

**Ms. Söder (Sweden):**

I have the honour to speak on behalf of the Nordic countries — Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and my own country, Sweden. Let me also mention that Sweden is presently chairing the International Contact Group on the Great Lakes Region, and I am happy to be accompanied today by our Special Envoy, Ambassador Lena Sund, who is also Ambassador to Angola.

At the outset, let me thank you, Mr. President, for this important initiative, which comes at a critical juncture but also at a moment of renewed opportunity for the Great Lakes region. I would also like to express my appreciation for the valuable testimonies made earlier by ministers from the region, as well as for the briefings by the Secretary-General, the African Union Commissioner for Peace and Security and the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for the Great Lakes Region.

For too long, tension and conflict have been far too common in the Great Lakes region, resulting in suffering for millions of people. We need to do more than just manage crisis and its consequences. We need to collectively support and strengthen international and regional efforts to prevent conflict by addressing the root causes of conflict. That includes a wide range of issues, such as socioeconomic needs, climate change, good governance and human rights, just to name a few, all of which are fundamental elements for building sustainable peace, long-term stability and development. The now three-year-old Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework for the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Region includes such a broad agenda. It recognizes that peace and development are two sides of the same coin and has tangible plans and actions of fundamental importance to reduce fragility in the region. Let me touch upon three areas that we believe deserve particular attention.

First, with regard to the role of regional organizations, the Nordic countries have consistently advocated for strengthened cooperation between the United Nations and regional organizations, because local ownership is a precondition for legitimacy and effectiveness in peacemaking, as well as in facing other challenges. We welcome and support the increasingly important roles played by the African Union and subregional bodies in the context of the Great Lakes region, in particular the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region (ICGLR). We encourage their stronger partnerships and their institutionalized collaboration with the United Nations.

Secondly, the lack of jobs and economic opportunities fuel conflict. We have already recognized that only in partnership with the private sector will we be able to realize the Sustainable Development Goals and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and advance the Paris Agreement on Climate Change. We are therefore encouraged by the Private Sector Investment Conference for the Great Lakes Region, which was arranged jointly by the United Nations and the ICGLR last month. The role of the World Bank and the African Development Bank in promoting economic growth should also be recognized.

It is important to note that Governments and businesses have a responsibility in securing decent work conditions, combating corruption and promoting human rights and environmental standards so that economic growth leads to sustainable economic, social and environmental development. The importance of good governance and predictable framework conditions for investments and private sector development cannot be emphasized enough. Let me echo what Said Djinnit said earlier about the importance of how natural resources can serve countries and peoples and not become a scourge or continue to be one. The region has much potential. There are ample opportunities for economic growth and job creation.

Thirdly, on the role of women, we emphasize the importance of the full and active participation of women in the prevention, the management and the resolution of conflicts, as well

as in post-conflict efforts and cooperation. In the experience of the Nordic countries, the genuine participation of women in all aspects of life, in all aspects of peacemaking, is an indispensable foundation for sustainable development. The Great Lakes region has shown leadership in ensuring women's participation in decision-making. In that particular regard the example of Rwanda stands out, with now around 50 per cent women members of Parliament.

Let me turn to the developments in Burundi. We remain deeply concerned about the reports of violence and the risk that economic decline could become an additional driver of the crisis. We welcome the strong regional leadership by the East African Community and the African Union, President Museveni and former President Mkapa, with the support of the United Nations. We were pleased to learn that the African Union and the Government of Burundi have agreed to increase the number of human rights and military observers. Impartial monitoring can help clarify allegations and ease tensions, and thereby prevent the escalation of the conflict and help create an enabling environment for dialogue. We believe that a political solution can be found, and strongly encourage all parties to refrain from using language that will encourage divisions along ethnic lines.

Let me conclude by emphasizing that the Nordic countries will remain committed to the people of the Great Lakes region. That commitment goes back to the 1960s, when the then Secretary-General Dag Hammarskjöld so tragically paid with his life when trying to make peace in the war-torn region. We now look forward to cooperating with the country to realize the great potential of the Great Lakes region.

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