

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. John Kerry, Secretary of State for the United States.

It is now my enormous privilege to make a statement in my capacity as the Secretary of State of the United States of America.

Let me begin by saying how genuinely honoured I am to be able to participate in this meeting at the United Nations, presiding over the Security Council in our role for this period, as the Secretary of State. It is also a privilege to preside over a meeting of the Security Council on a subject — a challenge — that is central to the mission of this vital Organization, that is, realizing the promise of peace.

For far, far too long, far too many lives in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the broader Great Lakes region have been ravaged by targeted, grotesque violence. They have been subjected to human rights abuses, and the region has been disrupted by dangerous instability.

The crisis that we are witnessing today underscores what we already know: it is a stark reminder of what fills the vacuum in the absence of good governance, basic dignity and firm leadership that holds accountable those who violate basic standards of decency.

It reminds — or it ought to remind — all of us of an obligation that we all share: not only to end the killing, the raping, the forcing of children into combat, the devastation and the fear, but the obligation to establish a lasting peace and a climate of development. In doing so, we can create the space for productivity and partnerships, for greater opportunity for the citizens of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and for the birth of a new generation of stability and of hope.

We can actually prove to the world that all of us working together — and, I might add, prove it at a time when many people are doubting the capacity of institutions to function and the capacity of political leadership to solve problems — have the ability to prove to the world that together, we actually can make a difference.

The seeds of that promise have already been planted. But our job does not end with the creation of the Framework. It continues in the cultivation of the seeds and in making sure that we implement the Framework and that we create a vigilant, accountable and cooperative effort in order to see those seeds grow into a full-blown peace that is sustainable.

I want to recognize our partners in that effort. First, I thank the Secretary-General for his personal engagement. I thank World Bank President Kim for the same kind of engagement and for their partnership. President Obama and I are grateful to both leaders and the institutions that they lead for the very novel United Nations-World Bank partnership that has been created which provides incentives for political progress through projects that create stability and improve infrastructure. Clearly, boosting regional commerce in the short term is one path to realizing stability and security in the long term. I think that we are all very hopeful that this approach can succeed in the Great Lakes region and perhaps even serve as a model for other areas, such as Mali, the Maghreb and beyond.

Regrettably, we have no dearth of locations where we are challenged and could use this kind of model today. I would just say parenthetically that, in the Middle East, the West Bank and Palestine, we are beginning to look at a similar kind of model, and hope that we can combine our efforts over the long term to find new ways to build sustainable peace.

I want particularly to also thank Mary Robinson, Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for the Great Lakes Region of Africa. She is a long-time friend and somebody I have long admired, and I reiterate the United States support for her work with regional leaders in the implementation of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework. We particularly welcome the priority that she places on including regional women's groups, local communities and civil society in the Framework peace process as we seek to break the cycle of violence and break down the barriers between humanitarian aid and the people who are desperate for it.

The day before President Obama nominated me to be Secretary of State, I met with Denis Mukwege, who just a few weeks earlier had fled the Democratic Republic of the Congo after an attempt on his life. Denis has demonstrated the courage to stand up and protect women and children from the weapons of war, which too often people only talk about in a whisper. The victims of these horrific crimes and humanitarians like Dr. Mukwege, who protect and treat those people, as well as all the people of that region, desperately need a voice. I know — and the Secretary-General obviously knows, because he chose her — that Mary Robinson to being that voice as the region and the international community address the full range of issues involved in translating the broad principles of the Framework into concrete benchmarks for implementation. I thank Mary Robinson for what she is doing. We are grateful for her continued public service.

It is also a great pleasure for me today to introduce the United States Special Representative for the African Great Lakes Region and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, former Senator Russ Feingold. The suffering in the Great Lakes, which we are going to debate and talk about here today, is a high-level priority for President Obama and for me, and it is one that we believe must be met by high-level leadership. I had the pleasure of working with Senator Feingold in the United States Senate for 18 years. In my judgement, there was no one in the Senate who was more trusted for his expertise in African issues. He brings enormous intellect, passion and courage to this challenge, and I am very pleased that he has consented to take this on.

I also bring the greetings of former United States Ambassador to the United Nations Susan Rice, who has asked me to convey a warm good morning and hello. We chatted briefly before I came here so I could get the latest tips on exactly what to do and what not to do today.

The United States joins every single participant in this meeting in welcoming the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework. It is a very important first step. But we also recognize that the progress which the region has made since February is extremely fragile, and the key question before all of us today is whether the commitments prescribed in the Framework can be and will be kept. Will they come to life, or are they destined only to live on paper?

Let me underscore that the United States stands ready to support the signatories and we will work with them, with focus, energy and persistence, in order to implement the Framework. But as President Obama has said, there has to be follow-through. I want to make it clear in that context that the United States is deeply concerned about recent reports of resumed external support to the Mouvement du 23 mars, as well as of collaboration with the Forces démocratiques de libération du Rwanda. So I want to be emphatic here today. All parties must immediately end their support for armed rebel groups. All Governments must hold human rights violators and abusers accountable. We must end the era of impunity, which, unfortunately, has been rampant.

To this end, the United States welcomes the deployment of the Force Intervention Brigade, and we support its mandate to neutralize all armed groups and protect civilians so that peace can take hold. We believe that it is now time for everyone in the region to exercise restraint, to return to the constructive path that they have set out for themselves, and to move forward together so that we can

address the root causes of the conflict and end it once and for all. I believe that this is doable. I believe that it is the absence of governance and the absence of an international presence that have created the vacuum that has permitted people to act with the impunity with which they have acted. I know that moving ahead is not easy. I know that it takes courage. But we all have to accept that this is our responsibility.

So, as President of the Council at this debate and as the representative of a nation that, like all others represented here, has a stake in the stability of the Great Lakes region, I want to urge all of us around this table to take advantage of the unique opportunity that the Framework provides. The United States respectfully challenges all of those who have committed themselves to the Framework to respect in turn the national sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. We cannot emphasize strongly enough how critical it is that everyone foster cooperation across borders. We challenge everyone to finalize the benchmarks that are outlined in the Framework and to adopt them during the plenary session of the General Assembly in September. We strongly urge everyone to formally include the voices that Special Envoy Robinson has engaged — voices that have too often been excluded, particularly those of women. And we challenge the Democratic Republic of the Congo to continue implementing reforms to its security sector and to re-establish State authority, particularly in the East. Finally, we pledge to join the Security Council, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, regional Governments and the international community in doing everything in our power to achieve a comprehensive peace accord.

Every one of us here understands the complex history of suffering in the Great Lakes region, but we all have a responsibility — a universally endowed responsibility — to ensure that a history of violence is not going to be followed by a future of vengeance. The only way to properly honour the millions of lives that have been lost is through peace, and the only way to achieve that peace is for the United Nations, all of the countries of the region and all of the countries with the capacity to step up and help show the way forward.

I now resume my functions as President of the Security Council.

I give the floor to the Secretary-General, His Excellency Mr. Ban Ki-moon.