

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

11 June 2020

Chair's Summary

1. On 11 June, 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. Marc-André Blanchard, Chair of the PBC. The objective of the meeting was to engage the PBC on how best to provide support for regional socio-economic cooperation among the countries of the Great Lakes, as a key component of building and sustaining peace and fostering sustainable development in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic and the continuing challenges posed by Ebola. The National Monitoring Mechanism of the Addis Ababa Peace Agreement was represented by the coordinator, Mr. Claude Ibalanky, and the deputy coordinator, Mr. Patrick Mutombo. UN staff from MONUSCO and UNDP also attended the meeting.
2. In his opening remarks, the Chair offered condolences to the Government and people of Burundi on the sudden passing of H.E. President Pierre Nkurunziza; participants observed a minute of silence in this regard. He recalled the focus of recent meetings of the Commission on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on peacebuilding and sustaining peace in the countries and regions under its consideration. He noted that it was imperative to act quickly and in a coherent manner to mitigate the socio-economic consequences, including in the Great Lakes Region. In the long-term, investments in sustainable development and inclusive growth, by supporting infrastructure, jobs, economic diversification and development of local private sector, were needed for post-COVID-19 recovery. He further underscored that the health crisis was not gender neutral as it had amplified existing inequalities. The Chair stressed the need for contextualized responses through a human security and gender lens, focusing on supporting small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) that constituted the fabric of local economies.
3. Mr. Huang Xia, Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for the Great Lakes Region, commended the countries of the region for the progress achieved towards greater regional stability and stressed the need for support to sustain the positive trends. He noted that the promising regional dynamics had been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic with more than 71,337 confirmed cases of COVID-19 and more than 1706 deaths in the countries of the region as of 11 June 2020, and by the recent resurgence of Ebola, which had claimed more than 2200 victims in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) since 2018. The impact of COVID-19 on the implementation of the Peace, Security and Cooperation (PSC) Framework for DRC and the region was already visible as two key regional initiatives, the Great Lakes Investment and Trade Conference, organized jointly by the Special Envoy's office, the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region and the Rwanda Development Board, as well as the

10th Summit of the Regional Oversight Mechanism of the PSC Framework, had been postponed. He underscored that women, young people and refugees and internally displaced persons were most affected by the crisis, which risked seriously undermining the region's efforts to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals. The Special Envoy acknowledged the need for resource mobilization and more flexible access to various financing mechanisms in order to consolidate peace and stability progress in the region. He updated the Commission on the preparations of a roundtable discussion on 18 June, in collaboration with the Economic Commission for Africa, with the aim to help mobilize additional resources. In this regard, he welcomed the advocacy role of the PBC in support for resource mobilization efforts. He stressed the importance of regional and cross-border initiatives and highlighted relevant contributions of the Peacebuilding Fund (PBF) in this regard, including two projects between Rwanda and DRC on cross-border trade and food security as well as reintegration of former combatants, with a total budget of 4.5 million USD. He also shared plans for a regional PBF project in the area of security cooperation.

4. Ambassador Zachary Muburi Muita, Executive Secretary of the International Conference of the Great Lakes Region (ICGLR), highlighted the economic potential of the region that had yet to be fully realized. He updated the Commission on the role of the ICGLR in the implementation of the Pact on Security, Stability and Development for the Great Lakes Region and its protocols and on the close partnership with the office of the Special Envoy. He further updated on the work of the ICGLR in devising innovative solutions for managing natural resources, especially highlighting the Regional Certification Mechanism, and underscored that the joint efforts with the office of the Special Envoy in this area were being intensified to ensure that the technical and political approaches could reinforce one another to promote transparent and integrated regional management of natural resources. He stressed the urgent need to consider innovative solutions and strengthen collective action among ICGLR Member States to mitigate the socio-economic and security consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic, while protecting vulnerable populations. He called for the support of the PBC in the design, implementation and follow-up of the Great Lakes Investment and Trade Conference, which was planned to take place in Kigali on 2-3 December 2020. He noted that the conference offers an opportunity to explore new modalities for the promotion of regional and global commerce and investments, strengthening of regional economic cooperation, and support for post-COVID-19 recovery efforts.
5. Ms. Deborah Wetzel, Director for Regional Integration for Africa, the Middle East and Northern Africa of the World Bank, highlighted World Bank commitments to support the PSC Framework of approximately 1 billion USD under the regional integration program. This included 207 million USD aimed at addressing vulnerability and improve community resilience, such as assistance to returnees, displaced persons and host communities, disease control and survivors of gender-based violence, and 860 million USD aimed at supporting

economic cooperation and regional integration, such as connective infrastructure in transport, electricity and ICT; regional collaboration in agriculture and cross-border trade facilitation. She explained that the World Bank support in response to the COVID-19 pandemic had so far been concentrated at the national level in the Great Lakes Region, with 124 million USD to Rwanda for health response and mitigating the effects in the areas of education and energy sector reform; 747 million USD to DRC primarily focused on health response and mitigating economic and social impact; 525 million USD to Uganda focused on health response and building resilience post-recovery; and 5 million USD to Burundi with an additional 73 million USD ready to be disbursed when a comprehensive national response plan had been developed. She concluded by underlining the readiness of the World Bank to work with partners to strengthen regional integration, including through the World Bank Strategy for Fragility, Conflict, and Violence (2020–2025).

