



# Security Council

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## Implementation of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework for the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Region

### Report of the Secretary-General

#### I. Introduction

1. The present report is submitted pursuant to Security Council resolution [2666 \(2022\)](#) in which the Council requested the Secretary-General to report every six months on the implementation of the commitments under the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework for the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Region and its linkages with the broader security situation in the region.<sup>1</sup> It provides an overview of peace and security developments since the previous report ([S/2023/237](#)), covering the period from 16 March to 15 September 2023.

#### II. Major developments

##### A. Security situation

2. The security situation in the Great Lakes region remained volatile and unpredictable. After a lull in cross-border security incidents between the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Rwanda between March and July, on 27 July, a Congolese soldier exchanged fire with a Rwanda Defence Forces soldier in Rutagara near Goma, Democratic Republic of the Congo, reportedly killing the Rwandan soldier. In a press release on 28 July, the Rwanda Defence Forces rejected accusations by the Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo that Rwanda Defence Forces soldiers were carrying out an incursion into North Kivu Province.

3. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, a fragile cessation of hostilities between the Mouvement du 23 mars (M23) and the Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo has prevailed since April. This was in contrast to the continued

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<sup>1</sup> In this context, the region refers to the 13 signatory countries of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework, namely: Angola, Burundi, the Central African Republic, the Congo, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Kenya, Rwanda, South Africa, South Sudan, the Sudan, Uganda, the United Republic of Tanzania and Zambia. In addition, the following four intergovernmental organizations act as guarantors of the Framework: the African Union, the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region, the Southern African Development Community and the United Nations.



attacks by M23 against civilians and increasing clashes between M23 and other armed groups, notably Forces démocratiques de libération du Rwanda (FDLR) and local groups that describe themselves as Wazalendo. Between 16 March and 10 September, M23 reportedly carried out 97 attacks against civilians, resulting in the killing of 124 persons, including 15 women and 11 children. M23 also reportedly attempted to extend its area of operations to South Kivu Province. While M23 disengaged from some areas in Petit Nord, it had yet to withdraw from all occupied areas, as stipulated in the Luanda communiqué of 23 November 2022.

4. FDLR also remained active in eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo. In addition to clashes with M23, FDLR were reportedly responsible for 17 attacks against civilians, resulting in 13 fatalities, including 1 woman and 3 children.

5. The Allied Democratic Forces (ADF) extended their area of influence into Ituri, Maniema and South Kivu Provinces, despite continuing joint operations by Congolese and Ugandan armed forces. Between 1 April and 10 September, ADF reportedly carried out 101 attacks, killing 406 civilians, including 56 women and 53 children, in Ituri and North Kivu Provinces. On 17 June, alleged ADF elements attacked a school in Mpondwe, western Uganda, near the Congolese border. The attack resulted in 42 deaths, six injuries and the kidnapping of six students. Protests erupted in Bunia on 20 April over the perceived limited impact of Operation Shujaa conducted by Congolese and Ugandan armed forces against ADF, and the state of siege, in place since May 2021. As noted in the report of the Group of Experts on the Democratic Republic of the Congo (S/2023/431), ADF reportedly received financial support from the Da'esh terrorist group and collaborated with Da'esh cells in South Africa, suggesting a growing threat of terrorism in the region. On 8 August, alleged ADF combatants renewed on social media their pledge of allegiance to the new leader of Da'esh, Abu Hafis al-Hashimi al-Qurashi.

6. In South Kivu Province, increased pressure from joint Congolese and Burundian military operations led to shifting alliances and cooperation between armed groups, including between the Résistance pour un État de droit au Burundi (RED Tabara) and Forces nationales de libération (FNL). From 4 to 5 August, the Burundi National Defence Force clashed with alleged FNL members in Cibitoke Province, Burundi. Six rebels were reportedly killed, while the Burundi National Defence Force lost three soldiers. In a communiqué dated 3 September, RED Tabara claimed responsibility for the destruction on 2 September of an aircraft guidance antenna at Bujumbura International Airport, and noted its ability to launch attacks in Burundi at any given moment.

7. On 3 April, the facilitator of the Nairobi process led by the East African Community (EAC), the former President of Kenya, Uhuru Kenyatta, announced the full deployment of the East African Community regional force troops to eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo. However, tensions between the Congolese population and the EAC regional force, including sporadic protests and social media campaigns against the latter, emerged after discontent was voiced by Congolese authorities vis-à-vis the role of the regional force in addressing the threat posed by M23. The status-of-forces agreement for the regional force, which expired on 8 September, was extended until 8 December, pending an evaluation report from the EAC Council of Ministers. On 17 March, the Parliament of Angola approved the deployment of Angolan troops to eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo to secure M23 cantonment sites and protect members of the ad hoc verification mechanism. On 17 August, at the forty-third Ordinary Summit of Heads of States and Government of the Southern African Development Community (SADC), participants endorsed the deployment of the SADC mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo to restore peace and security in eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo, as initially

announced by the SADC Organ Troika, comprising Namibia, South Africa and Zambia, during their Extraordinary Summit on 8 May (see sect. III.B. below).

## **B. Political developments**

8. Relations between the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Rwanda remained tense, characterized by continued confrontational rhetoric and accusations over the persistent activities of M23 and FDLR and alleged planned attacks on each other's territory. On 22 March, during a visit to Kinshasa and Goma by the Peace and Security Council of the African Union, the President of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Félix-Antoine Tshisekedi Tshilombo, called upon the delegation to take appropriate measures against the "flagrant violation of the African Union Charter by Rwanda", accusing Rwanda of aggression in eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo. Military reinforcement by both countries, coupled with the absence of direct high-level dialogue, indicated a heightened level of military preparedness on both sides, with potential grave consequences for peace and stability in the region.

