

Mr. Van Bohemen (New Zealand):

I thank the delegation of Angola for organizing this open debate on one of the regions of Africa that has taken up a very large part of the Security Council's time over the past two decades. I also want to thank the briefers, especially Special Envoy Djinnit, Mr. Chergui, and Mr. Pillai of the World Bank, for their helpful briefings on the contributions of their institutions to the ongoing efforts in the Great Lakes region.

In the past two decades, the Great Lakes have witnessed some of the most brutal and devastating conflicts since the Second World War. The genocide in Rwanda in 1994 set in motion events that resulted in three major African wars and the deaths of a further 5 million people in the years that followed. For much of that period, the positions of the international community were characterized by missed opportunities and an inability or unwillingness to act. Africa's institutions have also struggled. Today we are still working through the consequences of those failures. And the costs in terms of lives lost, women and children traumatized, infrastructure shattered and development foregone continue to rise.

We must acknowledge that much work has been done by the African Union, regional organizations and players, the United Nations, the World Bank and intergovernmental and non-governmental actors. There have been bright spots. As the United States Ambassador pointed out, there have been impressive economic gains — in Rwanda in particular, but also in Uganda. As she also noted, however, political developments and human rights have not kept pace and undue weight has been given to the cult of personality, to the detriment of the long-term future of those countries.

Furthermore, we cannot honestly claim to be even close to achieving sustainable peace. In the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo, many of the same militias that played a central role in the previous conflicts continue to operate, largely with impunity, and the potential for violence around the upcoming elections poses serious risks to national and regional stability. In Burundi, we have watched as many of the gains of the past decade, in terms of development and national reconciliation, have crumbled away in a matter of months, while the President of the country and those around him have prioritized their personal ambitions over the good of Burundi, its people and the collective national commitment to reconciliation reflected in the Arusha Accords.

Regional engagement and a focus on confidencebuilding measures are essential for achieving long-term and sustainable solutions. We therefore welcome the United Nations Great Lakes Regional Strategic Framework, which requires a consistent approach to implementation and active follow-up by the countries of the region. We also welcome the Great Lakes plan that was just presented by the Secretary-General. The Security Council must actively support those processes.

During New Zealand's campaign for election to the Council, we heard time and time again that the single greatest priority for improving the Council's effectiveness was to strengthen its performance in the prevention of conflict. However, 10 years on from the adoption of the landmark resolution 1625 (2005), the Council continues to shy away from putting conflict prevention into practice, including in relation to the Great Lakes region.

My delegation recalls the sense of optimism that greeted the establishment in 2002 of the Council's Ad Hoc Working Group on Conflict Prevention and Resolution in Africa. Initially, that Working Group provided practical leadership on specific country situations and pioneered innovative working methods that have since been adopted by the Peacebuilding Commission's country-specific configurations. We would like to see such leadership again.

Since joining the Council, New Zealand has advocated for more serious and effective efforts to address emerging conflict risks. Effective conflict prevention requires a willingness to be flexible and to work patiently and discreetly with national and regional stakeholders. It also requires a genuine commitment by stakeholders to look for solutions, rather than for excuses for delaying engagement. New Zealand argued for early, discreet engagement on the part of the Council in Burundi, including through the dispatch of a mini-mission to support the efforts of the African Union (AU), the Secretariat and regional partners. It took six months for that visit to happen. By that time, the crisis was entrenched, and the scope for quiet diplomacy was seriously diminished.

We cannot afford to allow opportunities for early preventive engagement to slip through our fingers. In our view, there are a number of steps that the Council can take to improve its game.

First, we must find ways to improve the Council's awareness of risks of evolving conflict, so as to enable more timely, consistent and effective attention to its role in managing them. To achieve that, we will need to be open to some changes in our working methods, so as to enable Council members to better engage using a problem-solving mindset. We also need to invest in building a real working relationship with the Department of Political Affairs and to strengthen the quality of information that we receive from the Department and the wider Secretariat.

Secondly, improving our game also means making practical improvements to the Council's willingness and ability to work with regional organizations, particularly the AU, on emerging conflict risks. The Council's interaction with the AU Peace and Security Council in Addis Ababa in January demonstrated the value of such engagement. We need to find ways to make meaningful engagement an everyday habit, particularly in dealing with complex challenges, such as the conflict risks in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and South Sudan. Perhaps the Ad Hoc Working Group could play a greater role there.

Thirdly, both Council members and national and regional stakeholders need to move beyond the current false dichotomy between confrontation and non-intervention, which so often leads to inertia. Early engagement to prevent conflict is both a legitimate and a necessary role for the Council. At the same time, such efforts are more likely to be effective when conducted in a manner that is sensitive to concerns of national sovereignty and when stakeholders see the Council as a body committed to working with them in order to try to resolve real problems. That means proceeding early before problems are entrenched; it means being respectful and genuinely listening to national and regional actors; and it means coming to discussions without political agendas, other than the prevention of conflict and the saving of lives.

Fourthly, in order to be effective in preventing conflict, the Council must take a more inclusive approach, involving the countries concerned, important regional stakeholders and others who can contribute to our discussions in a balanced and collegial way. We think that we should make more use of informal, interactive formats aimed at deepening our political analysis of the issues involved and building shared understanding of the drivers of conflict. If we do not understand the issues properly, we will come up with the wrong solutions.

More broadly, New Zealand remains concerned that the international community and the United Nations itself continue to underfund conflict prevention. The review of peace operations identified the urgent need to shift our focus from investing resources when we respond to crises to the far more cost-effective and humane business of preventing conflict. We call for urgent and favourable consideration by the Fifth Committee of the modest proposals put forward in that regard by the Department of Political Affairs.

We need stronger mediation and analytical capacity in the United Nations, and we need to invest more in regional engagement.

It is vital that we pay close attention to the Great Lakes region in the year ahead, particularly the evolving situations in Burundi and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and that the Council be ready to act — discreetly and sensitively, with the Secretariat and regional partners — to ensure that the people of that region are spared further tragedy so that they can build a future commensurate with the human and natural resource capital of the region.

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