



Huang Xia, UN Special Envoy for the Great Lakes region (Photo: Cristina Silveiro/UN).

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A WORD BY SPECIAL ENVOY HUANG XIA, SPECIAL ENVOY OF THE SECRETARY GENERAL FOR THE GREAT LAKES REGION

I am pleased to share with you the fifth edition of our Newsletter. The Newsletter covers key events and developments for the Office of the Special Envoy for the Great Lakes region between September 2021 and April 2022. Among others, this Newsletter puts the spotlight on the conclusions of the 10th high-level meeting of the Regional Oversight Mechanism of the Peace, Security and Cooperation (PSC) Framework for the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) and the region. The meeting took place on the shores of the Congo River in Kinshasa on 24 February of this year. In the area of security, the Newsletter features regional efforts to advance security cooperation, including the launch of consultations between the DRC Government and Congolese local armed groups, hosted by Kenyan President Uhuru Kenyatta in Nairobi in April, as well as progress made in the operationalization of the Contact and Coordination Group on non-military measures in complement to military operations against negative forces in the region. The Newsletter also covers my last two briefings to the United Nations (UN) Security Council, during which I emphasized the encouraging trends in dialogue, cooperation and integration in the Great Lakes region, which will need to be intensified and supported in order to address the ongoing security and humanitarian crises in eastern DRC.



President Yoweri Museveni of Uganda (L) hands over chairmanship of the Regional Oversight Mechanism to President Felix Tshisekedi of the DRC (Photo: DRC Presidency).

FEATURE 1: 10TH MEETING OF THE REGIONAL OVERSIGHT MECHANISM OF THE PEACE, SECURITY AND COOPERATION FRAMEWORK FOR THE DRC AND THE REGION

The Heads of State and Government of the signatory countries of the PSC Framework and representatives of the Guarantor institutions gathered on 24 February 2022 in Kinshasa, DRC, for the 10th high-level meeting of the Regional Oversight Mechanism (ROM). The meeting was hosted by President Félix Antoine Tshisekedi Tshilombo and attended by President Yoweri Museveni of Uganda as outgoing ROM chair. Jean-Pierre Lacroix, UN Under-Secretary-General for Peace Operations, Huang Xia, Special Envoy for the Great Lakes region and Bintou Keita, Special Representative and Head of the UN peacekeeping mission in the DRC, MONUSCO, represented the UN at the Summit. [Read more](#)



Members of armed groups delegations during the Nairobi talks on 27 April 2022.

FEATURE 2: LEADERS OF THE REGION RESOLVE TO PUT AN END TO THE THREAT POSED BY ARMED GROUPS IN EASTERN DRC.

Following the recent intensification of armed group activities in eastern DRC and its risks for the Great Lakes region, several leaders from the region convened in Nairobi on 8 and 21 April 2022 under the leadership of Kenyan President Uhuru Kenyatta to agree on measures to redress the situation. The Summits, referred to as the Conclave Summits, concluded with the adoption of a communiqué, which outlines a two-track approach aimed at ending the persistent threat posed by armed groups in eastern DRC.

[Read more](#)



Participants at the experts' meeting on the implementation of the operational cell, Goma, DRC, 13-17 December 2021 (Photo: Elisa Lux/OSESG-GL).

COUNTRIES TAKE ANOTHER STEP IN SUPPORT OF NON-MILITARY MEASURES AGAINST ARMED GROUPS.

Armed groups also termed “negative forces” in the region remain a major challenge to peace, stability and development in the Great Lakes region. Recognizing that there is no purely military solution to neutralize the threat posed by these groups, the Office of the Special Envoy for the Great Lakes region has been supporting efforts by countries of the region to advance non-military measures in complement to military action, notably through the creation of the Contact and Coordination Group. [Read more](#)



Ely Dieng, Coordinator of the Operational Cell of the Contact and Coordination Group

IN FOCUS: INTERVIEW WITH ELY DIENG, COORDINATOR OF THE OPERATIONAL CELL

The Action Plan of the UN regional Strategy was adopted in July 2021. Guided by the priorities of the countries of the region, it comprises five clusters for the period 2021-2023, namely: (i) promoting dialogue and strengthening trust; (ii) reducing the threat posed by armed groups; (iii) promoting a sustainable and transparent management of natural resources, as well as trade and investment; (iv) finding durable solutions to forced displacement; and (v) promoting regional preparedness to public health crises. [Read more](#)

ELY DIENG – SHORT BIO

Ely Dieng is the Coordinator of the Operational Cell of the Contact and Coordination Group, based in Goma in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC).

