

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. Tshibanda N'tungamulongo, Permanent Mission of the Democratic Republic of the Congo to the United Nations.

At the outset, I would like to sincerely congratulate you, Sir, on your appointment as Secretary of State of the United States of America. I also convey the pleasure of the Democratic Republic of the Congo at seeing you preside over the Security Council at this critical moment in its history and to thank you for having taken the initiative to organize this special meeting of the Council on the Great Lakes region, which for some years now has been prey to cyclical rebellions that have been incontrovertibly shown to bear the same genetic imprint and to be characterized by massive human rights violations, summary and extrajudicial executions, the drafting of child soldiers, sexual violence and rape, the pillaging of private and public assets, and the illegal exploitation of natural resources.

By choosing to talk about the Democratic Republic of the Congo at this specific moment, you have borne witness to the importance that the Government of the United States of America and the Security Council attach to a return to lasting peace in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo and the entire region.

I would also like to take the opportunity to thank Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon for his personal involvement in the negotiation, conclusion and implementation of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework for the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Region, concluded in Addis Ababa on 24 February. The Framework Agreement and its supporting resolution 2098 (2013) represent major innovations in both the understanding of the crisis that has affected the Great Lakes region since the second half of the 1990s, and of United Nations traditional peacekeeping doctrine.

The long-suffering populations of the countries of the region consider the Framework Agreement and the aforementioned resolution to be compelling evidence of the international community's determination to help to find a sustainable solution to the instability that has lasted far too long and for which my country in particular has paid a heavy toll. The same is true with respect to the recent joint visit to the region by the Secretary-General, the President of the World Bank and Ms. Mary Robinson, as well as the recent appointments of Mr. Kobler as Special Representative of the Secretary-General for the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Senator Feingold as United States Special Representative for the Great Lakes Region and the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

It is a sad, often overlooked reality that, because of the ongoing conflict, my country has lost over 6 million souls. The scale of the tragedy has no equal in the history of humankind, and to face it with indifference would risk the loss of our collective soul. Today's meeting forms part of the mutual effort to reaffirm our humanity and to evaluate frankly and together the implementation of the commitments made, with a view to ending the tragedy in accordance with the important Framework Agreement of 24 February and to identify the remaining challenges so that, once peace is restored once and for all, the region can devote its energy and intelligence to the critical issues of fighting poverty and improving the living conditions of the people.

The Democratic Republic of the Congo is determined to shoulder its responsibility to ensure the rapid restoration of peace and harmony in the region. As proof, the day after signing the Framework Agreement, the Congolese Government set out to fulfil its obligations, which, incidentally, correspond to the priority tasks identified 11 years ago. In that context, we have not only accelerated security sector reform, but promoted its institutionalization. The consolidation of the infrastructure and personnel of the army, security services and police; recruitment in the defence forces of young

Congolese from all provinces of the country; the reopening of military academies; and the training, with the assistance of bilateral partners, of special forces and support units, with the primary aim of the operationalizing the rapid reaction force are some of the concrete actions recently undertaken with the goal of creating professional and disciplined security and defence forces that respect human rights in order to more effectively defend our territory and bolster State authority.

In order to strengthen that authority, especially in the eastern part of the Republic, starting with Goma, the national police, public administration and courts have benefitted from prioritized capacity strengthening, which has enabled the gradual resumption of control of the situation. Decentralization, which is provided for in the Constitution, is another step closer to realization with the adoption of the necessary implementation laws.

The positive results achieved in reforming public finance administration over the past few years are evident in the continued stability of the macroeconomic framework, which has just been usefully supplemented by the implementation of measures to enhance the business climate and the national mineral resources certification scheme. This will effectively strengthen economic growth, which nevertheless is already one of the highest in the continent and has been consistently so for nearly 10 years. Better still, the Government has just undertaken a thorough review of the poverty reduction strategy paper with a view to more inclusive growth, reversing the time lost in efforts to achieve the Millennium Development Goals and ensuring greater credibility and effectiveness in the fight against poverty.

On the political front, reconciliation and strengthening national unity are more than ever on the daily agenda. Thus, the national oversight mechanism on the implementation of the Framework Agreement has been entrusted to a competent and experienced individual from the political opposition. The Independent National Electoral Commission has been completely reformed and a new, more seasoned and more inclusive team has just assumed leadership of that important institution supporting democracy. The new Commission has already mastered its task and prioritized the preparation of the electoral process with a view to organizing, in the best possible conditions, local, municipal, provincial, senatorial and provincial gubernatorial elections.

Moreover, upon the initiative of the President of the Republic, national consultations are to begin in August. Their purpose is to endeavour together to find ways and means to enhance national unity in order to better cope with all of the challenges facing the Congolese nation. In an effort to be inclusive, the forum will gather together, in addition to national and provincial political institutions, political parties of all persuasions, civil society in all its diversity, and a significant representation of women and youth. Its preparation and administration has been entrusted to a presidium consisting of the President of the Senate — a leader well known to the opposition, on whose behalf he was elected to his post — and the President of the National Assembly, a functionary of the presidential majority.

As proof of the presidium's participatory nature, the political opposition has recently prepared and filed with the presidium and with the President of the Republic a list of demands and proposals to be addressed in the forum. For each of those reforms, as for all other tasks of the Democratic Republic of the Congo under the Framework Agreement, the terms of reference or benchmarks have been or are being developed and communications related to the matter are under way with Ms. Mary Robinson and her team, to whom we reaffirm our support and cooperation. We will therefore be ready for the next meeting of the regional oversight mechanism set to take place on the sidelines of the next session of the General Assembly, right here, in September.

