

To our esteemed readers:

Happy New Year and a warm welcome to this edition of our newsletter! As in the rest of the world, the coronavirus pandemic has tested the resilience of Africa's Great Lakes region since early 2020. Throughout these challenging times, we have spared no efforts to work with the countries of the Great Lakes and regional organizations to maintain progress towards sustainable peace and development. This newsletter offers several examples of this collective endeavor over the past year.

Never in recent memory has humanity faced a challenge of this magnitude for its own survival. This existential threat has spared no communities, no countries, no regions, and no continents. As of today, the number of deaths to the virus globally is fast approaching the two million mark. This is a world tragedy the consequences of which will be with us for a long time to come. We are grateful that the Great Lakes region of Africa has been spared from the pandemic's more devastating health effects thus far, and at the same time, are aware of the necessity to remain vigilant and continue observing the health protocols in place. Meanwhile, we mourn with the rest of the world the many lives of loved ones taken from us prematurely. World economies have been brought to a halt resulting in millions of job losses. In many countries, health services proved inadequate or insufficient in the face of the scale of the disease. Schools, universities, and other academic centers were forced to close. In short, there are hardly any sectors or areas that have not been touched by the Coronavirus.

2020 also marked the 75th anniversary of the United Nations. I particularly welcomed this celebration at a time when a new United Nations Strategy for Peace Consolidation, Conflict Prevention and Conflict Resolution in the Great Lakes region has been launched at the request of the Secretary-General. There is no doubt we all need to do more to deliver a safer and more prosperous future to the people of the Great Lakes region. To this end, the strategy, developed in consultation with regional stakeholders, is aimed at maximizing the engagement and impact of the United Nations in the region.

I am also pleased that the year 2020 marked an important milestone for the promotion and defense of the rights of women and young girls with the celebration of the 20th anniversary of the adoption of Resolution 1325 (2000) and the 25th anniversary of the adoption of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, reminding us that no one should be left behind.

I am encouraged by the progress towards greater regional cooperation and the promotion of peaceful relations over the past year. Despite continued challenges, this is a promising time for the Great Lakes region.

As Special Envoy of the United Nations Secretary-General for the Great Lakes region, working in close collaboration with other UN entities and regional stakeholders, I will spare no efforts to ensure that peace, stability, and prosperity remain at the core of the political priorities of the region, and are translated into concrete gains for the millions of men, women, and young people who look forward to a better future.

I wish you and yours a peaceful and prosperous 2021.

Huang Xia, Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for the Great Lakes region