Formerly, Head (ad interim) of the Office of the Special Envoy of the UN Secretary-General for Burundi (OSESG-B), he led the Office through the tense period of the 2020 elections and oversaw the closing of the Office, as per the decision of the UN Security Council and discussions with the Government of Burundi. He previously served as the Office's Principal Security Sector Reform (SSR) Officer. [Read more](#)



Special Envoy Huang Xia (grey suit) and Special Representative and Head of MONUSCO, Bintou Keita (Photo: MONUSCO).

DIPLOMACY IN ACTION - HIGHLIGHTS FROM SPECIAL ENVOY XIA'S ENGAGEMENTS IN AND BEYOND THE GREAT LAKES REGION

The Office of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for the Great Lakes region has continued to provide support for the preparation of the second edition of the Great Lakes Investment and Trade Conference (GLITC), scheduled in the last quarter of 2021 in Kigali, Rwanda, the COVID-19 situation permitting. Meanwhile, the Office of the Special Envoy continues to promote projects that have the potential to strengthen regional integration and create jobs for women and youth in the border areas of the countries of the region. [Read more](#)



Special Envoy Huang Xia briefing the UN Security Council on 27 April 2022, New York (Photo: Penangini Toure/OSESG-GL).

THE UN SECURITY COUNCIL REAFFIRMS ITS SUPPORT TO THE GREAT LAKES REGION

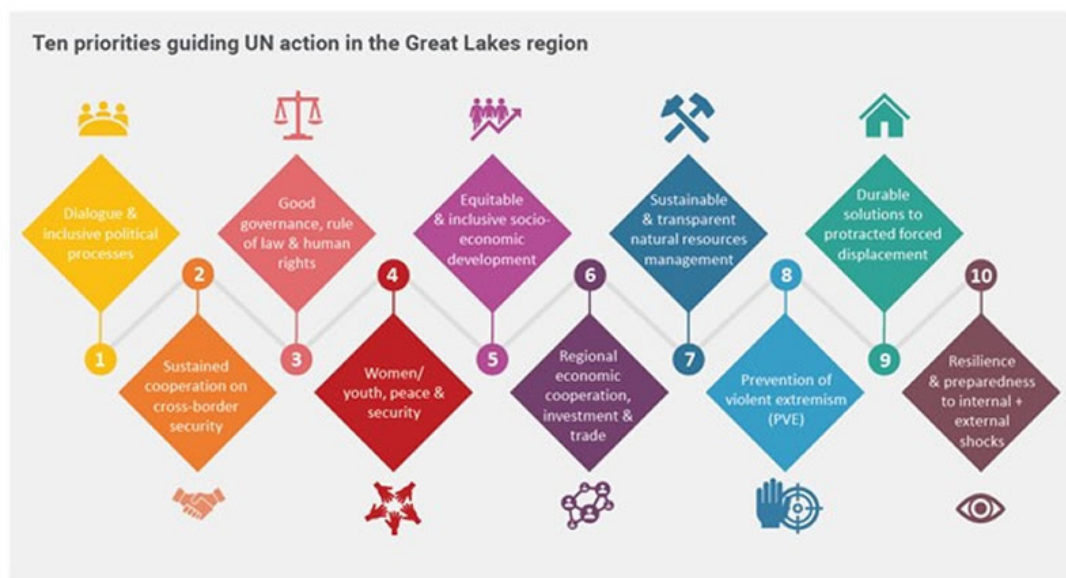
On 27 April 2022, the UN Security Council convened to discuss the situation in the Great Lakes region. Two topics dominated the discussion: the widespread insecurity and humanitarian crisis linked to the destabilizing activities of armed groups in eastern DRC, including the 23 March Movement (M23), the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF) and the Cooperative for the Development of the Congo (CODECO); and the intensification of regional diplomacy in the Great Lakes region, particularly through the Regional Heads of State Conclave meetings on the DRC on 8 and 21 April in Nairobi, which resulted in the adoption of a two-track, political and military, approach to put an end to the persistent threat posed by armed groups. [Read more](#)



