

Speech: Concrete steps on the ground to create an environment for free and fair elections in DRC

Thank you Mr President.

Let me begin by thanking the Special Representative Zerroughi for your very clear presentation and your report. I would also like to thank MONUSCO for all the important work it does in DRC. Thank you also to the Ambassador of Kuwait for your briefing. Sanctions remain an important tool that this Council has at our disposal to address threats to international peace and security in DRC.

And I would particularly like to thank Ms Bahimba for your really clear and incisive briefing to this Council and thank you in particular also for your work, for the very brave work, that your organisation does on the ground to support and advocate for women. I thought you made some really interesting and clear recommendations at the end of your speech and I would like to try and respond to each of those five recommendations in what I say today.

First, you spoke about the need for this Council to ask the government to respect human rights. We strongly agree with you and we share the concerns that you've expressed and that Special Representative Zerroughi has expressed about human rights violations and abuses committed in the DRC. In particular, with regard to the increase in sexual exploitation and abuse, we call for all these allegations to be swiftly investigated and for those responsible for them to be brought swiftly to justice.

You also made a recommendation about the need for all parties to respect the 31 December Agreement and the rule of law. And again, we strongly agree with you. We do welcome the limited progress so far and the steps taken by the government towards organising the elections, especially when it comes to voter registration.

But at the same time, we continue to be very concerned by the lack of progress on the implementation of the confidence building measures in the 31 December Political Agreement.

We call on all parties to remain committed to the Agreement, including by respecting fundamental rights and the electoral timeline, not just with words but also with actions.

And then in two of your recommendations, you called on us as a Council to do more to promote women's participation in politics and to materially support the organisations that do so. Again, we very much agree with you. As a Council, we all made clear when we adopted resolution 1325, that women need to be encouraged to meaningfully participate in all stages of the peace process and youth also need to be engaged. So we are very concerned to hear

about the increase in sexual violence. I am concerned by the points you raised about the impact of the electoral law on women's participation, and also by the point made by SRSZ Zerroughi about the shortage of women candidates that have so far been declared. We're very concerned by this and we all need to work together to do more to encourage women's participation.

And then finally, you made some very specific points about the role of MONUSCO. We take those concerns very seriously. I'm not able to give you a detailed response to each of them right now but we will certainly take away those points and reflect on them.

We do welcome the important role that MONUSCO is playing in helping prepare for the elections so far. However, as with other speakers, we note that challenges remain and we continue to call for cooperation between CENI and MONUSCO as we prepare for those elections.

Thank you very much for those five clear recommendations. In conclusion, we believe it's vital that this Council remains closely engaged on the DRC in the coming months in the run-up to the elections. As with Ethiopia, we support plans for a Council visit later this year. We must continue to urge all parties to abide by the Constitution, to respect the 31 December Agreement, and to take concrete steps on the ground to create an environment for free and fair elections.

Thank you Mr President.