

THE QUEST FOR PEACE, STABILITY AND DEVELOPMENT IN THE GREAT LAKES REGION CONTINUES DESPITE THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC



The momentum in the Great Lakes region towards positive and sustainable change continued in 2020, despite the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and, related thereto, a temporary slowdown of some regional initiatives. Efforts by countries in the region to rebuild trust and resolve tensions through diplomatic means testified to their sustained commitment to advance bilateral and regional cooperation in pursuit of peace, stability, and development.

In support of these positive dynamics, the United Nations Special Envoy for the Great Lakes engaged national authorities and regional partners through virtual consultations and shuttle diplomacy efforts. Following the easing of travel restrictions in September, he visited Angola, Burundi, the Republic of Congo, the DRC, Rwanda, and Uganda with a view to facilitating dialogue, building confidence, strengthening partnerships, and encouraging regional solidarity in the face of COVID-19. He also consulted his interlocutors on the Regional Strategy, which, inter alia, reaffirmed the importance of building trust and promoting inclusive political processes in efforts to advance peace, stability, and development.

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The Special Envoy continued his advocacy for peaceful, transparent, credible, and inclusive elections, in accordance with the African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance, which are indispensable for strengthening good governance, the rule of law and socio-economic development. Moreover, the African Charter is also an instrument that has the potential of creating opportunities for enhanced regional stability and cooperation on issues of common concern, such as the persistent threats of negative forces.

Other key political developments, reflecting the recognition by international stakeholders of progress made by countries in the region, include the removal of Sudan, after almost 30 years, from the United States list of 'State Sponsors of Terrorism'; the decision by the UN Security Council to end mandatory reporting on the situation in Burundi; and the lifting of some sanctions against Burundi by the European Union. These decisions create conducive conditions for the resumption of financial and technical assistance between these countries and external partners as well as multilateral organizations.

While the region continues to face numerous challenges, some exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, important groundwork has been laid over the past months towards resolving tensions and re-establishing trust as prerequisites for effective regional cooperation in line with the spirit and the letter of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework agreement for the DRC and the region.