

Positive progress in the Great Lakes Region must continue despite Covid-19

Thank you very much, Mr President, and let me join others in thanking Special Envoy Xia Huang for his briefing to the Council today. It's also been good to hear such broad consensus in the Council, particularly on the impact of COVID-19 situation across the region and, as others have, the elections in Burundi.

First, on COVID. As detailed in the Special Envoy's briefing, it's really encouraging to see renewed regional momentum towards the implementation of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework (PSCF) by the countries in the Great Lakes region, particularly over the last year or so. But hopefully we can continue to capitalise on this. But as others have said, we are meeting during uncertain times because of the COVID-19 pandemic, which will undoubtedly create challenges for maintaining this momentum. The pandemic demonstrates once again the necessity for really effective regional cooperation. And I was really glad to hear the Special Envoy speak about his role in engaging countries to try and address the challenges of COVID together. I think this will be really critical. So we encourage the Special Envoy and his team to consider innovative ways to support the Great Lakes region to ensure there is continued progress in this period. The threat of the pandemic might engender cooperation in combating COVID across the region, in line with the spirit of the Secretary-General's call for a global ceasefire.

And I was very glad also to hear the Special Envoy talk about the way that he was seeing real progress, not just in the main conflict areas, but in the states across the region, trying to do more to enhance their security cooperation as well.

I think the other thing we need to think about in this format, is how we come together at some point to begin to analyse the impact that COVID is having, and what we can do to address some of the longer term impacts that it will have on regional stability and also on the economic and humanitarian situation.

Looking at the security situation specifically, we also think it's critical to continue to address the underlying security challenges across the Great Lakes. We've seen in recent weeks increased reporting of cross-border incursions, as others have mentioned, and also other security spikes across the region. I think this underscores the need for full and swift implementation of the PSCF. And it was very good to hear Special Envoy Xia's list of priorities focusing on advancing regional security cooperation, including military and non-military measures.

I think while we commend Special Envoy Xia's efforts to promote economic integration, we just want to reiterate here that economic initiatives will only be successful if we are simultaneously tackling those underlying drivers

of the conflict: challenging aspects such as the illicit cross-border trade of natural resources and the war economy. Those things should not be overlooked.

I want to touch briefly on Eastern DRC. The UK encourages Special Envoy and his team to work closely with MONUSCO to develop a joint strategy on the conflict in Eastern DRC. And we think the Special Envoy can provide an important link between MONUSCO's efforts within the DRC and the regional efforts that need to be built around that. This will be critical to ending the conflict.

We had hoped to receive more information in this briefing on the status of the UN Peace and Security strategy for the Great Lakes region. This has been under development for quite some time now and we'd be grateful for more information from the Special Envoy, including whether MONUSCO and the international community will be consulted on the strategy relatively soon.

Finally, Mr President, the UK is concerned about the electoral environment surrounding Burundi's May elections. It's vital that all political parties are given equal access to the media and that special measures are implemented by the Government in response to COVID-19 to ensure that the elections are fair, in this regard.

Thank you very much, Mr President, and thank you, Special Envoy Xia.