

Mr. Tshibanda N'tungamulongo (Democratic Republic of the Congo) (spoke in French):

First of all, I would like to congratulate you, Sir, on your accession to the presidency of the Security Council for the month of March. I am also particularly pleased to welcome, through you, a kindred friendly country, Angola, with which the Democratic Republic of the Congo has long-standing, excellent relations marked by the seal of reciprocal trust and respect. Next, I want to thank you for having taking the initiative to organize this important debate on the maintenance of international peace and security and the prevention and resolution of conflicts in the Great Lakes region, a theme that reflects the interest that the Security Council has in our region. This meeting allows us to assess the effectiveness of our joint action for peace within our States and between our States, and gives us an opportunity to reflect on ways and means to accomplish that, not just so as to resolve disputes but also, above all, in order to prevent them, with the ultimate goal of bolstering cooperation between the States of the region and thereby usher in an era of lasting peace and stability. Finally, I want to welcome the presence at this meeting of my friends and brothers, Smail Chergui, Commissioner of the African Union for Peace and Security; Maman Sidikou, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for the Democratic Republic of the Congo; and Said Djinnit, Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for the Great Lakes Region, and to commend the way in which they are carrying out their respective tasks.

Today's debate has, above all, the interest of keeping us well aware of the crisis in the region, which, through its unprecedented duration and cost in human lives and the massive destruction of goods and infrastructure and the violation of human rights, not to speak of its humanitarian aspects, constitutes for the leaders and peoples of the African Great Lakes region a test of their sense of responsibility; and for the Security Council and United Nations peacekeeping operations a test of their relevance and effectiveness; and for the world in which we live a measure of its humanity. The participation of the Democratic Republic of the Congo in this debate, as in all previous meetings on the topic, reflects a collective awareness of the challenges and our ongoing willingness to work in concert with other regional and international actors to meet the challenges posed and affirm our determination to shoulder our part of the responsibility to ensure that peace and harmony can return and be consolidated in the region, so that the universality of the principles and values underpinned by the Charter of the United Nations can be shown to be effective and so that the Sustainable Development Goals cease to be an illusion for the people of our country and the peoples of the Great Lakes region.

The recurring conflicts in the Great Lakes region are the result of the convergence of various factors, at the heart of which are the moral and political failings of the elite: the failings of the national elites when it comes to governance, which for a long time has been, and in certain cases remains, characterized by the denial of the fundamental rights of citizens; the patrimonial governance of States and the failure to respect international law, thus opening the path to political instability, social unrest, intercommunal conflicts within States and open conflicts that have engulfed the States of the region. We should also recognize the failure of the elites within the community of nations, which have not always lived up to their historic responsibilities, owing to a lack of courage or to the prevalence of diverging national interests, including at the level of the Security Council. The result has been subjective actions that have been at odds with the rules of international law. Fortunately, despite those failings and their tragic consequences, the spirit of the Charter of the United Nations has always prevailed, and the relevance of the universal Organization has always been there to guide us. The same is true of the aspiration of our populations to better living conditions, as well as the determination of our peoples to control their own destiny, and therefore to protect and preserve their independence and sovereignty, while

respecting, at the national level, the rules of good political, economic and social governance and, at the regional level, respect for the international texts to which their States have subscribed.

That is the context where many initiatives undertaken by the States of the region and the international community belong and should be evaluated, including, in particular, the creation of the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region, the signing of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework Agreement for the Democratic Republic of Congo and the Great Lakes Region and the Security Council's adoption of several relevant resolutions, including resolution 2098 (2013).

The conduct of the Democratic Republic of the Congo in dealing with all these initiatives has been entirely responsible. Out of respect for the regional and international commitments it has undertaken, it has applied itself to implementing them, as it has done with the Framework Agreement and the Nairobi Declarations, despite the fact that implementation of the latter has been obstructed for some time now by the leaders of the former Mouvement du 23 mars. We therefore remain committed to eradicating all the negative forces and armed groups still active on our territory. This fight, which was initially begun by the Forces armées de la République Démocratique du Congo on its own, and whose results are proof of a power and professionalism that grows daily, has continued with the support and cooperation of the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and the military operations have been restarted. I should say that this struggle will not end until the negative forces and armed groups have been completely neutralized.

