

TOWARDS A COMPREHENSIVE APPROACH TO ARMED GROUPS IN THE GREAT LAKES REGION



Supporting the Great Lakes region in addressing the threats posed by armed groups is a key priority for the Special Envoy and his Office. While the overall security situation in the region remained relatively stable in 2020, the activities of armed groups, both foreign and local, particularly in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), continued to fuel human suffering and movements of population as well as to hamper sustainable development and strain relations among neighbouring countries, thus having an overall negative impact on regional stability. Armed groups also continued to contribute to and benefit from an illegal conflict economy centered on the region's abundant natural resources, with adverse effects on development, governance, human rights, and security.

To facilitate further progress towards the neutralization of armed groups, the Office of the Special Envoy has been pursuing a two-track approach. The first is focused on building confidence and promoting enhanced collaboration among the intelligence and security services of countries at the core of the region. The second is geared towards strengthening the capacities of regional mechanisms, notably the Expanded Joint Verification Mechanism of the International Conference on the Great Lakes region (ICGLR), which is mandated, inter alia, to investigate cross-border security incidents within the Great Lakes region and support their peaceful resolution.

In this regard, consultations initiated in 2019 among the chiefs of military intelligence of Burundi, DRC, Rwanda, the United Republic of Tanzania, and Uganda, as well as the Office of the Special Envoy - together with the African Union and ICGLR, among others - helped build consensus among key stakeholders on the need for a comprehensive approach to the neutralization of armed groups, which combines military and non-military measures.

A major step forward was the endorsement of a Contact Coordination Group (CCG) by the chiefs of intelligence and security services during their third meeting, co-organized by the Office of the Special Envoy, on 3 February 2020 in Nairobi, Kenya, and by the Heads of State and Government

of ICGLR member states during their eighth high-level Summit on 20 November. The CCG, once also endorsed at the next Summit of the Regional Oversight Mechanism (ROM), will be tasked with coordinating the implementation of non-military measures. The group will include experts and representatives from the countries concerned, the guarantors of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework and representatives of civil society.

While the COVID-19 pandemic slowed down some efforts on regional security cooperation, including through the postponement of the tenth ROM Summit, the Special Envoy continued to engage leaders of the region to encourage their sustained commitment to the CCG and to promote the establishment of critical national and regional disarmament, demobilization and reintegration frameworks.