



PRESS RELEASE

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UN Special Envoy for the Great Lakes and South African Ministers review the situation in the region and call for urgent military action against the FDLR

Pretoria, 16 January 2015 – UN Special Envoy for the Great Lakes region Saïd Djinnit concludes a visit in Pretoria today. He held extensive consultations with South African Ministers of International Relations and Cooperation, Ms. Maite Nkoana-Mashabane, Defence, Ms. Noluthando Mapisa-Nqakula, and State Security, Mr. David Mahlobo. They reviewed the current situation in the Great Lakes region focusing on urgent political and security issues as well as means to advance long-term regional economic cooperation and development. They also agreed to join efforts in improving the dire situation of women in the region, thousands of whom suffer daily unspeakable violence due to conflict.

In particular, they discussed the need to act decisively against armed groups in eastern DRC, notably the *Forces démocratiques de libération du Rwanda* (FDLR) and the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF), which continue to exert a heavy toll on the civilian population and whose activities continue to undermine regional trust and cooperation. Special Envoy Djinnit praised South Africa's contribution to peace and stability in eastern DRC and the region, and commended South African troops for their performance as part of the UN Force Intervention Brigade (FIB) in the DRC.

“We continue to witness horrific acts of violence perpetrated by illegal armed groups in eastern DRC, many of which directed at women and children. The six-

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month deadline given to the FDLR to voluntarily disarm by the International Conference on the Great Lakes region (ICGLR) and the Southern African Development Community (SADC) expired on 2 January, and in the absence of progress, military action by the Government of DRC and MONUSCO should now commence without delay”, both Special Envoy Djinnit and the South African Ministers said.

The Security Council has called for joint operations by the DRC armed forces (FARDC) and the UN stabilization force, MONUSCO. The effectiveness of such joint operations was recently demonstrated by the FARDC-MONUSCO operations against the *Forces nationales de libération* (FNL) in eastern DRC, with the participation of South African UN troops, and more recently against the *Front de Résistance Patriotique de l’Ituri* (FRPI) in Aweya.

“I commend the South African government’s firm support for the FIB’s mandate, and look forward to prompt and decisive military action against the FDLR, with every effort made to protect the civilian population”, Special Envoy Djinnit said.

In addition, both sides agreed on the urgency to expedite full implementation of the Nairobi Declarations of the Kampala Dialogue. A key next step would be the repatriation of ex-M23 combatants from Uganda and Rwanda to the DRC, building on the initial steps to repatriate ex-combatants from Uganda.

“It is time for the region to turn the page, tackle decisively the root causes of the recurring cycles of violence, remove obstacles to progress, and take full advantage of the enormous opportunities for business and economic development through cooperation”, Special Envoy Djinnit said. He further expressed satisfaction with ongoing preparations for a Great Lakes Private Sector Conference in 2015, and for South Africa’s support for the event. “The conference will aim to boost regional investment and growth, bring concrete opportunities to the peoples of the Great Lakes, especially women and youth, and demonstrate that the region is ready for business. The road to lasting peace in the Great Lakes lies in economic development and cooperation, and I am very pleased with the support expressed by South Africa.”

The Special Envoy’s visit is taking place two weeks before a major meeting of Heads of State of the region under the Regional Oversight Mechanism of the Peace, Security and Cooperation (PSC) Framework for the DRC and region, scheduled to take place on 31 January in Addis Ababa on the margins of the African Union summit. South Africa is one of the PSC Framework’s thirteen signatory countries. Together with Tanzania and Malawi, it is also a contributor to the UN Force Intervention Brigade in eastern DRC, operating as part of MONUSCO.

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