As witnessed by the excellent results we have had so far, my country has shown the same determination in implementing its national commitments by continuing the reforms under way aimed at consolidating democracy and the rule of law and rebuilding the country and its economic and social development. In order to solidify the State's authority, especially in formerly troubled areas, we have not only deployed the National Police, the public administration and the courts but also strengthened them, resulting in a significant reduction in sexual violence. At the same time, the decentralization provided for by the Constitution has been consolidated through the enactment of a series of laws needed to implement it, by the creation of 26 new provinces and the election, to be held at the end of this week, of new provincial governors and vice-governors.

Where the elections are concerned in particular, it is important to emphasize that we are determined to hold them on schedule, but above all in conditions that will ensure their transparency, credibility and especially peace. In that context, the Independent National Election Commission has been completely reformed and, led by a new team made up of representatives of the majority party, the opposition and civil society, is actively preparing for elections, with one of its priorities being the revision of the electoral register. In order to overcome any obstacles to the process and prevent post-election crises, the Head of State has invited the political classes and civil society to an inclusive political dialogue aimed at achieving a consensus on all the issues dividing them ahead of time. In our view, that is the only smart way in the circumstances, far more so than any unilateral Government decision or solution imposed from outside. We welcome the support to the dialogue provided by the international community.

The Democratic Republic of the Congo's strong involvement in the implementation of regional and international agreements is unfortunately not enough on its own to end the damage done by the negative forces and armed groups, still less to create the conditions needed in the Great Lakes region for peace, stability and prosperity. To do that, and to bring about positive, real and lasting change there, it is essential that the following five factors come together.

The first is that the other States signatories to the various relevant regional and international legal instruments must also be individually required to implement them and to report periodically on that implementation, particularly concerning respect for each State's sovereignty, non-interference in the internal affairs of other States, the promotion of democratic practices, and non-assistance to negative forces and armed groups.

The second is that all States must be sincerely and actively involved in combating those forces and groups, as well as the illegal exploitation of natural resources, within a framework of genuine cooperation on the diplomatic, security and judicial fronts.

The third is that legitimate and necessary promotion of the rule of law and democracy in the States of the region must not be conducted at the expense of the demands of peace and stability, without which there are no real prospects for lasting improvement in the overall situation.

The fourth is that without prejudice to the universality of the principle of good governance, each State's individual circumstances, in terms of challenges and also in efforts made and results obtained, should be taken into account in evaluating its internal situation and the importance of continuing support to it.

The fifth is that policies that incentivize private investment and regional cooperation should be implemented with the aim of achieving balanced and integrated development in the region and thereby providing better job prospects and decent incomes for the countries' populations, particularly women and young people. In that regard, the Government of the Democratic Republic of Congo welcomed the holding in Kinshasa on 24 and 25 February of a conference on private-sector investment in the Great Lakes region. Opened ceremonially by the President of the Republic, the conference was honoured by the personal presence of the Secretary-General and other high-level representatives of the worlds of politics and business from the Great Lakes region and elsewhere. It set the stage we need for peaceful coexistence and shared prosperity in the region by identifying a number of integrational projects in areas such as tourism, with the mountains, landscapes and beautiful locations that abound in Africa's Great Lakes region making it a naturally attractive tourist area. The same applies to the energy sector, with the methane gas that countries in the region have in common and the multiple watercourses that represent possibilities for hydropower development that are just as real. The prospects are similar for development projects for the transport infrastructure that is essential to the stimulation of cross-border trade, intraregional commerce and the economic growth of the countries of the region.

In conclusion, we should acknowledge that war and armed conflict are at the root of the distressing situation in the region, with its legacy of destruction of the economic fabric, of loss of human lives, including 6 million Congolese and of the erosion of mutual trust between the States of the region and their leaders. Whatever the wounds and horrors that have resulted from past suffering, of which we are all aware and which we do not minimize, we cannot stay trapped in dead-end positions indefinitely. That is why we must promote reconciliation and cohesion within our States and peaceful coexistence and cooperation between them. Our history and geography require it, as do the demands of survival and sustainable development. Others before us, in other places, have endured tests similar to ours. Without forgetting anything that had happened, they were still able to renounce indefinite reckless vengeance and a resort to force rather than the force of law to resolve disputes. The prosperity and peaceful understanding of those countries today should be our inspiration.

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