### **Regional peace processes**

9. Regional efforts to address the continued tensions between the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Rwanda and persistent insecurity in eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo continued, notably through the Luanda and Nairobi peace processes.

10. While there were no direct interactions between the Presidents of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Rwanda during the reporting period, the President of Angola, João Manuel Gonçalves Lourenço, continued to engage with Congolese and Rwandan authorities in his capacity as mediator appointed by the African Union for the Luanda process. On 12 April, he received the President of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Mr. Tshisekedi, in Luanda, where they reportedly discussed the ongoing peace process as well as progress made in the implementation of the Luanda road map. The following day, during a press conference in Kinshasa, the President of the Democratic Republic of the Congo reiterated his rejection of claims that the Democratic Republic of the Congo provides support to FDLR. He also rejected direct dialogue with M23 prior to the group's cantonment and participation in the national Disarmament, Demobilization, Community Recovery and Stabilization Programme. On 7 May, the President of Angola, Mr. Lourenço, in an interview, noted efforts by M23 to maintain the cessation of hostilities and emphasized the importance of the armed group being safely cantoned and effectively disarmed. He further noted that once the necessary conditions were in place, Angola would provide security to M23 elements brought to the cantonment areas.

11. At the tenth Extraordinary Summit of the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region (ICGLR), convened on 3 June in Luanda under the leadership of the President of Angola, Mr. Lourenço, participants directed the ministers for foreign affairs of Angola, Burundi, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Rwanda, with the support of the ad hoc verification mechanism, to meet periodically to jointly assess the progress made in implementing the commitments of the Luanda road map.

12. In the context of the Nairobi process led by EAC, the EAC Heads of State convened on 31 May and on 5 September for the twenty-first and twenty-second Extraordinary Summits, in Bujumbura and Nairobi, respectively. Both summits were preceded by meetings of EAC Defence Ministers and of their Chiefs of Defence. At the summits, participants reaffirmed the importance of sustainable security solutions through a political process and dialogue among all parties and called for the resumption of the inter-Congolese dialogue. They further agreed to extend the

mandate of the EAC regional force, first to 8 September and subsequently to 8 December, respectively. At the twenty-first Extraordinary Summit, they agreed to establish the position of a civilian Head of Mission to coordinate all political matters related to the regional force and mandated the EAC facilitator to handle all communications with M23.

13. Efforts under the political track to prepare for the next inter-Congolese dialogue (Nairobi IV) continued despite challenges relating to the M23 crisis and tensions between the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the EAC regional force. On 9 April, the High Representative of the President of the Democratic Republic of the Congo for the Nairobi and Luanda processes, Serge Tshibangu, stated in an interview that the implementation of the Luanda road map remained a precondition for the re-entry of M23 into the Nairobi process. For its part, M23 conditioned its cantonment on prior dialogue with the Congolese authorities. In order to address the impasse, a multi-partner technical team was set up on 30 June by the facilitator of the EAC-led Nairobi process, comprising representatives of Angola, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the EAC Secretariat, the regional force, the ad hoc verification mechanism and the United Nations. During its second meeting on 12 July in Goma, the team discussed a list of confidence-building measures aimed at removing challenges in preparation for the cantonment of M23. The Congolese delegation continued, however, to hold divergent views from those of the regional force and the ad hoc verification mechanism regarding the withdrawal status of M23. The dates for the Nairobi IV consultations are yet to be determined.

14. On the military track, the EAC regional force contributed to the holding of the ceasefire and partial withdrawal of M23 during the reporting period, acting as a buffer. On 27 April, the Commander of the regional force, Major General Jeff Nyagah (Kenya), resigned, citing concerns regarding his personal security. He was replaced by Major General Alphaxard Muthuri Kiugu (Kenya), who assumed his functions on 18 May. On 23 August, the Chiefs of Defence Forces of EAC convened an extraordinary meeting in Nairobi to review the assessment report on the implementation of the regional force mandate, which was prepared following the visit of a technical evaluation team to North Kivu Province from 3 to 8 July.

15. Efforts to strengthen coordination between the Luanda and Nairobi processes continued and culminated on 27 June at the quadripartite summit on peace and security in eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo, which brought together EAC, the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS), ICGLR and SADC, under the aegis of the African Union, and with the participation of the United Nations. Summit participants agreed on a comprehensive joint master plan to enhance coordination, harmonization and coherence of all peace initiatives on eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo. While the participants decided to establish a coordination working group, the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo underscored the principles of national ownership and Congolese leadership of all initiatives related to peace in the eastern part of the country.

#### **Other bilateral developments**

16. Several countries in the region pursued efforts to further strengthen their bilateral relations, as outlined in section III.B. below. From 22 to 24 March, in Kigali, Rwanda and Uganda convened the eleventh meeting of the Joint Permanent Commission. Both countries signed four memorandums of understanding on diplomatic and political consultations, justice and constitutionalism, mutual legal assistance and migration matters. General Muhoozi Kainerugaba, then-senior presidential adviser in charge of special operations to the President of Uganda, Yoweri Museveni, was received by the President of Rwanda, Paul Kagame, on 24 April in Kigali, in an effort to bolster bilateral relations.

