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Great Lakes countries agree on collective actions to curb the financing of negative forces linked to the illicit exploitation and trade of natural resources

Khartoum (Sudan), 2 September 2021 – The International Conference on the Great Lakes Region (ICGLR), the Office of the Special Envoy of the United Nations Secretary-General for the Great Lakes region and the German International Cooperation Agency (GIZ) co-organized, from 31 August to 2 September 2021, a high-level workshop on natural resources in the Great Lakes region. The three-day workshop, hosted by the Government of The Sudan in Khartoum was themed “Taking Collective Actions to Achieve Peace and Development Integration in Africa’s Great Lakes region.”

Africa’s Great Lakes region has, for decades, been affected by conflict and political instability. Evidence confirms that the illicit exploitation and trade of natural resources remain one of the main causes of this instability. The illegal mining and smuggling of high-value minerals known as the 3Ts, i.e., tantalum ore (coltan), tin ore (cassiterite), and tungsten ore (wolframite), as well as gold, contribute to financing armed groups and sustaining criminal networks, thus fueling conflict, and exacerbating tension among States.

The overall objective of the workshop was to explore options to effectively curb the illicit exploitation, trade of natural resources, and address the linkages with illegal armed groups in the region as well as to provide a platform for discussing joint coordinated actions among all stakeholders.

Recently, the region has witnessed an increase in high-level diplomacy and efforts to strengthen bilateral relations and cooperation. A series of cooperation agreements have been signed, notably on economic cooperation, security and cross-border infrastructure, and bilateral commissions have been created or reinvigorated. Countries have also taken steps to resolve tensions and strengthen trust through dialogue in line with the objectives of the ICGLR Pact on Security, Stability and Development for the Great Lakes Region signed in 2006 and the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework for the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the region signed in 2013.

In his remarks, João Samuel Caholo, the Executive Secretary of the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region, informed the delegates that Heads of State and Government had demonstrated political leadership and goodwill by adopting the Regional Initiative against the Illegal Exploitation of Natural Resources in 2010 in Lusaka, Zambia, with the sole purpose to break the link between mineral resources and financing of negative forces. He said there is a need to cascade this political goodwill to expedite the implementation of the Regional Initiative. “As a



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region, we need to take stock of the progress and challenges in the implementation of the Regional Initiative on Natural Resources and seek sustainable regional solutions for the advancement of the Pact for Security, Stability and Development in the Great Lakes Region,” he added.

On his part, Huang Xia, Special Envoy of the United Nations Secretary-General for the Great Lakes region, said, “It is my firm conviction that the region should seize the recent momentum towards enhanced cooperation to accelerate the successful implementation of the ICGLR Regional Initiative against the Illicit Exploitation of Natural Resources. To achieve this, a holistic approach is required that involves all stakeholders along the value chain – upstream and downstream - with the common objective of strengthening compliance with regional and international standards.”

At the end of the workshop, participants agreed on a set of recommendations to be submitted for endorsement to the decision-making bodies in the region. The recommendations pertain to activities in the areas of (i) strengthening the implementation of the ICGLR Regional Initiative against the Illegal Exploitation of Natural Resources; (ii) strengthening partnerships; and (iii) strengthening capacities of the ICGLR. Among others, it was proposed that the ICGLR Executive Secretariat and the Office of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for the Great Lakes region undertake high-level political advocacy with a view to enhancing ownership of the RINR and to raise awareness among transit and destination countries of their contribution to these ongoing efforts. Emphasis was also placed on strengthening the fight against impunity of natural resources-related crimes.

The workshop brought together, both in presence and virtually, over one hundred participants, including from the 12 ICGLR Member States (Angola, Burundi, Central African Republic, Republic of Congo, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Kenya, Uganda, Rwanda, South Sudan, Sudan, Tanzania, and Zambia), the United Nations System, as well as regional and international development organizations and financial institutions.

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