

Speech: “The Great Lakes region continues to face many challenges.”

Thank you, Madam President, for convening this important meeting, and also for maintaining this Council’s focus on conflict prevention in Africa. I join others in thanking Special Envoy Said Djinnit for his briefing. But also for the critical role that you play in making preventative diplomacy active. And also for the role that you play in including women in peace processes as Sweden and others have said.

Said, as you and others have made clear today, the Great Lakes region continues to face many challenges.

In response, it’s clear that a structured approach to regional stability is needed. We support work to reform and reinvigorate the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework. It needs active engagement from its members and guarantors to have high impact. And that impact, as we’ve heard, is vital.

Today I personally want to focus on two countries in the region; the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Burundi. As we heard last month, the situation in DRC remains deeply troubling. I pay tribute to CENCO for their mediation efforts. But it is up to the government and the opposition to deliver the 31st of December Agreement in letter and in spirit, with purposeful speed.

What we’ve actually seen is stalling, and obfuscation, particularly by the government. This is not only hindering implementation of the agreement, but it is distracting attention from the real prize that is at stake; peaceful and credible elections to take place this year, enabling the first democratic transition of power in the country’s history.

Sadly, the obstacles to this goal go beyond inertia. The appointment of a new Prime Minister by President Kabila last week was an active step, and I agree with France it is a worrying one. It went against both the spirit and the letter of the Agreement. This appointment will not help to restore the broad national consensus that lies at the heart of the Agreement.

Until that consensus is built, the uncertainty of DRC’s politics risks being mirrored in the security situation, which continues to deteriorate. We are particularly concerned about the increase in violence and reports of atrocities in the Kasai region. This underlines the importance of MINUSCO, and the joint human rights office, investigating violations and abuses of human rights and international law. Those who commit human rights violations will be held to account.

We are also concerned about the ongoing threat from armed groups, including the resurgence of the M23 in Eastern DRC and reiterate the need for dialogue, not just a military effort, in order to tackle armed groups. The resumption of talks between the Government of DRC and the M23 is vital, as is the

implementation of the Nairobi declarations and repatriation of M23 and FLDR rebels. We support the Special Envoy in his efforts to make progress on these issues.

The presence of SPLA-IO elements in Eastern DRC is destabilising. We welcome efforts by SRSB Sidikou, as well as the SRSB, to find a solution and their engagement with regional partners. We need to find a regional solution urgently to avoid exacerbating tensions in fragile local communities. We ask that the Secretariat keep the Council updated.

Turning to the concerning situation in Burundi; the regime claims that normality is returning to the country. It is not. A climate of fear persists as disappearances, arbitrary arrests and killings continue almost daily. The government still shows no sign of acting in the interests of its people, and seems to be concerned only with clinging on to power. Moves by President Nkurunziza to enable him to remain in power for a fourth term, and possibly beyond, risk bringing the country to the brink once again. The government's refusal to engage with the international community is especially worrying. And some of the language and activity of the Imbonerakure, as others have said earlier in this session, is truly horrific.

Here, in this open session, I call on the government of Burundi to participate fully in the talks being led by former-President Mkapa. These talks, which must be open and sincere as France has said, remain the best hope of resolving the crisis peacefully. We urge the government to enable implementation of resolution 2303, that this Council passed, and to allow the OHCHR to conduct its work without hindrance and to cooperate fully with the Commission of Inquiry, which was mandated by the United Nations Human Rights Council. I agree with Egypt and Sweden that the Peacebuilding Commission has an important role to play in all of this.

Madam President,

We know how difficult it is to bring peace and stability to a country or a region after conflict. But we also know that it can be done, and that there is nothing inevitable about the future. The governments of DRC and Burundi can step back from their current course, they can take decisions in the interests of their people, and they can avoid bloodshed and instability in this very fragile region.

It is the duty of all countries in this Council to support that course and to do all we can to implement our own resolutions. Given the significance that Ethiopia has already talked about in terms of the wider strategic posture of this region, it is really important that we all do our best right now.

Thank you.