While we are gathered here, the people of Goma and Rutshuru are again living in fear and uncertainty because of sporadic attacks carried out since the adoption of resolution 2098 (2013). In defiance of the latter, the Mouvement du 23 mars (M-23) has launched attacks on the defensive

positions of the Forces armées de la République démocratique du Congo (FARDC).

To conceal its inconsistent peaceful gesture, that negative force is attempting to justify its crimes through baseless accusations to discredit the FARDC, the Force Intervention Brigade and the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) by stating without proof that they are collaborating with the Forces démocratiques de libération du Rwanda (FDLR). United Nations officials have already responded to these accusations.

For its part, the Democratic Republic of Congo has categorically denied those allegations. It has sent its response to the President of the Security Council, with a request that it be distributed to all members of the Council as an official document of the Security Council. Careful examination of the documentation that we have provided eloquently demonstrates the policy of the Democratic Republic of the Congo in that area, as well as the scope, quality and effectiveness of its efforts in the past five years to fight the FDLR, which it would have completely neutralized had it not been for the outbreak of the M-23 rebellion.

It should be noted that this positive assessment has been certified by non-Congolese experts, who could hardly be accused of complacency in that regard, namely, MONUSCO and, most especially, those very people who, today, by their accusations, seem to have repudiated their own signatures.

It also should be noted that no country of the Great Lakes region has advocated as hard as the Democratic Republic of the Congo for the creation of the Force Intervention Brigade, whose task is to neutralize all negative elements, including the Forces démocratiques de libération du Rwanda, and for the Brigade to be granted an offensive mandate.

It should be understood that the Democratic Republic of Congo, whose population suffers more than any other from the presence of foreign armed groups on its territory, cannot maintain any collaboration whatsoever with such groups, whose specialties include murder, rape, all kinds of abuses, and the looting of public and private property and natural resources. Any such collaboration, if substantiated, would represent instances of independent action on the ground, and the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo would unequivocally condemn them and stands ready to unflinchingly punish them.

I take this opportunity to solemnly reaffirm that the Democratic Republic of the Congo has never wavered from respecting and will continue to scrupulously respect the sovereignty and territorial integrity of other States of the region and the sacrosanct principle of non-interference in their internal affairs.

With regard to the involvement of certain elements of the Forces armées de la République démocratique du Congo (FARDC) in human rights violations in Minova, this case is being dealt with by the justice system and any FARDC members whose guilt is established will be severely punished, regardless of their rank. As for recent allegations of the mistreatment of prisoners, inhumane and degrading treatment, and the desecration of the dead, investigations have just been launched to establish the truth. Justice will be equally merciless for the perpetrators of these acts, if confirmed. It should nevertheless be underscored, with regard to these allegations, that they are, to say they least, surprising, because, while such human rights violations are known to have been committed by the leaders of rebels groups that were forerunners of the Mouvement du 23 mars (M-23), this is the first time in 15 years of struggle against various rebellions that regular army of the Democratic Republic of the Congo has been the subject of such accusations. That has something to say about their credibility.

As is clear, the Democratic Republic of Congo is significantly advanced in the implementation of its

commitments. It is therefore legitimate for us to expect that other regional and international partners will make the same effort.

The deployment on the ground of the Intervention Brigade established under resolution 2098 (2013) represents undeniable progress, which we fully appreciate. Our aim now is to see the Brigade assume, as quickly and efficiently as possible, the responsibilities entrusted to it by the Security Council, which include monitoring and securing the border between the Democratic Republic of the Congo and its neighbours to the East on the one hand and, on the other hand, neutralizing all negative forces, without exception.

That said, we recognize that military force cannot alone solve the complex equation of peace in the Great Lakes region of Africa, where the causes of conflicts and disputes are interlinked, as well as home-grown and external alike. In the light of the extremism of virtually all of these negative elements, force is necessary, but not sufficient. To be sustainable, the solution must also involve sincere dialogue among all internal and external parties and the exhibition of good faith when it comes to the conclusions reached these parties.

That is why, for our part, the Democratic Republic of the Congo will remain actively involved in the Kampala talks, facilitated by Uganda in its capacity as current Chair of the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region (ICGLR). However, we wish to emphasize that, based on our experience of the agreements reached in 2003, 2006 and 2009 with the rebels— most of whom are now part of the M-23 — and in accordance with the relevant resolutions of the Security Council, we are not ready to sign an agreement that endorses impunity and reintegrates into the armed forces persons subject to prosecution or international sanctions due to mass violations of human rights, war crimes, crimes of genocide or crimes against humanity, as this would lay the foundation of a new breach of peace and sow the seeds of instability.

To conclude, whatever the scars and horrors of the suffering of the past, of which we are all aware and which none of us would seek to understate, we cannot lock us forever into a stance whereby no compromise is possible. Without forgetting the past, we must focus on reconciliation and cohesion within our States and peaceful coexistence and cooperation between our States. History and geography requires us to do so; survival and sustainable development demand it.

The Democratic Republic of the Congo will never surrender a square inch of its territory or any part of its sovereignty over its wealth. But it remains ready, today as yesterday, to agree on a pact for peace, stability and development throughout the Great Lakes region and, in this context, to develop regional cooperation. Others before us, in other regions, have lived through challenges similar to those facing our region. And they found a way, without forgetting anything, to renounce the reckless thirst for revenge. Their prosperity and ongoing entente cordiale should inspire us.

The peoples of the Great Lakes region of Africa have, like those elsewhere throughout the world, the right to peace and prosperity. In reiterating my congratulations and thanks, I beg you to believe, Sir, in the inexhaustible determination of His Excellency Mr. Joseph Kabila Kabange, President of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, to work towards a lasting peace in the Great Lakes region, together with the Council, the Secretary-General, his counterparts in the ICGLR and the Southern African Development Community, and all our other bilateral and multilateral partners.