Kenya's Permanent Representative to the UN, Martin Kimani, presiding over the Security Council, 20 Oct. 2021 (Photo: UN)

THE SECURITY COUNCIL'S PRESIDENTIAL STATEMENT ON THE GREAT LAKES REGION

At the conclusion of the high-level meeting on 20 October 2021, the Security Council issued a Presidential Statement [S/PRST/2021/19], in which the 15-member organ urged signatory countries of the PSC Framework as well as regional organizations and the international community to coordinate their efforts to undercut the economic lifelines of armed groups that benefit from the illegal exploitation and trade in natural resources. [Read more](#)



THE UN REGIONAL STRATEGY'S ACTION PLAN: WHERE ARE WE?

The Action Plan of the UN regional Strategy was adopted in July 2021. Guided by the priorities of the countries of the region, it comprises five clusters for the period 2021-2023, namely: (i) promoting dialogue and strengthening trust; (ii) reducing the threat posed by armed groups; (iii) promoting a sustainable and transparent management of natural resources, as well as trade and investment; (iv) finding durable solutions to forced displacement; and (v) promoting regional preparedness to public health crises.

The objective of the Action Plan is to translate the Strategy's vision of a peaceful and prosperous Great Lakes region into feasible, impactful and timebound priority actions for the period leading to the 10th anniversary of the PSC Framework in 2023. [Read more](#)

RECAP: WHAT IS THE UN REGIONAL STRATEGY?

In October 2020, UN Secretary-General António Guterres approved the UN Strategy for Peace Consolidation, Conflict Prevention and Conflict Resolution in the Great Lakes region. The Strategy, developed by the Office of the Special Envoy for the Great Lakes region in consultation with a wide range of stakeholders, including representatives from the countries in the region, proposes an integrated, forward-leaning approach that aims to better leverage the political, operational, and programmatic expertise of the UN in support of a peaceful, inclusive, prosperous, and resilient region.

While prioritizing political solutions, the Strategy advocates for a shift in narrative beyond the traditional focus on conflict-related challenges to emphasize opportunities for peace, security, and people-centered development. [Read more](#)



Participants at a workshop on natural resources in Khartoum, Sudan, 31 August 2021 (Photo: Mahmoud Shamrouk/UNITAMS)

COUNTRIES RALLY TO FIND WAYS TO CURB THE ILLICIT EXPLOITATION AND TRADE OF NATURAL RESOURCES

Africa's Great Lakes region has long been affected by conflict and political instability. Evidence points to the illicit exploitation and trade in natural resources as one of the enablers of this instability. Given the close linkage between natural resources, the flow of arms and the ongoing conflict in eastern DRC, the UN Security Council has been involved in this matter since the year 2000. Actions taken so far involve, among others, the establishment of a Group of Experts to investigate the smuggling of natural resources in the DRC and subsequently the creation of a Sanctions Committee targeting persons involved in this scourge. More recently, in 2020, the UN Security Council called upon the Office of the Special Envoy for the Great Lakes region and MONUSCO, the UN peacekeeping mission in the DRC, to seek a political solution to tackle the cross-border flows of armed combatants and the illicit exploitation and trade in minerals. [Read more](#)

HIGHLIGHTS AT A GLANCE: 31 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR A MORE SUSTAINABLE MANAGEMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES IN THE GREAT LAKES REGION

