

**Press Release by the Peacebuilding Commission
on the meeting on the Great Lakes Region**

15 June 2020

Following the virtual meeting of the Peacebuilding Commission convened by its Chair, H.E. Mr. Marc-André Blanchard on 11 June 2020 on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and the Ebola outbreak on peacebuilding in the Great Lakes region, with briefings by UN Secretary-General's Special Envoy (SESG) for the Great Lakes region, Mr. Huang Xia, the Executive Secretary of the International Conference on the Great Lakes region, Ambassador Zachary Muburi Muita, the World Bank Director for Regional Integration for Africa, the Middle East and Northern Africa, Ms. Deborah L. Wetzel, the General Manager of Brookside Dairy LTD and business leader in the region, Ms. Brenda Denousse, and Ambassador Liberata Mulamula, member of the Peacebuilding Fund Advisory Board and of the SESG's Advisory Board for Women, Peace and Security in the Great Lakes region, the Commission issued the following statement.

The members of the Peacebuilding Commission:

Noted that while the Great Lakes is often portrayed as a region of endless challenges, this is region of endless opportunities that can benefit from the Commission's attention and support.

Welcomed the momentum in the region towards enhanced cooperation in key peacebuilding areas reflected in the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework (PSC Framework) for the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) and the region, a framework that helps ensure coordination between and continuous support from the African Union, the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region, the Southern African Development Community (SADC) and the United Nations. They also welcomed progress in economic cooperation, including in the area of natural resources management.

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 *welcomed* the Special

Envoy's efforts in accompanying the region in nationally-owned peacebuilding efforts, which can benefit from PBC attention and support.

Welcomed all efforts in support of continuing cross-border cooperation in the context of the PSC Framework, including ongoing support for enhanced security cooperation, especially non-military measures to eradicate non-state armed groups in eastern DRC. In that regard, acknowledged the important role that the PBC can play in support of peacebuilding activities in the DRC, in close collaboration with MONUSCO and DRC authorities.

Expressed concern over the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic for the region's peace and stability efforts, including the postponement of major initiatives related to the implementation of the PSC Framework for the DRC and the region. They noted that the COVID-19 pandemic and some measures taken to curb its spread could contribute to the deterioration of regional macroeconomic indicators and the disruption of economic activities in key sectors, such as health, education, transport, trade and tourism, and increase pressure on national budgets, thereby affecting the countries' capacities to address peace and security challenges, among others.

Welcomed the coordination of responses to the COVID-19 pandemic at regional and sub-regional levels and *called for* international solidarity in the fight against its spread. They *expressed their readiness* to support the countries of the region in their strides towards ensuring post-COVID-19 socio-economic recovery and development. In this context, they underscored the importance of giving priority consideration to the pivotal role that women and youth can play, as key agents of change, as well as to improve the business climate to unleash the full potential of small and medium size businesses in the region.

Expressed hope that the round table with international financial institutions and partners, which the Special Envoy plans to organize in collaboration with the Economic Commission for Africa on 18 June, will help mobilize resources for effective socio-economic responses and recovery. They further welcome preparations for the Great Lakes Investment and Trade Conference (GLITC), scheduled to take place in December 2020 in Kigali, to help enhance the business environment in the region. In that regard, they are pleased to note the close collaboration between the UN and the World Bank in support of this and other similar initiatives in the region.

They also emphasize the importance of supporting improved governance and management of natural resources to leverage the socio-economic opportunities for the Great Lakes.

Welcomed the support provided by the Peacebuilding Fund in the region to help address drivers of instability associated with forced displacement; create peace dividends for women and youth through increased cross-border trade and strengthened food security; and support reintegration of former combatants into their communities.

Expressed their commitment 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.