

Ambassadorial-Level Meeting of the Peacebuilding Commission on the Great Lakes Region

26 July 2021

Chair's Summary

1. On 26 July, the Peacebuilding Commission (PBC) convened an Ambassadorial-level meeting on the Great Lakes Region. The meeting was held on a virtual platform and chaired by H.E. Mr. Mohamed Edrees, Chair of the PBC. The objective of the meeting was to discuss ways to mobilize support for regional peacebuilding efforts and the implementation of the United Nations Strategy for Peace Consolidation, Conflict Prevention and Conflict Resolution including for Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration (DDR) of former combatants in the Great Lakes Region.
2. In his opening remarks, the Chair noted the active engagement of the PBC with the Special Envoy and the countries of the Great Lakes region in 2020 that included discussions on the socio-economic impact of COVID-19 and the role of women in peacebuilding. He recalled his briefing to the Security Council on 12 April 2021 in which he updated on the PBC engagement with the Great Lakes and the Special Envoy. He noted the positive dynamics in the region and the commitment of Heads of State to enhanced regional cooperation and sustain peace. Considering the complex set of challenges in the region exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, the Chair highlighted the emerging consensus among leaders of the Great Lakes region on the need for comprehensive joint action aimed at effectively reducing the threats posed by local and foreign armed groups. This includes the disarmament, demobilization, repatriation, reintegration, and resettlement (DDR/RR) of ex-combatants.
3. Mr. Huang Xia, Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for the Great Lakes Region briefed the Commission on the Action Plan for the implementation of the UN Strategy for Peace Consolidation, Conflict Prevention and Conflict Resolution. He recalled that the plan is structured around five thematic clusters: i) promoting dialogue and strengthening trust; ii) reducing the threat posed by armed groups; iii) promoting sustainable and transparent management of natural resources, as well as trade and investment; iv) finding durable solutions to forced displacement; and v) promoting regional preparedness to public health crises. Youth and women's inclusion and empowerment will be addressed across all five clusters. He noted that effective implementation of the Action Plan would be a shared responsibility among the relevant stakeholders including signatory countries, guarantor institutions of the PSC Framework, United Nations entities and Member States, through their strengthened political, technical and financial support. In addition, the Special Envoy highlighted the continued willingness of the leaders to strengthen their political, security and economic relations at the regional level. In this regard, he welcomed the fifth consultations among Security and Intelligence services held on 6 July 2021 in Bujumbura that discussed non-military measures as part of the priorities of the Contact and Coordination Group (CCG) with the overall goal to

eradicate the persistent threats to regional stability posed by the negative forces. The CCG, whose activities were launched in May 2021, receives support from the Office of the Special Envoy CCG as part of its immediate and key priorities. The Special Envoy urged the Commission to support the immediate and key priorities of the Action Plan through the mobilization of additional resources as well as further political and technical support.

4. Ms. Marie Claude Nkulu Mbayo, Chief of Staff for the National Oversight Mechanism of the DRC for the Peace, Security and Cooperation (PCS) Framework for the DRC and the Region reiterated the willingness of the President of the DRC and Chair of the African Union - Félix Antoine Tshisekedi - to intensify efforts to sustain peace and eradicate negative forces in the Region. Following the fifth consultations among Security and Intelligence services held on 6 July 2021 in Bujumbura, the CCG decided to start the operationalization of the Action Plan on Non-Military measures. The Action Plan on Non-Military measures is based on four areas of intervention: i) Facilitating the disarmament and repatriation of negative forces through an approach involving local communities and civil society; (ii) Preventing the resurgence of negative forces by combating the supply of weapons, troops and finances; (iii) Strengthening DDR/RR programs; and iv) Strengthening cross-border cooperation to generate economic opportunities, especially for youth. In this regard, she stated that the President of the DRC had committed to provide the premises of the CCG in Goma for a period of two years. She further recalled that the emergency state in all the eastern regions of the country aimed at eradicating the persistent threats to regional stability posed by negative forces.