### **C. Humanitarian situation**

17. The humanitarian situation in the region worsened further, with large-scale forced displacements linked to a surge in violence in parts of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, South Sudan and the Sudan. According to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), as of the end of August, the region had registered more than 4.7 million refugees and asylum-seekers fleeing armed conflict and instability, as displacement linked to conflict was exacerbated by climate-related events in the eastern and Great Lakes regions of Africa.

18. The high levels of violence in eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo led to renewed refugee influxes into Rwanda, Uganda and the United Republic of Tanzania, among other countries. Uganda continued to host the largest number of refugees from the Democratic Republic of the Congo, as well as other refugees from Africa, and as of August was hosting 1.5 million refugees. Close to 1 million Congolese refugees were hosted by signatory countries to the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework, making the Congolese refugee crisis the second largest on the continent.

19. As of the end of July, approximately 11.6 million internally displaced persons were reported in Burundi, the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, South Sudan, the Sudan and Uganda. The Democratic Republic of the Congo remained the country with the largest number of internally displaced persons (6.24 million) in Africa. Since March 2022, 2.8 million internally displaced persons have been displaced from Ituri, North Kivu and South Kivu Provinces alone. Gender-based violence remained prevalent, with nearly 64,000 cases registered between January and July 2023. Sexual exploitation, including forced prostitution as a means of survival, was rampant inside and near camps for internally displaced persons, particularly those in the vicinity of Goma. The number of grave violations against children was also on the rise, in particular cases of child recruitment, abductions and sexual violence.

20. Support for durable solutions to forced displacement continued, with some 220,830 Burundian refugees voluntarily returning to Burundi since September 2017. Approximately 263,000 Burundian refugees continue to be hosted throughout the EAC region, notably in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Rwanda, Uganda and the United Republic of Tanzania.

21. Food insecurity remained a major challenge in the Great Lakes region. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo and South Sudan, at least 25.8 million people (nearly one quarter of the population) and 7.7 million people (over two thirds of the population), respectively, were acutely food-insecure.

22. In an encouraging development, representatives of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Rwanda held a high-level tripartite meeting on the return of Congolese and Rwandan refugees, organized by UNHCR on 15 May in Geneva. During a technical-level follow-up meeting, held on 26 and 27 June in Nairobi, the two countries agreed on enhanced information-sharing on conditions in areas of return and levels of assistance available to returnees, as well as initial cross-border meetings and a pilot project with a limited number of refugees, to test conditions of return in late 2023 and 2024, respectively.

### **D. Human rights and the rule of law**

23. Continued human rights violations and abuses, as well as violations of international humanitarian law, remained matters of concern in the Great Lakes region, with a continued high risk of atrocity crimes, notably in the context of

protracted and resurgent armed violence in eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo.

24. The United Nations Joint Human Rights Office in the Democratic Republic of the Congo documented 2,708 human rights violations and abuses between March and August, a nearly 5 per cent increase compared with the previous six months (2,585 violations and abuses). A total of 77 per cent of those were committed in conflict-affected provinces. Armed groups remained the main perpetrators, with alleged responsibility for 64 per cent of the overall number of abuses, while State agents were allegedly responsible for 36 per cent. ADF combatants were reported to be responsible for 271 reported incidents of human rights abuses between March and August, which amounted to 10 per cent of the overall number of violations and abuses documented in the country. M23 was reportedly responsible for 201 incidents of human rights abuses, while FDLR combatants reportedly committed 17 abuses.

25. On 23 May, the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo submitted a referral under article 14 (1) of the Rome Statute to the International Criminal Court, requesting that the Court investigate alleged crimes committed in North Kivu Province from 1 January 2022 to date. On 15 June, the Prosecutor of the Court, Karim Khan, announced his intention to conduct a preliminary examination.

26. In Burundi, the former Prime Minister, Alain Guillaume Bunyoni, who was dismissed from office in September 2022, was arrested on 21 April and subsequently charged on 5 May with undermining State security and the national economy, personal enrichment, illegal possession of weapons and contempt of the President. On 8 May, he appeared before the Supreme Court, which extended his pretrial detention. He was transferred to the prison of Gitega (Centre) on 18 July.

27. The five human rights defenders arrested on 14 and 15 February in Burundi on charges of rebellion, undermining internal State security and the functioning of public finances were released on 28 April, following a trial. Three of the accused were acquitted, while the remaining two were convicted and received fines along with a two-year suspended sentence. On 23 May, however, the Prosecutor of the Ntahangwa High Court in Bujumbura appealed the decision. On 2 May, the 10-year prison sentence of journalist Floriane Irangabiye for undermining State security was upheld by the Court of Appeal.

### **III. Implementation of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework**

#### **A. Commitments of the Democratic Republic of the Congo**

28. The Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo continued to implement national commitments under the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework. On 18 May, the National Assembly announced the establishment of a commission for peace, reconciliation and reintegration to address the intercommunal conflict between the Teke and Yaka communities in Mai-Ndombe Province and its surrounding areas.

29. On 4 May, the Senate passed a law establishing a military reserve force that would allow for civilian volunteers to be included among reservists to defend the country and its territorial integrity in the case of an external threat or aggression. The decision raised concerns over the potential integration of armed groups into the Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, contrary to the provisions of the Nairobi process and the Disarmament, Demobilization, Community Recovery and Stabilization Programme.

