

Mr. Chergui (spoke in French):

At the outset, on behalf of the presidency of the Commission of the African Union, allow me to express the deep gratitude of the African Union to Angola, which holds the presidency of the Security Council for the month of March 2016, for scheduling this debate on the Great Lakes region. I would like to thank the Angolan presidency for the opportunity to address the Council.

I would also like to take this opportunity to once again express the gratitude of the African Union to Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon for his personal commitment to Africa, as well as for his unstinting support, not only to the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework for the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Region, signed in Addis Ababa on 24 February 2013, but more generally for the initiatives he has taken in favour of peace, stability and prosperity in the Great Lakes region. His loyalty to the principles and founding goals of the United Nations naturally led him most recently to the Western Sahara in order to provide the necessary impetus to the peace process so that we can finally achieve the objective for which the United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara was established, namely, the organization of a referendum on self-determination for the Saharan people.

That was also the reason behind the Secretary-General's recent visit to Burundi and to the Democratic Republic of the Congo in the month of February in the context of the extension of the mission of Security Council members from 21 to 22 January in Bujumbura. The Secretary-General's visit to Burundi on 25 and 26 February was followed by a high-level delegation made up of five Heads of State and Government of the African Union within the framework of supporting the country to emerge from the spiral of violence that had enveloped it since April 2015. That visit also underscores the unanimous vision and the complementarity of action between the African Union and the United Nations when it comes to Burundi.

The Great Lakes region faces numerous security and humanitarian challenges that are mainly linked to the results of the activities of the negative forces operating in the region. They have taken the development of the region as hostage and encouraged the illegal trafficking of natural resources, thus adding to the poverty of the population and preventing development, which is unsustainable. However, thanks to the efforts of the countries of the region, supported by bilateral and multilateral partners, significant progress has been made, namely, since the signing of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Agreement. The most outstanding progress is the neutralization of the Mouvement du 23 mars (M-23), the signing of the Nairobi Declarations, on 12 December 2014, as well as the organization of the Private Sector Investment Conference for the Great Lakes Region held in Kinshasha on 24 and 25 February.

In that regard, we also welcome the resumption of cooperation between the Government of the Democratic Republic of Congo and the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo on joint military operations against the Forces démocratiques pour la libération du Rwanda (FDLR) and the other negative forces that are present in the eastern part of the country. Council members will remember that the Heads of State of the region had encouraged the resumption of that cooperation during the sixth meeting of the follow-up mechanism of the Framework Agreement, which was held here in New York on 29 September 2015.

In that regard, we must also congratulate the co-guarantor organizations of the Framework Agreement — the Southern African Development Community, the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region, the African Union and the United Nations, as well as the two co-chairs of the Technical Support Committee — for their efforts in implementing the Framework Agreement. I

would like to encourage the planned visit by the co-guarantors to Uganda, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Rwanda from 11-25 April, as well as the evaluation mission of the members of the Support Committee to Goma during the same time period. Both those visits would be a part of the decisions that emerged from the second ministerial retreat of Member States and the guarantors of the Framework Agreement, which was held on 28 January in Addis Ababa.

I hope that those initiatives will help us to identify possible solutions to questions linked to the repatriation of ex-combatants of the M-23 cantoned in Rwanda and Uganda, the repatriation of the FDLR cantoned in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, as well as the neutralization of the combatants of the FDLR.

The latest political developments in the Central African Republic are a reason for hope for the African Union and the United Nations, which have spared no effort for the return of stability to that country. That is why I would like to congratulate the transitional authorities for the sound holding of the elections that led to the election of a new democratically elected President as head of the country.

On South Sudan, the signing of the agreement on security arrangements on 3 November 2015 will make it possible to implement the peace agreement signed in August 2015 under the facilitation of Intergovernmental Authority on Development between President Salva Kiir Mayardit and Mr. Riek Machar. I would like to renew our support for the security measures under way to finalize the return of the First Vice-President to Juba, as well as the setting up of a transitional Government. I hope that the return of Mr. Machar to Juba is a matter of days, not of weeks.

The African Union, through its High Representative, President Alpha Oumar Konaré, is continuing its mission to support the peace process under way. I would like to renew the unreserved support of the African Union for the efforts of President Mogae as head of the Joint Monitoring and Evaluation Mission of the Peace Agreement on South Sudan in order to establish peace and to promote both parties' full respect for the ceasefire. That would prevent a worsening of a humanitarian situation, one that is already disturbing, at a time when a large part of the region is experiencing a serious drought and is facing an acute food crisis.

The African Union remains concerned by the security and humanitarian situation in Burundi, where a durable solution would be the holding of an inclusive dialogue, under the facilitation of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), without preconditions, among all the actors in the crisis. In that regard, I am pleased by the ECOWAS appointment of Mr. Benjamin Mkpa as the new facilitator for the Burundi crisis. Mr. Mkpa has just conducted a consultation mission to Bujumbura, Rwanda and Uganda with a view to holding this dialogue as soon as possible.

The African Union, like the United Nations, is committed to providing its entire support to the mediation team in order to provide every opportunity to that dialogue. At the same time, the African Union continues its operation to deploy 200 human rights observers, as well as military experts, approved by the Government of Burundi and the Peace and Security Council of our organization in order to support the dialogue and also to restore a secure environment in the country where human rights and freedom of expression are respected. The very high number of refugees, as well as displaced persons, must also command our full attention.

Given the situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, as the constitutional time line is approaching for the holding of presidential elections, the African Union remains alongside the Democratic Republic of the Congo and intends to support it in every effort to hold inclusive, peaceful, credible, free, just and transparent elections. I welcome the support of the United Nations,

as well as of the entire international community, to the efforts of the facilitator of the African Union, Mr. Mkojo, with a view to holding a political dialogue with the Congolese stakeholders to find solutions with regard to the electoral time line, as well as the actual holding of elections in the Democratic Republic of the Congo in peace and unity.

I cannot conclude without recalling the need for greater promotion of the rights of children and women in the region. Any type of violence against women must stop immediately. And the inclusion of women in conflict prevention, in conflict resolution and in reconstruction is not an act of charity, but rather an investment in a society that would be fair, inclusive and respectful of the rights of everyone and in harmony with the eternal values of Africa.

Finally, I hope the Kinshasa Investment Conference will send a decisive signal on support for cooperation, development and solidarity in combating the ideology of hatred, suspicion and recurring crises in the Great Lakes region.

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