 candidates were identified as children (267 boys and 10 girls) and were removed from the recruitment process.

D. Gender and sexual violence in conflict

69. From December to March, at least 116 women and 1 man were victims of conflict-related sexual violence. Armed groups were responsible for incidents affecting 98 women. Reportedly, Twa factions perpetrated most of the abuses (37 women), followed by M23 (22 women), Raia Mutomboki (5 women), Nyatura factions (5 women), FDLR (5 women), Mai-Mai factions (4 women), CODECO (2 women) and APCLS factions (1 woman). State agents were allegedly responsible for sexual violence cases involving 18 women and 1 man.

70. During the reporting period, 46 per cent of the cases were recorded in North Kivu, 34 per cent in Tanganyika, 12 per cent in Ituri, 5 per cent in South Kivu, 2 per cent in Maniema and 1 per cent in Haut-Katanga. Moreover, insecurity continued to hamper access for monitoring and investigation of conflict-related sexual violence, particularly in Rutshuru territory, North Kivu.

X. Exit strategy

71. On 6 January, Mr. Tshisekedi chaired a meeting between his country's Government and MONUSCO to discuss, among others, the relation between the Government and MONUSCO following the adoption of Security Council resolution [2666 \(2022\)](#).

72. On 22 February, the Deputy Chief of Staff of the Ministry of Planning and the Head of the Integrated Office of MONUSCO chaired a third technical-level meeting of the joint sub-working group on transition. Discussions focused on the minimum security conditions enabling a responsible transition of MONUSCO, namely benchmarks 1 to 4 and 15. Discussions are ongoing.

A. Implementation of priority actions

73. During the period under review, MONUSCO initiated transition planning at the provincial level. From 26 January to 14 February, MONUSCO and the United Nations country team organized workshops to launch the provincial integrated transition team in South Kivu, North Kivu and Ituri. In Tanganyika, following technical validation sessions facilitated by the provincial government on 2 December and 6 January in Kalemie, the country team endorsed the provincial transition plan, identifying priority actions in four strategic areas (protection of civilians, stabilization, institutional reform, and communication).

74. MONUSCO conducted intensive outreach and engagement to prepare communities for the closure of several bases and facilitate the handover of tasks to Congolese authorities. On 9 January, MONUSCO and local authorities conducted a pre-closure joint assessment mission to Bijombo, South Kivu, and engaged with representatives of all the local communities (Bavira, Babembe, Banyamulenge, Bafuliro and Banyindu). On 7 February, MONUSCO and the Executive Secretary of the South Kivu government organized another pre-closure joint assessment mission to Walungu. On 16 February, MONUSCO deployed a joint protection team to Mutwanga, North Kivu, to officially hand over the temporary operational base to local authorities. On 31 January, MONUSCO briefed 12 women civil society members on the functioning of the Community Alert Network. On 21 February, following its withdrawal from Tanganyika, MONUSCO handed over its former camp in Bendera, Tanganyika, to the Congolese National Police and provided logistical support for the deployment of 174 national police officers in the area.

B. Update on integration and resource mobilization

75. From 7 to 11 February, a joint United Nations-World Bank high-level visit took place in Kinshasa with a view to better aligning international support with the peacebuilding and development priorities of the Congolese authorities and identifying areas for deeper cooperation, at the strategic and operational levels, with partners to ensure a responsible transition of MONUSCO. The visit was also aimed at promoting integrated support to the Nairobi process and stabilization, including the Disarmament, Demobilization, Community Recovery and Stabilization Programme and security sector reform.

76. On 18 January, the Peacebuilding Fund approved the financing of two projects in Tanganyika to consolidate peace on equitable socioeconomic and natural resources access for the Twa and Bantu communities (\$2.5 million) and on inclusive security governance in Nyunzu territory (\$2.5 million). Both projects will be implemented by UNICEF, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, and by the International Organization for Migration, the United Nations Development Programme and the Joint Human Rights Office, respectively.