30. On 24 and 25 August, the National Oversight Mechanism charged with overseeing the implementation of the national commitments under the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework convened a workshop in Kinshasa with representatives from other Congolese institutions and the United Nations to discuss, among other topics, challenges and opportunities facing the, as well as measures to strengthen the Mechanism, including through enhanced participation of civil society.

## **B. Commitments of the region and engagements by the guarantor institutions**

31. As outlined in section II.B. above, regional efforts continued in response to the persistent crisis in eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo and related regional tensions. In the area of security cooperation, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Uganda met on 3 April in Kinshasa to assess the joint military operation against ADF. On 7 June, Angola and the Republic of Congo discussed border security in Cabinda Province, Angola. Discussions between the Ministers of Defence of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and South Africa on 3 July focused on options for enhancing cooperation in defence, security and peacekeeping. On 4 August, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Kenya signed a military cooperation agreement, focusing on assistance and capacity-building for the Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo by the Kenya Defence Forces. Kenya and Uganda committed to reinforce bilateral security cooperation during a meeting of their Joint Defence Committee, held on 17 and 18 August in Mbale, Uganda. On 28 August, Burundi and the Democratic Republic of the Congo signed an agreement to strengthen bilateral security and political relations on the occasion of a two-day state visit by the President of Burundi, Évariste Ndayishimiye, to Kinshasa. On 30 August, Kenya and South Africa agreed to strengthen their bilateral defence cooperation.

32. Several countries convened bilateral permanent commissions, including Angola and the Republic of Congo, Rwanda and Uganda, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo and South Africa. The meetings resulted in several memorandums of understanding on political, security and economic cooperation. In addition, Angola and Uganda, as well as Rwanda and Zambia, during high-level bilateral meetings in April and June respectively, assessed the status of implementation of signed bilateral agreements and explored options for further strengthening cooperation.

33. Countries in the region continued to strengthen economic cooperation and trade. On 16 March, South Africa and the United Republic of Tanzania resolved to enhance bilateral cooperation on trade, investment, tourism and manufacturing. On 19 March, Angola, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and South Africa agreed to establish a virtual permanent secretariat to strengthen their trilateral partnership on economic development, infrastructure, public administration and defence. Similarly, Kenya and Rwanda committed to strengthen cooperation during visits to Kigali by the President of Kenya, William Samoei Ruto of Kenya, on 4 and 5 April, and by the Prime Cabinet Secretary of Kenya, Musalia Mudavadi, on 28 May. On the margins of the ICGLR Summit held on 3 June, the Ministers for Foreign Affairs of Angola and Kenya discussed ways to revitalize the Joint Bilateral Commission and increase bilateral trade. On 15 June, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Zambia laid the foundation stone for a plant that will specialize in manufacturing batteries and electric vehicle precursors in Lubumbashi, Democratic Republic of the Congo.

34. Advancing regional integration remained a key priority. On 25 May, the Heads of State of the United Republic of Tanzania and Uganda commissioned the Kikagati-Murongo Transboundary Hydropower Plant, which is expected to contribute to more reliable and affordable electricity, thereby enhancing economic development and

regional cooperation. On 2 June, the President of Uganda, Mr. Museveni, received members of the Parliament from the Ituri Province Committee, with whom he reportedly discussed the development of cross-border transport and energy infrastructures, as well as the opening of consulates of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Uganda, respectively, in Arua, Uganda, and Bunia, Democratic Republic of the Congo. On 5 July, Angola, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Zambia signed a trilateral agreement for the Lobito Port and Rail Line Concession, an infrastructure project aimed at enhancing regional connectivity by linking mining regions in the three countries.

35. The eleventh high-level meeting of the Regional Oversight Mechanism of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework was held on 6 May in Bujumbura, with the participation of the Secretary-General. In a communiqué issued on the same day, the leaders of the region called for strengthened coordination of regional initiatives and security mechanisms in the Democratic Republic of the Congo with a view to enhancing effectiveness and avoiding duplication of efforts, among other measures. They expressed support for the full participation of women and youth in conflict prevention, peacebuilding and dialogue processes in the region, including the Nairobi and Luanda processes. They also took note of progress and challenges in the implementation of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework since its signing 10 years ago and reiterated its pertinence as a vehicle for addressing the root causes of instability in the region. They requested the Technical Support Committee to conduct an independent, impartial and honest assessment of the Framework's implementation to date. The conclusions and recommendations of the assessment will be included in a road map for the revitalization of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework to be submitted to the next high-level meeting of the Regional Oversight Mechanism, which is scheduled for 2024, for its endorsement.

36. The meeting of the Regional Oversight Mechanism was preceded by a meeting of the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the signatory countries on 4 May in Bujumbura, as well as the thirty-third and thirty-fourth meetings of the Technical Support Committee held, respectively, on 12 and 13 April and on 2 May, in Nairobi and Bujumbura.

37. The guarantor institutions continued to support the implementation of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework. From 20 to 23 March, the Peace and Security Council of the African Union, under the chairpersonship of the United Republic of Tanzania, visited the Democratic Republic of the Congo. In addition to discussions on national developments, the delegation engaged Congolese interlocutors on the coordination of ongoing regional peace initiatives in eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo. The Chairperson of the African Union Commission, Moussa Faki Mahamat, also visited several countries in the region in May and June, including Burundi, Kenya and Rwanda, where he discussed, with the respective Heads of State, options for enhancing regional action in support of conflict resolution efforts in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the wider region.

