

**Remarks by SESG  
at the launch of the EU peace and security project for the Great Lakes region  
12 December 2018, Bujumbura, ICGLR Secretariat**

Ambassador Zachary Muburi-Muita - Executive Secretary of the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region

Roeland Van De Geer, EU Special Envoy for the Great Lakes Region;

Michael Häusler, Ambassador of Federal Republic of Germany

Wolfram Vetter – Ambassador of the European Union Delegation to Burundi

Astrid Karamira, Head of Program, GIZ

Ambassadors and other representatives of the Diplomatic Corps;

UN and EU colleagues;

Distinguished media representatives;

Ladies and Gentlemen;

It is an honour to attend this launch here today. Allow me to express my appreciation to Ambassador Muburi-Muita for hosting us here today.

Since the signing of the ICGLR Pact on Security, Stability and Development in the Great Lakes Region and the Peace, Security and Cooperation (PSC) Framework for the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) and the region nearly six years ago, encouraging progress has been made in several areas.

Yet, important challenges remain. The DRC and the wider region continue to grapple with threats posed by non-state armed groups, in addition to challenges resulting from weak state institutions; illegal exploitation of natural resources; youth unemployment; massive displacements of people and crises around electoral processes. In addition, bilateral relations have repeatedly come under strain and mutual allegations of cross-border interferences persist.

All this suggests that the root causes of conflict in the Great Lakes region have not been fully addressed. Strong political will, ownership by key stakeholders and adequate financial support continue to be required in order to advance the

implementation of the commitments under the ICGLR Pact and the PSC Framework.

In an effort to assist, we at the United Nations have developed the Great Lakes Regional Strategic Framework, which was endorsed by the UN Security Council in March 2016. It is based on a comprehensive conflict and socio-economic analysis which underlined the vital importance of addressing cross-border issues at the eastern DRC border. Huge illicit flows of natural resources and finances across national boundaries, refugee movements, as well as fugitives from international justice highlight the interlinked nature of conflict dynamics in the region.

The conflict trends and patterns demonstrate the centrality of border areas as the main theatres where risks manifest and proliferate. However, opportunities for peace building also exist in these border areas. The border areas can be tapped to build confidence, create trust, and establish momentum for peaceful settlement of conflicts.

The Great Lakes Regional Strategic Framework focuses on five countries – DRC with its four neighbours to the East – Uganda, Rwanda, Burundi and Tanzania. It aligns cross-border development and programmatic interventions to the broader political objectives of the PSC Framework. It is complementary to the ongoing work at country level. Projects undertaken in the context of the Regional Strategic Framework have demonstrated that the success of national level initiatives is enhanced when they are implemented as part of a regional focus, with simultaneous and/or complementary action across the relevant countries.

One example is a cross-border project between Tanzania and Burundi supported by the United Nations Peacebuilding Fund which addresses key issues around forced displacement including access to protection, legal support, skills development and support to reintegration. We are preparing now the second stage of this project for next year.

Regional initiatives such as High-Level Learning Exchanges on land and conflict issues and the Great Lakes Judicial Cooperation Network are making significant strides forward.

But we need to do more to address the critical needs in the region:

Today's launch of a regional peace and security initiative with the European Union, GIZ and ICGLR is an important next step. The EU project will support DRRR in targeted areas in the Great Lakes where there is potential to repatriate and reintegrate ex-combatants; enhance the ICGLR Fora and strengthen especially the women's role in mediation, dialogue and other political and socio-economic processes. It will be implemented through three UN agencies – UNDP, UNWOMEN and UNFPA.

Allow me therefore to express my deep appreciation for the commitment demonstrated by the European Union in the Great Lakes. I also wish to thank Executive Secretary Muburi-Muita for the good co-operation on a number of joint initiatives so far. We look forward to moving together on the successful delivery of this regional project.

Thank you, Your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen, for your kind attention.