

Great Lakes Judicial Cooperation Network – Intervention by Mr. Robert Hovde on behalf of HE Ambassador Susan Eckey, Kampala 12 November 2018

Thank you very much for the opportunity to address this important meeting on an extremely critical issue for the Great Lakes region. The region has an immense abundance and diversity of natural resources, from a range of minerals to rainforest and wildlife. If managed sustainably and democratically, these riches could offer a huge potential for development and prosperity.

Currently, however, illegal exploitation of and trade in these resources are a key driver for continued conflict and instability and a source of suffering and misery for the population.

Sustainable management of natural resources is a cornerstone in Norwegian foreign and development policy. We have through Oil for Development programme since 2005 offered assistance to developing countries in their efforts to manage petroleum resources in a sustainable manner. We are a staunch supporter of Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative and was first OECD country to decide to implement the EITI criteria. We have extended our International Climate and Forest Initiative, established in 2008, until 2030, as part of our commitments at the Paris climate summit. Although mitigating climate change is a key objective, sustainable use and exploitation of forest resources are also a crucial element.

Since the challenges in terms of combating illegal exploitation and trade are of a cross-border nature, redoubled regional – and broader international – efforts are key to wipe out the curse. Norway is the largest donor to the Trust Fund managed by the Office of the UN Special Envoy for the Great Lakes for the implementation of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework for the DRC and the Region, and a substantial part of our contribution has been dedicated to initiatives for combating the pillaging of the region's resources.

The ICGLR Regional Initiative against the Illegal Exploitation of Natural Resources adopted 8 years ago has achieved some results in the fight against the illegal exploitation of natural resources, including a certification mechanism to prevent mining and trading of conflict minerals.

But progress has been too slow and too weak. While acknowledging the huge operational obstacles confronted in this endeavor, we remain convinced that the fundamental challenges are not primarily technical complexities, but genuine political will, within countries and across borders.

We believe that the most important steps to start stabilizing the region would be to fully respect HR, open up political space and stop repression. That would of course not lead to an overnight dramatic improvement of the situation, but in the absence of such reforms, also results in terms of sustainable management of natural resources and combating their illegal exploitation will be harder to attain. We hope that the Great Lakes Judicial Cooperation Network will play a key role in this endeavor.