38. On the revitalization of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework and in follow-up to the 1140th meeting of the Peace and Security Council of 17 February, the African Union Commission convened a Technical Consultation Meeting in Addis Ababa on 29 March. Participants agreed, inter alia, on the holding of regular meetings to coordinate efforts of the guarantor institutions towards regional peace and security, together with EAC and ECCAS. So far, there has been no dedicated follow-up action on the recommendations.

39. On 8 May, during an Extraordinary Summit convened in Windhoek, the SADC Organ Troika, under the chairpersonship of the President of Namibia, Hage Geingob, approved the deployment of an SADC force to eastern Democratic Republic of the



Congo within the framework of the SADC Standby Force. The SADC Organ Troika further urged the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo to put in place the necessary conditions and measures to facilitate the effective coordination of forces operating under multilateral and bilateral arrangements on Congolese territory.

40. A follow-up summit of the SADC Organ Troika plus SADC Troika was held virtually on 11 July. Participants reiterated their call for the immediate cessation of hostilities in eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo by all armed groups and “unconditional withdrawal from the currently occupied areas”. They “committed to exploring additional measures to the current diplomatic efforts, to force M23 and other armed groups to abandon all forms of attacks”. The Summit further approved the mandate and supporting legal and operational instruments for deploying the SADC mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

41. During the forty-third Ordinary Summit of SADC held on 17 August in Luanda, participants endorsed the deployment of the SADC mission to the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo, while reiterating the call for strengthened coordination and harmonization of peace initiatives in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

42. The Regional Committee on the Fight against the Illegal Exploitation of Natural Resources of ICGLR convened its twenty-sixth meeting from 25 to 27 July in Luanda. The Committee reviewed the implementation of the regional initiative on the fight against the illegal exploitation of natural resources and proposed options for a sustainable self-financing mechanism for implementation of the initiative.

43. Following the Extraordinary Summit on 3 June, the Ministers of Defence of ICGLR met on 7 July in Luanda. The meeting was preceded by a meeting of the Chiefs of Defence Staff on 5 July. The Ministers of Defence called upon the Expanded Joint Verification Mechanism and the ICGLR ad hoc verification mechanism to conduct verification missions to investigate the accusations made by the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Rwanda, respectively, regarding supporting armed groups to destabilize the other country.

### **C. International commitments**

44. The international community continued to support regional peace efforts, notably the Luanda and Nairobi processes. From 14 to 17 March, representatives from several partner countries participated in the planning workshop for the Nairobi IV consultations, held in Naivasha, Kenya.

45. The International Contact Group for the Great Lakes Region convened on 24 March and 26 June to discuss recent developments in the region, as well as options for strengthening diplomatic efforts in support of a political solution to the current crisis in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

46. Efforts to promote concerted resource mobilization in support of ongoing regional peace processes also continued as further outlined in section V.B. below.

## **IV. Implementation of the action plan of the United Nations Strategy for Peace Consolidation, Conflict Prevention and Conflict Resolution in the Great Lakes Region**

47. On 28 March, the Special Envoy for the Great Lakes Region and his Office organized, together with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Belgium, consultations on the regional strategy between the United Nations and key partners and donors in Brussels. The consultations provided an opportunity for United Nations entities to

give an update on progress made in the implementation of the regional strategy's flagship initiatives and related funding gaps. The event also offered a platform for engaging with European Union representatives on options to enhance synergy between the regional strategy and the strategy of the European Union for the Great Lakes Region, adopted on 20 February.

## **A. Promoting dialogue and strengthening trust**

48. The Special Envoy for the Great Lakes Region continued to provide his good offices in the region in support of a de-escalation of tensions and negotiated political solutions to the persistent crisis linked to instability in eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo. In his engagements with senior government officials from Angola, Burundi, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Kenya, Rwanda and Uganda, he reiterated the imperative need for a holistic approach based on dialogue and non-military measures, to complement ongoing military efforts, and emphasized the need to fully implement the commitments made under the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework, as well as the decisions of the Luanda and Nairobi processes.

49. The Special Envoy continued to support the Nairobi and Luanda processes. In addition to providing political, technical and financial support to the planning workshop in Naivasha, in close collaboration with the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO), the Special Envoy and his Office engaged with the EAC facilitator and his team on several occasions, including as members of the technical team tasked with identifying solutions to the challenges in the M23 cantonment process. In order to enable alignment between the Nairobi process and the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework, the Special Envoy facilitated the participation of the EAC facilitator in the eleventh high-level meeting of the Regional Oversight Mechanism. He also participated in the tenth Extraordinary ICGLR Summit of 3 June and the quadripartite summit of 27 June to sustain United Nations support to peace efforts in the region.

50. The Special Envoy continued his regular consultations with Government officials in Angola in support of the Luanda process, advocating enhanced coordination with the Nairobi process, and offering support to regional efforts aimed at encouraging rapprochement between the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Rwanda.

51. Following the announcement on 8 May by the SADC Organ Troika of the deployment of an SADC force to eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo, the Special Envoy visited Namibia and Botswana on 23 and 30 May, where he was received by the President of Namibia and Chair of the SADC Troika, and by the SADC Executive Secretary, respectively. The Special Envoy called for coordination of efforts in support of the ongoing political and diplomatic initiatives led by Angola and EAC.