77. During the reporting period, UN-Women provided technical support for the development of gender-sensitive provincial plans under the Disarmament, Demobilization, Community Recovery and Stabilization Programme and contributed to the joint coordination mechanism led by MONUSCO in support of the Programme. UN-Women also took steps to mobilize resources, in collaboration with MONUSCO, to support efforts towards greater access of women and girls to the security sector.

XI. Mission effectiveness

A. Mission performance (military, police and civilian personnel)

Military component

78. As at 15 March, the military component of MONUSCO had deployed 12,505 troops, 6 per cent of whom were women, and 498 United Nations military experts on mission, 24 per cent of whom were women, of an authorized strength of 13,500 troops and 508 United Nations military experts on mission. From 1 December to 31 January, MONUSCO implemented 4 standing combat deployments and conducted 6,369 day patrols, 5,122 night patrols, 540 long-range patrols and missions, 691 joint patrols, 610 escorts and 1 aerial reconnaissance operation.

79. In line with its Action for Peacekeeping Plus commitments, and using the new task, standards and indicators methodology, the Mission conducted evaluations of 10 military units, 4 medical units, 2 aviation units, 1 signal company, 1 engineer company and 1 special force company. All evaluated units met the required standard. The evaluations revealed positive indicators in terms of professionalism, morale, high standards during exercises and discipline of personnel. One of the evaluated units showed shortfalls in personnel management (leave policy) and military peacekeeping intelligence. A performance improvement plan was developed for each unit to implement corrective measures.

80. The number of female engagement teams remained at 14, representing 9 per cent of the total strength of the force. As part of the ongoing strengthening of the military unit evaluations, the military component conducted in-mission evaluations that are still under review, using the task, standards and indicators methodology developed by the Office of Military Affairs and already rolled out for almost all units.

In addition, pilot evaluations for sector headquarters, medical, and military police units are still under way.

81. Women represent 24.3 per cent of MONUSCO military staff officers and military observers, compared with 25.7 per cent during the previous reporting period, while contingent female participation increased slightly from 7.5 per cent in the previous reporting period to 7.6 per cent. Female and mixed engagement teams conducted over 60 activities of a varying nature, including civil-military cooperation, outreach projects and patrols.

Police component

82. As at 15 March, the police component had deployed 1,589 personnel: 1,240 formed police unit personnel, including 205 female personnel, and 349 individual police personnel, including 108 female officers, of the authorized strength of 1,410 formed police unit personnel and 591 individual police officers. Formed police units achieved 4,229 quick-response interventions, 282 escorts, 1,934 patrols, 1,066 joint patrols with individual police officers, 114 joint patrols with the Congolese National Police and 98 patrols around camps for internally displaced persons.

83. During the reporting period, the overall performance rating for individual police officers was 74 per cent. This represented a 4 per cent decrease from the previous period, due to newly onboarded police officers who had lower operational and professional ratings. Eight formed police units were evaluated in terms of comprehension of and support to mandate implementation, command and control, operational readiness and capability, administration, training, sustainability of logistical capacity and medical support. All units were rated as satisfactory. A total of 18 operational readiness inspections, 914 training sessions and 96 training inspections were conducted for all formed police units.

Civilian component

84. As at 13 February, 2,158 civilian personnel (21.2 per cent women), including 302 United Nations Volunteers and 34 government-provided correctional personnel, were serving with MONUSCO. This represents 92 per cent of the approved positions.

Comprehensive planning and performance assessment

85. MONUSCO continues to implement its Comprehensive Planning and Performance Assessment System results framework, developing fact sheets that support briefings to the Security Council, with infographics depicting trends in the security and operational environment and the correlation between threats to civilians and measures taken by the Mission. On 1 March, the Mission finalized a desk review of its results framework to ensure that it is fully aligned with the operational context and strategic guidance on mandate implementation.

B. Strategic communication

86. During the reporting period, mis- and disinformation and hostile campaigns against MONUSCO intensified. On 6 February, violent protests erupted in Goma, North Kivu, against the perceived lack of support of the East African Community regional force and MONUSCO to Congolese security forces in the fight against M23. Using the monitoring tool Talkwalker, MONUSCO assessed that the negative sentiment against the Mission increased. On social media, some activist groups circulated threats to physically attack MONUSCO personnel and installations, should M23 seize Goma.

