

Security Council Debate on the Situation in the Great Lakes Region: DRC and the Great Lakes, July 25th 2013, Security Council Chamber

Statement by Mr. Quinlan, Permanent Mission of Australia to the United Nations.

I thank the United States delegation for its initiative in convening this debate and to Secretary Kerry for his presence. I also thank the Secretary-General and his Special Envoy for the Great Lakes region, Ms. Mary Robinson, for their sustained engagement and leadership, and of course all the briefers for their insightful remarks.

As the attendance of the participants today indicates, we are at a pivotal moment in the search for durable peace and security in eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Great Lakes region. We should be ashamed by the staggering toll of the conflict: the lives of more than 5, perhaps 6, million people, the displacement of millions more and the subjection of countless men, women and children to horrendous human rights abuses. Today, the Democratic Republic of the Congo is languishing at the bottom of the United Nations Human Development Index.

The Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework provides the best opportunity to definitively break the cycle of violence and instability. We are at a moment of hope because of the leadership and efforts of regional Governments and organizations, working in close cooperation with the United Nations and the Secretary-General himself, and now with the World Bank.

The potential genius of the Framework is that, for the first time, all the relevant parties have made clear commitments to integrate political, security and development efforts — a nexus that is essential to tackling the root causes of instability. The recent joint visit by the World Bank President and the Secretary-General reflects what should be a crucial impetus for the region. There have been encouraging early signs of follow-up on the Framework commitments, but also stark reminders of the sobering challenges ahead. Attacks by the Mouvement du 23 mars and infighting among the Forces armées de la République démocratique du Congo (FARDC) near Goma are ongoing. Just last week, attacks by the Allied Democratic Forces in Kamango forced more than 65,000 refugees to flee into Uganda. We note Ugandan Foreign Minister Kutesa's warnings this morning about the Allied Democratic Forces.

The immediate priority must be to ensure that all signatories take practical steps to implement their commitments under the Framework. Where they fail to live up to these commitments, they must be held to account, by their own citizens and civil society, by their regional neighbours, and by the broader international community, including the Security Council.

Australia welcomes the initial efforts of the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo to initiate key reforms. The establishment of the Democratic Republic of the Congo's National Oversight Mechanism is an important step, as was the inaugural meeting of the 11+4 regional oversight mechanism and the establishment of the technical support committee. The implementation of tailored, realistic benchmarks will, however, be fundamental to the success of the Framework. It is imperative that broad agreement is reached on the specific benchmarks and how these will be taken forward by the next meeting of the regional oversight mechanism in New York in September.

All signatories have committed under the Framework not to interfere in the affairs of neighbouring countries and to neither tolerate nor provide assistance or support of any kind to armed groups. Any collaboration between the FARDC and the Forces démocratiques de libération du Rwanda must cease, as must any support to the Mouvement du 23 mars. There can be no peace so long as such support continues.

Turning briefly to some key practical challenges and priorities ahead, persistent reports of grave human rights abuses and widespread sexual violence by armed groups and the FARDC undermine the foundations for any lasting peace. At an event Australia co-hosted this week, we heard first-hand the impact of the use of rape as a tool of war to destroy communities in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Impunity cannot be tolerated. It is critical that decisive action is taken to prevent such atrocities and to investigate and prosecute such crimes. In this context, the efforts of the International Criminal Court deserve our full support.

It is also critical that security sector reforms be intensified. Ultimate responsibility for security rests with the Democratic Republic of the Congo Government. A professional and effective army is central to this. The FARDC's capabilities, discipline and cooperation with the United Nations Mission, including the Intervention Brigade, will be critical to the success of efforts in the Kivus. Disarmament, demobilization and reintegration must, finally, also be given genuine priority. The unregulated flow of small arms and failure to implement effective reintegration strategies are themselves root causes and drivers of conflict.

Women's participation and leadership in both the security sector reform and disarmament, demobilization and reintegration processes is essential to long-term peace. So, too, is their direct engagement in the implementation of the Framework. Special Envoy Robinson's work to ensure their full and effective participation, including through the recent Bujumbura Conference is long overdue, prospective and reassuring.

In concluding, Australia reaffirms our strong support for the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the deployment of the Force Intervention Brigade, and expresses our deep appreciation to the troop-contributing countries. The Intervention Brigade cannot, of course, be seen as a panacea or a substitute for the Democratic Republic of the Congo's own responsibilities. What the Brigade can do, and what the Council intended it to do, is to act as a circuit-breaker to create the space for the Democratic Republic of the Congo Government to implement the necessary reforms and tackle underlying issues of the conflict.

The Brigade's creation was an historic and risky decision by the Council, borne out of frustration certainly, but more so from necessity. The Democratic Republic of the Congo and its neighbours have provided the essential enabling environment for a new start, but implementation will obviously be decisive. The Council itself must continue to give incisive and consistent attention to the Democratic Republic of the Congo to reinforce the incentives for change and to break the cyclical patterns of the past. We all know that this is a genuinely critical moment; we must ensure it becomes transformative.

I understand there is a Congolese saying that "no matter how hard you throw a dead fish in the water, it still will not swim". The framework of hope is very much alive, and we need to ensure it is able to swim.