52. In line with the decisions of the eleventh high-level meeting of the Regional Oversight Mechanism, the Special Envoy further supported efforts towards the revitalization of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework. Following consultations with Burundi, as current Chair of the Mechanism, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and other key stakeholders, the Office of the Special Envoy hired a team of consultants to undertake an independent assessment of the implementation of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework. The ongoing assessment includes extensive consultations initiated in July with national, regional and international stakeholders, together with several missions in the region, as well as virtual interactions on progress and challenges in the implementation of the

national, regional and international commitments. The findings will be presented at a retreat of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework signatory countries and guarantor institutions, to be convened by the Office of the Special Envoy in cooperation with the Office of the High Representative of the Chairperson of the African Union for the Great Lakes Region, facilitated by the South African think tank, African Centre for the Constructive Resolution of Disputes, at a date to be determined.

53. The Special Envoy and his Office also engaged with the new leadership of the National Oversight Mechanism in the Democratic Republic of the Congo with a view to further enhancing collaboration on key issues related to the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework and offered, at their request, support for joint engagements with the Burundian authorities, as current Chair of the Regional Oversight Mechanism.

## **B. Reducing the threat posed by foreign armed groups**

54. As part of flagship initiative 4 of the regional strategy's action plan, the Special Envoy dispatched an assessment mission from 23 March to 1 April to Burundi, Rwanda and Uganda to assess the countries' needs and capacities in terms of disarmament, demobilization, repatriation, reintegration and resettlement of foreign ex-combatants. Comprising representatives from different United Nations entities and external partners, the mission was organized in follow-up to the first mission of the operational cell of the Contact and Coordination Group on non-military measures to Goma in September 2022, through which the cell received indications from armed group members of their wish to repatriate. Against this backdrop, the assessment mission identified existing operational mechanisms; financial and logistical requirements, including shortfalls in this regard; national legal and policy frameworks on disarmament, demobilization and repatriation, as well as critical infrastructure in place for the effective reception and sustainable reintegration of foreign ex-combatants.

55. From 25 April to 12 May, the operational cell conducted its third mission in the region, with visits to Burundi and Rwanda. Building on contacts previously established with elements of Burundian and Rwandan armed groups that are active in South Kivu Province, notably FNL, RED Tabara and Conseil national pour le renouveau et la démocratie (CNRD), the operational cell identified, subject to further verifications, approximately 161 Burundian combatants and their dependants in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, who were willing to disarm and repatriate without political conditions. The Special Envoy subsequently engaged with the Heads of State of Burundi and the Democratic Republic of the Congo on the deployment of a joint mission, together with his Office, MONUSCO and other United Nations entities, to verify the identity of these combatants and agree on the modalities for their disarmament and repatriation. Practical modalities for that mission are yet to be agreed on.

## **C. Promoting sustainable and transparent management of natural resources, as well as trade and investment**

56. The Special Envoy and his Office continued to collaborate closely with ICGLR in support of more sustainable and inclusive management of natural resources. On the margins of the sixteenth annual Forum on Responsible Mineral Supply Chains, organized by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, held in Paris in April, the Special Envoy and the Executive Secretary of ICGLR convened a

side meeting on 28 April with countries in the Great Lakes region and artisanal gold destination countries to discuss strengthening cooperation with partners in support of a more responsible management of the gold supply chain. From 25 to 27 July in Luanda, the Office of the Special Envoy also participated in the twenty-sixth meeting of the Regional Committee on the Fight against the Illegal Exploitation of Natural Resources. From 12 to 15 September, the Office of the Special Envoy co-organized with ICGLR and Congolese authorities in Kinshasa a regional forum on the implementation of the ICGLR artisanal and small-scale mining gold strategy, which resulted in a declaration and recommendations to implement, without delay, a regional mineral tracking system, which is viewed as a sustainable solution for fostering responsible artisanal gold trade in the region.

57. Those efforts were preceded by a workshop, jointly organized by the Office of the Special Envoy, ICGLR and the Government of Uganda, in Kampala from 7 to 9 June, during which a project to support the participation of women and youth in the region's mining sector was launched. The workshop brought together women and youth networks operating in the mineral sector, gender experts and representatives of civil society organizations and the private sector.

58. From 8 to 10 August, a follow-up workshop was held in Lusaka on peer learning and on the sharing of best practices and policies for the inclusion of women and youth in strategic minerals value chains. On 31 July and 1 August, the Office of the Special Envoy, together with the ICGLR Youth Forum, briefed the ICGLR Forum of Parliaments on joint ICGLR-United Nations initiatives to promote the role of women and youth in the sustainable management of natural resources in the region.

59. From 14 to 16 June, the Office of the Special Envoy also participated in the Congolese Mining Week, held in Lubumbashi, during which the Special Envoy reiterated his call upon stakeholders along the value chain, including mining companies and destination countries, to support regional efforts on due diligence. In the context of green energy transition, he further advocated responsible investments in the battery and electric vehicle segment that would open opportunities for local communities and vulnerable groups.

#### **D. Finding durable solutions to forced displacement**

60. In line with flagship initiative 11 of the regional strategy, UNHCR and the Office of the Special Envoy continued to support efforts to revitalize the tripartite mechanism on the return of refugees between the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Rwanda. On 15 May, UNHCR convened a high-level tripartite meeting in Geneva, with the participation of the Office of the Special Envoy. A technical-level follow-up meeting was held on 26 and 27 June in Nairobi (see sect. III.C above). Together with ICGLR, UNHCR also organized, from 25 to 27 July in Nairobi, a conference on the eradication of statelessness and access to legal identity documentation in the Great Lakes region. Participants underscored the need for continued awareness-raising with and advocacy to governments to address the issue of statelessness and advance the implementation of related national action plans.