At the high-level workshop on natural resources in the Great Lakes region, participants identified a set of 31 recommendations. While most recommendations were addressed to ICGLR and its 12 Member States, 5 recommendations were directed at the Office of the Special Envoy for the Great Lakes region, requesting the Office, in partnership with the ICGLR, to:

- Lead high-level political advocacy in support of strengthened ownership of the RINR;
- Support efforts to strengthen existing regional judicial cooperation mechanisms;
- Encourage the use of the Great Lakes Judicial Cooperation Network as the main tool for combating trans-border crime related to natural resources;
- Help strengthen the capacity of media and civil society organizations in the region;
- Engage destination countries involved in the illegal trade of natural resources, specifically gold;
- Support follow-up actions on the engagement with and commitment by donors.



Women in the Great Lakes training on Mediation and Negotiation Skills, Kigali, Goma 6 September 2021 (Photo: Eugene Uwimana/UNDP Kigali)

WOMEN IN THE REGION HONE THEIR SKILLS IN PEACE NEGOTIATIONS AND MEDIATION

Women play a critical role in conflict prevention and resolution. "Where women lead, processes are more inclusive, address root causes and lead to more sustainable outcomes", reaffirmed the UN Deputy Secretary-General Amina Mohammed during a high-level retreat on peace, security and stability in Africa, held in November 2021 in Nairobi. [Read more](#)



Special Envoy Huang Xia (Center, front row) with members of the Great Lakes Women Entrepreneurs network, Nairobi, Kenya, 2 December 2021 (Photo: Penangini Toure/UN)

LAUNCH OF THE GREAT LAKES WOMEN ENTREPRENEURS' NETWORK

Women entrepreneurs in the Great Lakes region account for about 70 percent of cross-border traders. Their role as catalysts for the region's economic growth is recognized as key to the consolidation of peace and security in the Great Lakes region. In addition, women are critical actors in the region's vibrant agricultural sector. During the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, many women entrepreneurs had to adjust their business models to the new context. [Read more](#)

WOMEN DISCUSS THEIR EFFECTIVE PARTICIPATION IN POLITICAL PROCESSES AND DECISION-MAKING

On 20 December, the Office of the Special Envoy facilitated a virtual advocacy engagement among the ICGLR Regional Parliamentary Forum, regional women representatives and youth to discuss sexual and gender-based violence as well as women's effective participation in political processes and decision-making. The Chair of the Regional Parliamentary Forum pledged to lead a campaign to strengthen gender sensitivity within parliaments. At the end of the meeting, women representatives submitted an advocacy document outlining specific areas requiring parliamentary engagement, including on eliminating existing barriers to gender equality, repealing discriminatory laws, strengthening leadership and meaningful representation of women, marginalized groups and people with disabilities, and enacting positive measures to achieve gender balance in programmes for prevention and care linked to COVID-19.

In a few words...

The UN Strategy for Peace Consolidation, Conflict Prevention and Conflict Resolution in the Great Lakes Region

The United Nations (UN) Strategy for Peace Consolidation, Conflict Prevention and Conflict Resolution in the Great Lakes Region (S/2020/1168) was adopted by the Executive Committee of the Secretary-General on 22 October 2020. The Strategy was subsequently transmitted to the Security Council and to all signatory countries and guarantor institutions of the Peace, Security and Cooperation (PSC) Framework for the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) and the region in early 2021. The Strategy identifies 10 priorities structured around three pillars: (1) peace, security and justice; (2) sustainable development and shared prosperity; and (3) resilience to long-standing and emerging challenges. The priorities provide an overarching 10-year horizon for United Nations action in the region...[Read more](#)

The Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework for the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the region

In February 2013, 11 nations signed the Peace, Security and Cooperation (PSC) Framework for the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) and the region, in a renewed drive to end the recurring cycles of devastating conflicts in eastern DRC which impact stability and development in the Great Lakes area of Africa. On 31 January 2014, two more countries, Kenya and Sudan, became signatories of the PSC Framework. The Framework aims to help "address the root causes of conflict and put an end to recurring cycles of violence" in eastern DRC and the Great Lakes Region... [Read more](#)

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