

Speech: Pursuing peace and stability in the Great Lakes region

Thank you very much indeed Mr President.

I wanted to take the floor because we are at an important point in this region, but I also wanted to welcome the SRSB back to the Council, and through him, to thank the UN mission for everything they are doing. It is also extremely helpful to have the update from the Ambassador of Congo.

I would like to start by saying to my good friend, the Ambassador of Equatorial Guinea, that it isn't a modest contribution that his country makes, it is much more than that.

Mr President, it's been five years since the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework was signed. It has proved to be a crucial framework for pursuing peace and stability in the Great Lakes region. But as the SRSB and the Ambassador from Congo have spelt out the DRC has always been at the centre of the framework. The situation in the DRC, the nerve centre, affects the stability of the region. As this Council has discussed in recent days, we are now at a critical juncture. What happens in the DRC over the next few months could be a defining moment in greater regional stability. We have a choice, Mr President, between seeing the situation improve or being overturned.

The United Kingdom, for our part, remains committed to supporting the implementation of the PSCF and we support free, fair and credible elections in DRC in December. We welcome the progress that has been made in the five years since the signing of the framework and I'd like to highlight the increase in the participation of women and a commitment to greater regional and international cooperation in the course of advancing peace and security.

That said Mr President, we are concerned that implementation of key elements has not made progress and this includes the repatriation of foreign combatants. As the Ambassador from Congo highlighted, we welcome efforts to reinvigorate the framework and urge all signatories to implement the framework in full, and we are very supportive of what the SRSB had to say on judicial issues. We are also concerned by the continued proliferation of violence in DRC, particularly in North and South Kivu, Tanganyika, Ituri and the Kasais. The results of this instability have indeed been devastating. 4.5 million Congolese have fled their homes and communities. There are more internally displaced people in DRC than anywhere else in Africa. And over 13.1 million people are in need of humanitarian assistance and protection. So we support the other calls in the Council, Mr President, for regional players to come together in the interest of stability in the coming months. And I would like to endorse what the French Ambassador said about the importance of that regional cooperation.

Mr President, I'd like to conclude by talking about elections. Credible and constitutional elections are the only way to end the political crisis and

achieve stability in DRC and we urge the signatories of the framework to ensure that peaceful and credible elections can take place in December 2018. This means that the electoral calendar needs to be respected and key milestones must be met and the confidence building measures of the 2016 December Agreement need to be implemented in full. This critically includes the freeing of political prisoners and the opening of political space and peaceful demonstrations. It is a region Mr President that is in all our interest and the United Kingdom pledges to work together with partners to achieve progress.

I have some other remarks, Mr President, on some other aspects of the region and framework but I will save those for consultations.

Thank you.