61. In accordance with flagship initiative 13, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) continued to provide multisectoral assistance to persons affected by displacement and to host communities. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, IOM supported the rehabilitation and construction of community infrastructure so as to improve access to education and vocational training in villages of return. In Burundi, IOM enhanced the absorption capacities of host communities through better access to basic services and livelihood opportunities, as well as enhanced access to land.

## **E. Promoting regional preparedness to public health crises**

62. As part of efforts to advance flagship initiative 14, IOM promoted health and hygiene awareness and practices in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and neighbouring EAC countries. IOM also supported the EAC Secretariat in the implementation of the EAC five-year road map for cross-border health programming at points of entry.

## **F. Advancing the inclusion, participation and empowerment of women and youth**

63. In order to help ensure that the voices of women and youth are heard in regional peace processes, the Special Envoy facilitated the participation of the Chair of the ICGLR Regional Women's Forum, Sabine Ntakarutimana, and the Chair for Peace and Security of the ICGLR Regional Youth Forum, Audrine Faith Otieno, at the eleventh meeting of the Regional Oversight Mechanism, in Bujumbura. In their statements, the women and youth representatives called upon the regional leaders to ensure the meaningful and effective representation of women and youth in all peace processes, as well as in the revitalization process of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework. They also stressed the need to strengthen compliance with legislation aimed at ending impunity for violence against women and girls, to develop and implement national action plans on youth and peace and security, and to support youth in developing globally competitive skills for the future. The Heads of State requested Burundi, as Chair of the Mechanism, to organize a platform for dialogue with the women and youth of the region so as to enable their contributions to the region's peace efforts.

64. The Special Envoy also remained engaged in advancing the women and peace and security agenda in the region. On 31 March, the Office of the Special Envoy facilitated a meeting of gender focal points from ICGLR, the United Nations and civil society organizations on regional activities and challenges related to the implementation of the women and peace and security agenda. From 29 August to 2 September, the Office co-organized, with the Special Envoy of the African Union for Women, Peace and Security, MONUSCO and other stakeholders, a joint solidarity mission to the Democratic Republic of the Congo to help strengthen the role of women in addressing peace, security and development challenges affecting the country and the region.

65. On 21 June, the Office of the Special Envoy joined MONUSCO, the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women), ICGLR and ECCAS in a seminar on women's participation and leadership in peacebuilding. Participants identified strategies to increase women's peacebuilding efforts in volatile contexts. Prior to that, the Office of the Special Envoy took part in an International Women's Forum for Peace and Democracy, convened on 25 and 26 May in Luanda, at the initiative of the President of Angola, Mr. Lourenço. These engagements supported by the Office of the Special Envoy helped to further strengthen regional networks to advance the women and peace and security agenda.

## **G. Promotion and protection of human rights and the fight against impunity**

66. In follow-up to the Kinshasa Declaration on Enhancing Judicial Cooperation in the Great Lakes Region, adopted by the Ministers of Justice of ICGLR member States on 16 June 2022, and consultations with Congolese interlocutors between November

and December 2022, the Office of the Special Envoy supported further consultations between May and June in Burundi, the Central African Republic, South Sudan and Uganda, in close cooperation with the Office of Rule of Law and Security Institutions of the Department of Peace Operations, ICGLR and the Chair of the Great Lakes Judicial Cooperation Network. As a result, several cross-border priority cases were identified, including crimes related to the illicit exploitation of natural resources. In June, the Office of the Special Envoy organized virtual meetings with judicial authorities in Rwanda and Uganda. The meetings formed part of the Special Envoy's ongoing support to accelerate effective follow-up by ICGLR member States to the Kinshasa Declaration.

67. These consultations helped to better identify the existing capacity-building needs of the respective countries around regional judicial cooperation. Follow-up consultations continued with partners, including MONUSCO and the International Institute for Justice and the Rule of Law, with a view to identifying training and capacity-building opportunities, at both the national and regional levels.

## **V. Partnerships with regional organizations and mechanisms, international partners and United Nations system entities**

### **A. Regional organizations and mechanisms**

68. The Office of the Special Envoy continued its close collaboration with regional and subregional organizations. In addition to engaging the African Union and the other guarantor institutions on the revitalization of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework, the Office provided support to EAC in the context of the Nairobi process and to ICGLR, through joint initiatives on judicial cooperation, women and peace and security, and the fight against the illicit exploitation of and trade in natural resources. Among other efforts, the Office of the Special Envoy supported the recruitment of two experts to strengthen the EAC secretariat contribution to the Nairobi process. The Office of the Special Envoy also took part in a conference for border communities on peaceful coexistence and regional integration, organized by EAC on 3 July in Kajiado, Kenya.

### **B. International partners**

69. The Special Envoy continued to engage with international partners, including in Brussels, Moscow, Paris, New York and Washington, D.C. On 22 March, he convened a meeting with representatives of the diplomatic community in Nairobi to discuss recent developments in the region, as well as progress made in the implementation of the United Nations Strategy for Peace Consolidation, Conflict Prevention and Conflict Resolution in the Great Lakes Region. The meeting preceded consultations with international partners and donors in Brussels, from 27 to 29 March.

### **C. Other United Nations system entities**

70. The Special Envoy continued to collaborate closely with other United Nations entities in the region. In addition to regular exchanges, the Special Envoy and the Special Representative for the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Head of MONUSCO further strengthened collaboration and alignment through the establishment of a biweekly coordination mechanism. From 14 to 17 March, the Office of the Special Envoy took part, in Libreville, in the ninth annual meeting of the heads of United Nations presences in Central Africa, convened by the Special

Representative for Central Africa and Head of the United Nations Regional Office for Central Africa. Participants discussed entry points for conflict prevention and agreed on the importance of enhancing cooperation and coordination in the context of the situation in the region.