87. The Mission intensified its social network presence through video, pictures and voice notes format in French and in Swahili to debunk false accusations. On 23 January, the Mission proactively released a message to counter false statements circulating on social media attributed to the Special Representative of the Secretary-General. Following the attack on a MONUSCO convoy in Munigi, North Kivu, on 7 February, the Mission released video materials to counter disinformation related to the incident.

C. Serious misconduct, including sexual exploitation and abuse

88. Between 1 December and 28 February, MONUSCO recorded 16 new allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse occurring between 2006 and 2022 and involving 16 military personnel. All 16 allegations are pending investigation by the relevant troop-contributing countries or by the United Nations.

89. The Mission ensured that the 16 alleged victims, including children, and those subject to paternity claims were supported and received medical and psychosocial support in a timely manner and in accordance with the victim assistance protocols established with service providers, including UNICEF and the United Nations Population Fund. Assistance to victims included vocational trainings to encourage self-sufficiency.

90. In line with the zero-tolerance policy of the Secretary-General with regard to sexual exploitation and abuse, MONUSCO reinforced its prevention strategies, including risk assessments and the implementation of mitigation measures. MONUSCO, in partnership with local authorities, 43 community-based complaint mechanism networks, and civil society organizations, carried out extensive awareness-raising activities, especially in areas where the Mission had a strong presence of uniformed personnel. In addition, the Mission shared the outcome of investigation reports and related recommendations with relevant United Nations entities.

91. In addition, 19 new allegations not concerning sexual exploitation and abuse allegations were reported. The perpetrators included 6 civilians, 10 uniformed personnel and 3 police personnel. These allegations, concerning homicide, theft, fraud, physical assault, unauthorized outside activity, conflict of interest, illegal trade and trafficking of prohibited goods, are all under investigation.

XII. Safety and security of United Nations personnel

92. In February, the perceived lack of support of MONUSCO to the Congolese security forces in combating M23 fuelled anti-MONUSCO sentiment and violent demonstrations targeting the Mission, including incidents involving roadblocks, attacks on convoys and stone pelting in eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo, hampering the Mission's freedom of movement. The Mission swiftly adopted mitigation measures, including movement restrictions. Moreover, efforts are continuously deployed by the Mission to inform authorities of the application of the status-of-forces agreement.

93. On 5 February, a MONUSCO helicopter travelling from Beni to Goma came under fire by unidentified assailants. One peacekeeper was killed and another wounded. The helicopter managed to land in Goma. On 6 February, military justice authorities in Goma launched a judicial inquiry into the incident and MONUSCO is providing technical support.

94. On 7 February, a crowd attacked a MONUSCO convoy, escorted by Congolese armed forces, travelling to Munigi camp in North Kivu. During the incident, 30 peacekeepers, 7 non-United Nations contracted staff and 1 Congolese soldier were injured and at least 5 civilians were killed. At least three trucks were also reportedly looted and burned. Congolese authorities opened a judicial investigation and MONUSCO is providing technical support.

95. Security and safety incidents decreased from 160 during the previous reporting period to 87, which could be related to measures put in place following anti-MONUSCO demonstrations. These incidents, which affected a total of 46 United Nations personnel (40 men and 6 women), include 3 incidents related to armed conflict, 38 crime-related incidents, 27 civil unrest cases and 19 cases of hazards.

96. During the reporting period, MONUSCO monitored the appeal hearing before the High Military Court at Ndolo prison in Kinshasa of 50 people convicted in relation to the assassination of the two United Nations experts in Kananga in 2017. On 30 December in Goma, six people were convicted of robbery, rebellion and destruction of property in relation to the attack on MONUSCO premises in July 2022. A second case in relation to that attack, involving 10 accused, is ongoing.

XIII. Observations

97. I welcome the adoption by the Democratic Republic of the Congo of an ambitious national budget for 2023. I hope the budget serves as a tool to harness the country's strong economic performance in support of essential reforms and the holding of transparent, credible, inclusive and peaceful elections.