5. Mr. Fodé Ndiaye, UN Resident Coordinator of Rwanda updated the Commission on the on-going cross-border project supporting socio-economic reintegration of former FDLR combatants and their dependents repatriated from the DRC to Rwanda to which the Peacebuilding Fund is contributing. A short documentary was projected to demonstrate the impact of the project on the beneficiaries <https://media.un.org/en/asset/k1n/k1ngs6roke>. Mr. Ndiaye also highlighted the contribution of the project to sustainable development goals (SDG) including peace, justice and strong institutions; poverty reduction; hunger eradication; gender equality and economic growth. He noted that critical and key success factors included government leadership, cooperation and partnership including through the Ministry of Trade and Industry and the Rwanda Demobilization and Reintegration Commission (RDRC), the interagency coordination (UNDP, FAO, WFP and UNWOMEN) as well as the catalytic role of the Peacebuilding Fund. In line with the Special Envoy's efforts and priorities reflected in the Strategy and its Action Plan, he called for continued support to sustainable reintegration for former combatants and their dependents, including activities focused on building community resilience, community-based reconciliation, transitional justice and preventing new recruitment into armed groups, in a conducive context of greater dialogue and cooperation among countries of the sub-region.

6. Assistant Secretary-General Oscar Fernandez-Taranco welcomed this meeting as a timely follow-up to the PBC's last engagement on the Great Lakes Region which had focused on ways to mobilize the regional socio-economic cooperation including tackling the socio-economic impact of COVID-19 as well as the reinforcement of the central role played by women in peacebuilding efforts in the region. He welcomed the multi-stakeholder approach to consultations led by the Special Envoy during the development of the Strategy and the identification of the priorities of the Action Plan. He underscored that the Action Plan was a unique window of opportunity to mobilize the Member States through a comprehensive, strategic and coordinated approach for peacebuilding. He informed PBC members that PBSO was already working the Special Envoy and relevant UN entities on multi country peacebuilding project proposals addressing cross borders issues such as community resilience, reconciliation and transitional justice, and initiatives involving gender and youth promotion, for which the PBF would provide seed funding in support for the Strategy. He suggested that Member States could provide additional support to these initiatives and other peacebuilding priorities of the Strategy. In this regard, he noted that the project to support sub-regional efforts to build government capacity for reintegration offered a unique opportunity to catalyze partners' support in strengthening stability in the Great Lakes region under the leadership of the governments involved and in line with the Action Plan presented by the Special Envoy.
7. Member States welcomed the briefings and made the following observations:
 - They commended the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for the Great Lakes Region on the Action Plan for the implementation of the UN Strategy for Peace Consolidation, Conflict Prevention and Conflict Resolution in the Region. They agreed that there was a unique and unprecedented window of opportunity to transform the region into a more peaceful, stable and prosper region and that the Strategy provided a tool to mobilize UN and international support to the region's efforts.
 - They welcomed the coordinated holistic and comprehensive approach presented in the Action Plan, as well as results achieved on the ground, including with the Peacebuilding Fund support.
 - They further welcomed the local and inclusive approach of the UN Strategy and highlighted the need to strengthen national ownership through the engagement of leaders towards enhanced economic and security cooperation including in the areas of trade and natural resource management and governance. They further stressed the importance of inclusiveness through cross-border communities-based initiatives and underscored the importance of integrating mental health issues and violence-related psychosocial traumas in building community resilience and trust among the populations.

- They emphasized the role of the Coordination and Contact Group in addressing non-military measures including Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration efforts. In this regard, they commended the DRC for its leadership in hosting the GCC and underscored the political will and commitment of the Great Lakes Region's Leaders to continue to improve internal governance and strengthen cooperation among countries on regional issues.
 - They underscored the need to strengthen the response to COVID-19 at the regional and country levels, including vaccination efforts and addressing the socio-economic impact of the pandemic. They stressed the importance of empowering women and youth as agents of social and economic transformation with the support of the private sector and civil society organizations. They welcomed the catalytic role of the Peacebuilding Fund in addressing cross-border issues and called for further support by international partners, including the IFIs.
 - Members of the PBC committed to provide political, financial and technical support to the implementation of the Action Plan through their existing engagement in the region and additional resources focused on the priorities identified by the Action Plan.
8. In his closing remarks, the Chair reiterated the PBC's commitment to continue accompanying the region and to support the Special Envoy's peacebuilding efforts. He echoed the Member States' call for follow up PBC discussions to sustain the support for the peacebuilding priorities of the Action Plan, including Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration processes.