71. From 15 to 19 May, the Office of the Special Envoy attended the fifty-fifth session of the United Nations Standing Advisory Committee on Security Questions in Central Africa, held in Sao Tome and Principe. The Committee reviewed the political and security situation in Central Africa and adopted a declaration on refugees and forced displacement in the region.

72. In order to further enhance collaboration through the United Nations Strategy for Peace Consolidation, Conflict Prevention and Conflict Resolution in the Great Lakes Region, the Office of the Special Envoy participated in a workshop on the next common country analysis of Rwanda, which was held from 17 to 20 May and organized by the Resident Coordinator in Rwanda. The workshop contributed to increasing understanding of the interlinkages between national and regional dynamics.

73. On 5 and 6 July, the Office of the Special Envoy organized a biannual political coordination meeting in Nairobi, bringing together United Nations entities from the region as well as representatives of regional policy think tanks. Discussions focused on current dynamics and emerging trends in the region and options for strengthening United Nations support to regional peace efforts. A follow-up virtual meeting was convened on 31 August to share updates and agree on joint recommendations for the consideration of United Nations senior leadership in the region.

## **VI. Observations**

74. Peace efforts in the Great Lakes region have reached an important juncture. I welcome the increased engagement by regional leaders to address the persistent crisis in eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo and related positive regional dynamics, as illustrated by the series of high-level meetings over the past few months. Under the leadership of the Presidents of Angola, Burundi and Namibia, as well as the former President of Kenya, important steps were taken to deepen regional ownership for solutions to conflict, and to further strengthen coordination between ongoing and planned regional peace initiatives.

75. The full deployment of the EAC regional force, the decision to deploy an SADC mission to the Democratic Republic of the Congo and efforts to advance progress in the cantonment of M23, including through the planned deployment of Angolan troops, bear testament to the unwavering commitment of the region to restore peace and stability. It is now critical to ensure that these initiatives are well aligned and mutually reinforcing, and that they result in the genuine implementation of the commitments undertaken by all countries in the region, as well as the actual cessation of armed conflict by all armed groups in eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo. I welcome the outcome of the quadripartite summit held in Luanda on 27 June and encourage the African Union and all key stakeholders to pursue the implementation of the decisions made by the summit.

76. I welcome the recent decrease in cross-border security incidents between the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Rwanda. Nevertheless, I remain deeply concerned about the heightened tensions and rhetoric between both countries. I call upon the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Rwanda to exercise continued restraint, maintain dialogue and fully implement their respective commitments under the Luanda process, making use of available regional mechanisms to decrease tensions and improve their relations on a sustainable basis.

77. I note that the cessation of hostilities between M23 and the Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo still holds. At the same time, the overall prevailing situation remains fragile and calls for heightened vigilance, as well as concerted efforts to prevent a return to hostilities. The surge in violence in several parts of eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo, including gender-based violence, is deeply disturbing and must stop. I strongly condemn attacks by armed groups in eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo and reiterate my call upon all Congolese and foreign armed groups to immediately and unconditionally lay down their arms and engage without delay in the disarmament process. I also urge M23 to fully withdraw from all occupied areas, and to comply with the decisions of the Luanda road map.

78. I welcome the progress made on non-military measures to address negative forces in eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo, through the efforts of Burundi, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Rwanda, Uganda and the United Republic of Tanzania, as members of the Contact and Coordination Group on non-military measures. The early indications of such progress from the contact and reconnaissance missions of the operational cell of the Contact and Coordination Group are illustrated by the willingness of some foreign armed group members to disarm, demobilize and repatriate to their countries of origin, without conditions. This opportunity must be seized. I urge the concerned countries to rapidly scale up their national disarmament, demobilization and reintegration capacities so as to effectively receive and support ex-combatants and their dependants.

79. The worsening humanitarian situation in the region is deeply concerning. Millions of people need humanitarian assistance, with numbers still rising. I am concerned by reports of continued human rights violations and abuses and the continued use of hate speech and incitement to violence. I reiterate that all those responsible for such acts must be held to account.

80. I urge all actors to remain focused and coordinate efforts on finding a political solution to the current crisis in eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo. Experience has shown that military solutions alone are short-lived and fail to build strong and durable peace. Political will, good faith and a genuine desire to end needless suffering are needed from all stakeholders in order to make a meaningful difference. These are the underpinnings of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework for the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the region, which reminds us of the imperative of addressing, at all levels, the underlying causes and drivers of conflict.

81. My Special Envoy will continue to support such efforts through good offices, advocacy and other support. He will also continue to promote the participation of women and youth in political processes so as to ensure that their voices are heard.

82. The relatively stable and improving relations between several countries in the region, including efforts to consolidate cross-border cooperation on economic activities, are encouraging and will ultimately reduce the tendency for conflict in the region.

83. I encourage continued efforts to address the illicit exploitation of and trade in natural resources from eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo and the region, which remains a key factor in the current crisis in the country. The rising demand for and prices of critical minerals provides an opportunity to strengthen responsible investments in the mining sector and can help support structural transformation of economies of the region.

84. I wish to thank the Special Envoy for the Great Lakes Region for his support for regional peace efforts and for the implementation of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework.