

Mr. Ybañez (Spain) (spoke in Spanish):

I would like to begin by thanking Angola and in particular you, Foreign Minister Chikoti, for the organizing today's open debate, which is of the utmost importance and topicality. I also extend my thanks to the SecretaryGeneral, the Commissioner for Peace and Security of the African Union, the Special Envoy of the SecretaryGeneral and the representative of the World Bank for their valuable contributions.

A well-known African proverb affirms that when two elephants fight the grass gets hurt. The Great Lakes region continues to experience some of the worst conflicts currently ravaging the African continent. The region has not completed its search for the path of peace, stability and prosperity, and it is the population that is suffering the consequences. In recent decades, the structural transformation of the Great Lakes has been spectacular. In the 1990s, we witnessed a brutal genocide in Rwanda, followed by a cruel war in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. In 2013, we witnessed the signing of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework for the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Region. The distance between those two events is enormous.

But this transformation is not enough. Or put another way, it has not been completed. The region continues to fail to turn the page on conflict. The constant threat of conflict forces us to look further — to try to understand the deeper forces that persist in a region still suffering from instability and violence despite the still-remarkable progress in stabilization and growth in countries such as Rwanda and various regions of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. In that context, I want to discuss three challenges that we consider to be priorities, namely, democratic governance, inclusive development and regional cooperation.

The first factor is democratic governance. Every peaceful, stable and prosperous society is built upon a social contract that requires leaders to fulfil their responsibilities and provide services to everyone in the civilian population. The democratic mandate is the best instrument we know to fulfil these objectives and is the expression of a fundamental right, namely, the right to political participation, which makes citizens the architects of their own destiny. The absence of governance leads to a vacuum of responsibility and the inability to provide adequate services to the population. The lack of democracy implies the denial of the rights of individuals. In the Great Lakes there is a serious problem of lack of democratic governance. Some countries have made progress in the provision of services to its population, but in several of them elections do not end up becoming an instrument of democratic development and social inclusion. Political participation is an essential instrument for empowering citizens. Today it is essential to ensure that this includes women, who have been traditionally excluded in many societies and who are possibly the greatest force for change in the world. Inclusion and respect for legal procedures are conditions to ensure that electoral processes contribute to peace, stability and prosperity.

Constitutions and the legal order as a whole are frameworks for coexistence that no one can overturn, because all citizens are equal before the law. And the leaders must lead by example. It is essential to respect the provisions and limitations of presidential mandates, since the rotation in power is one of the best safeguards of peace and stability. The most worrisome case at the moment is that of Burundi, which I would like to address in greater detail. Over a year ago, Burundi was poised to be honoured as an example of success in the Great Lakes.

It seemed to be a country able to turn the page on violence and instability and begin writing a history of development and prosperity. In April 2015, that illusion began to unravel. Since then, the number

of dead has not stopped growing. And there are approximately 240,000 Burundian refugees who have been forced to leave the country. This situation can and must end without any further delay. Spain respects the role of African countries as primarily responsible and interested in the prosperity and stability of their continent and believes that, as emphasized by the Presidents of Africa at the African Union Summit in January, it is urgent to have an inclusive and unconditional political dialogue that fully respects the Arusha Agreement and the Constitution of Burundi and enables the parties to reach a broad and generous agreement on the future they want for the Burundian people.

The second fundamental challenge is to achieve inclusive economic and social development that benefits all citizens of the countries of the region. This challenge is also a non-negotiable obligation, for we cannot go on justifying the tens of millions of people living in poverty, the millions of suffering young people whose outlook on the future is marked by hopelessness and the lack of opportunity, and the millions of women suffering from attacks on their lives and integrity and living excluded from economic and social participation in a region that is extraordinarily rich.

Let us take the case of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The country has enormous resources of all kinds, valuable deposits of minerals, fertile soil and plentiful water resources — in a world where water and energy are two of the most precious assets. With the support of the international community, the Democratic Republic of the Congo can and should move forward in combating the illegal exploitation of its resources, especially in the eastern part of the country. We must move from armed groups to the generating of tax revenues and from violence and corruption to the construction of schools and hospitals and the creation of decent jobs for young people.

The question now is how to unlock the energies that still prevent the achievement of the future that the people deserve. In part, this question has been answered — through democratic governance. It is crucial for the institutional strength of the State to reach those areas that today remain outside the control of the law. In those places where the State is not present, where the law is not respected, violations of human rights and illegal exploitation of natural resources go hand in hand. The State must return to those regions or newly appear in areas where it could not be found previously. In other words, it is necessary that there be a fair and inclusive electoral process and that constitutional parameters be adjusted. We look forward to the country's upcoming elections. They will be the best way to measure the maturity of the people and institutions of Democratic Republic of the Congo. We have confidence in them.

The third major challenge for the Great Lakes region is developing effective regional cooperation that is able to ensure that the countries of the region come together to achieve a better future and that they share the benefits of prosperity. The Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework for the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Region is the key reference point for all efforts, and its provisions must be fully respected by all its signatories. In particular, it is crucial that no country tolerate or assist any armed group in any way. I would to mention in that regard the recent agreement on the resumption of military cooperation between the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) and the (Forces armées de la République démocratique du Congo, which is an excellent development and which, we trust, will soon begin to bear fruit. We must recognize the crucial role played by MONUSCO in helping Congolese society achieve the goals I mentioned earlier. With respect to the repatriation of the former combatants of the Mouvement du 23 mars, we agree with the Secretary-General's encouragement that the countries of the region decisively move forward pursuant to the Nairobi Declarations.

Finally, I would like to express my concern about reports of the recruitment, training and infiltration of a group of Burundian rebels in neighbouring countries for the purposes of carrying out attacks

against Burundi. As I said earlier, the situation in Burundi is extremely serious, and the work of the countries of the region is essential to finding a peaceful solution to the crisis. In the past, episodes of mass violence in the Great Lakes region have been closely interconnected, and there is no reason to think that the dynamics have changed today. For humanitarian reasons, but also for self-interest, all countries in the region must make every possible effort to bring an end to this conflict, which casts a dark shadow over the present and the future of the region. The voice of the African Union and its capacity to maintain peace on the continent are extremely important in that respect and must be heard clearly and firmly.

I began my statement by citing an African proverb, and wish to conclude it by quoting another: “In order to cross a bridge you must first reach it.” After a few decades of uncertainty, the Great Lakes region has now reached its bridge and has all the capacities it needs to cross it, leaving a past of violence and instability behind it once and for all. The international community’s could be of great assistance, but in the final analysis the countries of the region are masters of their own destinies. The challenge is so huge that there is no room for doubt or hesitation, and requires all their energy and commitment. The present moment is highly complex, but the future of peace and stability that we seek for the region is within our reach. Let us move forward.

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