

Ms. Power (United States of America):

I thank Foreign Minister Chikoti for being here today and for hosting this timely debate on an incredibly important set of issues. Let me also thank Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, Commissioner Chergui, Special Envoy Djinnit and Mr. Pillai of the World Bank for their remarks and determined work throughout the Great Lakes region.

The Great Lakes Private Sector Investment Conference, co-hosted by Special Envoy Djinnit's Office in Kinshasa last month, spoke to the economic and security gains made across the region over the last decade. That progress is tenuous and fragile, and there is still a long way to go. The trajectory over the past several years, however, has clearly been positive. I would like to use my remarks to underscore the inextricable connection linking democratic accountability, human rights and the rule of law, on the one hand, and economic progress and lasting stability and peace, on the other.

On the very same day that the Great Lakes Private Sector Investment Conference began, a court in the Democratic Republic of the Congo ruled on the case of six young activists — five men and one woman — who had been charged with attempting to incite civil disobedience. They had been arrested eight days earlier at a private home in Goma at 4.30 in the morning as they prepared banners for a general strike to protest potential election delays. One of the banners read "in 2016 we won the Cup" — in reference to the African nation's soccer championship — "we can also win democracy". They were convicted and sentenced to two years in jail, a term reduced, on appeal, to six months.

The Democratic Republic of the Congo is not the only country in the region where civil society is threatened or where democratic processes are being deliberately undermined. This unfortunately has been the accelerating trend in recent months, evident at the top, where leaders make increasingly blatant power grabs to remain in office, and on the streets, where their Governments close media outlets, arrest opposition members, intimidate civil society groups and otherwise squeeze the political space available for competing views. This widening disregard for democratic processes threatens to undermine the political security and development progress achieved over the past two decades, and it imperils the progress still to come. It defies the ability of citizens to freely choose their leaders and hold them accountable. It drives them into the streets or out of the country. It threatens to plunge communities back into the cycle of poverty and violence, from which many are only now beginning to emerge.

Let me speak briefly to the situation in four countries where this trend is most pronounced and where there is still time to change course.

The economic achievements of President Kagami's Rwanda are well known and rightly celebrated. Per capita income has doubled since the year 2000. Rwanda's advances on the Human Development Index are greater than any other country in the world over the past 25 years. It has become a leader in international peacekeeping, in numbers as well as in performance, with its forces admired for their bravery and their commitment to civilian protection. When one reflects on the horrors of the genocide that killed approximately 800,000 Tutsi and moderate Hutu 22 years ago next month, one sees the epic scale of the achievements by President Kagami and by the Rwandan people. The results on the ground for Rwandans are remarkable. Unfortunately, despite Rwanda's progress on economic rights, women's right, and on so many development axes, its record in the protection and promotion of civil and political rights is less impressive. The United States remains deeply committed to its partnership with Rwanda, but the continued absence of political space and the inability of individuals and journalists to discuss political affairs or report on issues of public concern pose a serious risk to

Rwanda's future stability. Rwanda can achieve lasting peace and prosperity through a Government centred on the principle of democratic accountability, not one centred on any single individual.

The same applies in Uganda. Uganda is a critical contributor to peace and security, especially through its long-time contribution to the African Union force in Somalia. It is also a generous host to more than 500,000 refugees, providing the right to work and access to social services to refugees and Ugandan citizens alike. However, when it comes to democratic accountability, the run-up and aftermath to last month's elections show real issues. The Government and its security forces detained opposition figures without legal justification, harassed their supporters and intimidated the media. It passed legislation restricting the operations of non-governmental organizations, banning them from acting against the "interests of Uganda". President Museveni's actions contravene the rule of law, jeopardize Uganda's democratic progress and threaten Uganda's future stability and prosperity.

In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, President Kabila appears to be considering a similar path. His country remains one of the poorest in the world, but it has begun to see gains in democracy, stability and economic growth. In 2014, its economy grew by 9.5 per cent. Yet as President Kabila's term nears its end, that fragile progress hangs in the balance. Continued development depends upon further advances against armed groups and the extension of State authority. And, of course, it depends on free and fair presidential elections in November. There is no credible reason that the Democratic Republic of the Congo's elections would not occur on schedule. The Independent National Electoral Commission said in January that it would need 18 months to update voter rolls. But election experts assure us that it can be done in six months. As the representative of a country that continues to debate its own electoral processes, I recognize that elections are not always perfect, and certainly not always easy, but fidelity to the Constitution — not to mention longterm stability — means that elections must occur on time. Not only must ballots be cast, but individuals must be allowed to campaign for their preferred candidates and express their opinions freely. There is no excuse for the harassment and detention of peaceful activists and opposition leaders in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, like the six activists I mentioned earlier or the 18 other members of the pro-democracy youth movement known as LUCHA, who were detained last Tuesday and held for four days. Their offence was peacefully protesting the Supreme Court's refusal to release two activists, Fred Bauma and Yves Makwambala, who were arrested a year ago and still have yet to receive a trial. It should go without saying that this is not the path to lasting stability. Fred, Yves, the Goma six and all the other young people who have done nothing more than seek a better future for their country should be released. The Government's attempt to limit its cooperation with the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo in order to force a reduction of troops is also concerning. Let us be clear: the Council should not allow peacekeeping missions to become pawns in political games. When Blue Helmets are deployed, they must be allowed to fulfil their mandate, in the Democratic Republic of the Congo or any place else.

We need look no further than Burundi to see the dangers of pursuing personal power over the interests of the people. Burundi's economy grew steadily for a decade, but contracted by an estimated 7 per cent last year. President Nkurunziza's decision to stay in office, in defiance of the Arusha Accords, and his crackdown on political opposition have swiftly undone the country's progress of recent years. That is evident in the widespread reports of sexual violence, the more than 400 people who have been killed, the over 250,000 that have fled the country and the even more challenging economic times that, unfortunately, lie ahead. What remains to be seen is whether President Nkurunziza will take decisive action to correct course. Some of his Government's recent commitments are encouraging, but none have yet been matched by meaningful action. Of the 2,000 prisoners he pledged to free, just 158 have been released to date, and only 47 of those were political prisoners. Two of the five radio

stations shuttered have been allowed to re-open. But that is just two of the five, and one of those allowed to re-open is pro-Government. We will welcome and support constructive steps when we see them. But rhetoric is not enough.

Let me conclude. The United States has historically been a strong partner of all four of those countries, as it has been for others in the region. Those partnerships are not tied to any particular individual leader, but to the people of those countries. This has been evident in our long-standing aid programmes, our efforts to encourage stability and our commitment to institution-building. It is evident, too, in our strong support for the PublicPrivate Alliance for Responsible Minerals Trade, which we hope will enable supply-chain solutions that encourage the legitimate trade in natural resources. All four of the leaders I have mentioned today have led their countries through extraordinarily difficult times, but the choices they make now will determine whether their countries' gains are sustained and how they themselves will be remembered decades from now. President Obama told an audience in Ethiopia last year, "Sometimes you'll hear leaders say, well, I'm the only person who can hold this nation together. If that's true, then that leader has failed to truly build their nation."

Those nations are ready. If they are given opportunities to fully participate in democratic processes, to hold their leaders accountable, to be subjected to and benefit from the rule of law, they will not merely survive, they will prosper.

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