6. Ms. Brenda Denousse, General Manager of Brookside Dairy LTD, updated the Commission on the ICGLR Private Sector Forum that, along with a newly created women business leader network, were key players in providing support to regional business-led investment and trade initiatives and remained fully committed to support the Great Lakes Investment and Trade Conference. She recalled that the Great Lakes Region had built up resilience in the last decade, during which the region had faced a multitude of social and economic challenges and noted with concern that the economies of the region had been severely impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, with SMEs and in particular women-owned businesses experiencing the largest effects. She highlighted that the governments of the region were doing their best to support economic recovery, including by providing fiscal stimulus support. She noted that the existing resources were limited in view of the magnitude of immediate challenges to address. In this regard, she stressed that there was evidence that engaging women (in economic recovery plans) could add 1-2 percentage points to growth and that the young population represented an enormous potential. She emphasized that regional trade had continued during the pandemic and expressed hope that the region would soon be able to re-establish pre-pandemic international and continental trade flows, develop regional supply chains and work together in addressing hotspots of COVID-19 as well as other diseases such as Ebola, measles and malaria. She noted that building stable, mutually beneficial and sustainable relationships in the long-term were the best investments and expressed hope that the PBC would support such investments and help to mobilise business expertise in support for investment and trade in the region.
7. Ambassador Liberata Mulamula, member of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General's Advisory Board for Women, Peace and Security in the Great Lakes region, noted that the region had made progress on the implementation of the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda, including through solidarity missions by the women leaders of the Advisory Board that had promoted efforts to increase women's representation in key institutions with tangible results.

She noted that the countries of the region were implementing recommendations from high level meetings on WPS and that several countries of the region were reinforcing coordination and implementation measures that included early warning, mediation, and monitoring and evaluation on Security Council Resolution 1325 through their respective National Action Plans. She recalled that the Great Lakes Women Advisory Board had recently proposed that priority measures be taken to economically cushion and protect women against the most severe impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. She emphasized the urgency of preserving the gains made to date in the implementation of the WPS agenda in the midst of the pandemic. In this regard, she encouraged the PBC to fully integrate the WPS agenda in its engagement and to pay particular attention to the consequences of the pandemic for women in the Great Lakes Region. She further called for a coordinated advocacy for resource mobilization and increased funding for women-led peacebuilding, cross-border trade and agriculture initiatives. She suggested a follow-up PBC meeting dedicated to the implementation of the WPS agenda in the Great Lakes Region.

8. Member States welcomed the briefings and made the following observations:

- They noted that while the Great Lakes was often portrayed as a region of endless challenges, it presented immense opportunities which could be realized with adequate support to the efforts of the countries and the region. The Commission's attention to mobilize such support was highlighted in this regard.
- They welcomed the momentum in the region towards enhanced cooperation in key peacebuilding areas reflected in the PSC Framework and progress made in economic cooperation, including in the area of natural resource management. They also emphasized the importance of the programmes of action stemming from the Pact on Security, Stability and Development in the Great Lakes Region, particularly those that lie at the intersection between peacebuilding and sustainable development.
- They commended the Special Envoy's efforts in accompanying the region in nationally owned peacebuilding efforts, including in the area of socio-economic cooperation, and welcomed the preparations for the Great Lakes Investment and Trade Conference to help enhance the business environment in the region.
- They noted with concern the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic for the region's peace and stability efforts and welcomed the coordination of responses to the pandemic at regional and sub-regional levels. They expressed their readiness to support the countries of the region in their strides towards ensuring post-COVID-19 socio-economic recovery and development.

- They underscored the importance of giving priority consideration to improve the business climate to unleash the full potential of SMEs in the region as well as to the pivotal role that women and youth could play as key agents of change. They further called for the WPS agenda to be fully integrated in regional peacebuilding efforts.
 - They highlighted the need for inclusive, cross-pillar response measures that addressed the needs of the most vulnerable, while strengthening governance and rule of law and safeguarding human rights.
 - They highlighted the role of International Financial Institutions in socio-economic recovery and welcomed the support provided by the PBF to help address drivers of instability through cross-border and regional initiatives.
 - The PBC committed to remain engaged with the countries of the region and convene additional meetings to support their efforts to enhance economic cooperation and regional integration as key vehicles for building and sustaining peace and stability in the region, including a meeting focused on the participation of women in these efforts.
9. In his closing remarks, the Chair reiterated the commitment of the PBC to continue accompanying the countries of the Great Lakes Region towards peacebuilding and sustaining peace, including by supporting the preparations of the Great Lakes Investment and Trade Conference. In addition, he supported the call for a follow-up PBC meeting dedicated to the implementation of the WPS agenda in the region.