98. Despite the challenges, the efforts of the Independent National Electoral Commission and the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo to ensure the timely completion of voter registration for the 2023 elections are commendable. I am encouraged by the voting registration rates of women, which is a positive sign for their meaningful political participation. I reiterate the readiness of the United Nations system to help the Congolese authorities to organize elections that meet the expectations of the Congolese people, through its good offices, technical and limited logistical support.

99. The rapidly worsening security and humanitarian crisis in eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo poses a grave threat to the peace and stability of the country and the entire Great Lakes region. In Ituri, North Kivu and South Kivu, thousands of people, including women and children, continue to be victims of violence and sexual abuse by armed groups, including the ADF, CODECO, FDLR, Zaire, M23 and Mai-Mai groups. The unspeakable violence perpetrated by these armed groups against the civilian population must stop and those responsible brought to justice. Once more, I call upon all Congolese and foreign armed groups to unconditionally lay down their arms, disarm unconditionally and bring an end to the suffering caused by their actions. The sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Democratic Republic of the Congo should be respected by all Member States.

100. I am encouraged by the continued mobilization of the region in response to the alarming situation in eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo. I welcome ongoing efforts to ensure that the various diplomatic initiatives underway are mutually reinforcing and deliver tangible results for the thousands of Congolese who are desperate to see an end to the recurring cycles of violence. I call upon M23 to adhere to the ceasefire in order to create conditions for its full and effective withdrawal from all areas, in line with the decisions of the Luanda mini-summit of 23 November. MONUSCO is determined to leverage its capabilities in support of the Luanda and

Nairobi processes and the East African Community regional force. I am also alarmed by the escalating tensions between the Democratic Republic of Congo and Rwanda. I encourage both sides to settle their differences through dialogue and existing conflict resolution mechanisms.

101. I am deeply concerned by the deterioration of the humanitarian situation, exacerbated by unprecedented levels of mass displacement. Some 26.4 million people, or 30 per cent of the population, are currently in need of humanitarian assistance and protection. I call upon all actors to ensure unimpeded humanitarian access to populations in need and commend the tireless efforts of humanitarian actors to deliver assistance under trying circumstances. I strongly condemn the attack on a United Nations Humanitarian Air Service helicopter on 24 February and call upon all parties to the conflict to respect their obligations under international humanitarian law. I commend the recent establishment of a humanitarian air bridge in Goma and urge partners to redouble their efforts to ensure that the 2023 humanitarian response plan is fully funded.

102. I strongly condemn the attack on 5 February on a MONUSCO helicopter in North Kivu, which resulted in the death of one peacekeeper. I express my deepest condolences to the family of the fallen peacekeeper. I recall that attacks against United Nations peacekeepers may constitute a war crime under international law and call upon the Congolese authorities to investigate the incident and swiftly bring those responsible to justice. In the meantime, I urge troop-contributing countries to maintain a robust posture in pursuit of the Mission's core mandated priorities, in line with the Action for Peacekeeping Plus principles.

103. I stress that there can be no room for hate speech and incitement to violence, including against certain communities, and reiterate that all those responsible must be held to account. I deplore the continued violence and hostile narratives targeting MONUSCO. I am deeply troubled by the recent attack on a MONUSCO convoy, which led to the death of civilians and injury to peacekeepers. I express my condolences to the families of the victims and wish a prompt recovery to all injured. I reaffirm the Mission's readiness to participate in a joint investigation of the tragic incident with the Congolese authorities.

104. I welcome the commitment of the Congolese authorities to working closely with MONUSCO and the United Nations country team to prepare the ground for the Mission's phased, responsible, conditions-based withdrawal. I look forward to the swift conclusion of ongoing discussions with the Government on the re-evaluation of the joint transition plan for MONUSCO, which will serve as a basis for the work that must be undertaken together to achieve this common objective.

105. Lastly, I wish to express my gratitude to my Special Representative, Bintou Keita, for her tireless efforts and leadership. In addition, I wish to acknowledge and thank all MONUSCO personnel, members of the United Nations system, troop- and police-contributing countries and the Office of the Special Envoy for the Great Lakes Region for their steadfast commitment to achieving peace and stability in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the region.

