



Security Council briefing on MONUSCO (DRC), 27 March 2024

Malta Statement delivered by Ms Francesca Gatt

Deputy Permanent Representative of Malta to the United Nations, New York

Thank you, President, and I also thank SRSG Keita and Ms. Jacquie-Anna for their briefings.

We convene today with a pressing call on all parties to prioritise de-escalation. Regrettably, we continue to witness an alarming escalation of conflict in the eastern DRC. Tens of thousands of IDPs are being forced to flee from the wider Sake area towards Goma., with more than 200 civilians killed, including 14 children.

As underlined by the Secretary-General in his latest report, this recent escalation is pushing the region dangerously close to the brink of war.

Malta deems it imperative for armed groups to lay down their weapons, with an immediate cessation of all state support to ensure a definitive path towards disarmament. The sophisticated weaponry of armed groups, notably the M23, also demands serious attention by this Council.



Malta is also deeply concerned by recent attacks on MONUSCO positions in and around Goma and Sake, including the recent incidents impacting MONUSCO peacekeepers. These could exacerbate threats to MONUSCO's presence in North Kivu.

Prioritising dialogue to address underlying grievances, including through the Luanda and Nairobi processes, remains essential.

We commend President Lourenco for reactivating the Luanda process and for facilitating diplomatic engagements through a 'Mini Summit' in Addis Ababa and bilateral meetings with both President Tshisekedi and Kagame.

President

While welcoming the recent electoral milestones in the DRC, we are worried over irregularities and violence.

We are concerned by armed groups organised under the Wazalendo umbrella to join the new Armed Defense Reserve, causing an increasingly insecure environment, and hampering the implementation of the P-DDRCS. Despite the country's continued efforts in strengthening human rights, we are concerned by the recent lifting of the moratorium on the death penalty.



Nonetheless, we commend efforts to address electoral violence against women, particularly through the adoption of the roadmap for the 2024-2028 electoral cycle. We stress on the importance in upholding electoral integrity and fostering trust in state institutions.

President

We recall the necessity for any withdrawal of MONUSCO forces to be accompanied by the bolstering of the national armed forces. This is most needed in regions where civilians, including IDPs, are relying on the Mission for protection.

Ensuring gender analysis and expertise to inform the transition process, including through consultations with women's civil society organisations, is also crucial.

In this vein, we recognise MONUSCO's transfer of the Kamanyola base to the DRC Government.

MONUSCO continues to play a pivotal role in multiple spheres, such as in supporting the justice system and facilitating security sector reform. We encourage continued cooperation by DRC authorities to combat impunity and to ensure that security forces are properly vetted.



Over the past four months, MONUSCO and UNICEF have been diligently conducting age-verification assessments for 1,229 candidates seeking recruitment into the armed forces. 152 of these candidates were confirmed to be children and were rightfully excluded from the recruitment process.

This essential endeavour must be sustained, emphasising the imperative for DRC authorities to collaborate closely with UNICEF to ensure continuity in safeguarding children's rights even after MONUSCO's departure.

We also welcome awareness sessions in addressing deeply concerning cases of sexual exploitation and abuse within MONUSCO. We reiterate our firm position that sexual violence remains unacceptable and intolerable.

In conclusion, President, with humanitarian needs escalating and resources dwindling, it is crucial that our support goes to those most in need.

It is also imperative for all parties to abide by humanitarian and human rights law and facilitate unhindered access to affected populations.



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The safety and security of humanitarian workers is also crucial and critical actions are required to arrest the scourge of hunger and halt the spread of diseases.

Genuine efforts towards de-escalation and dialogue are imperative to alleviate human suffering and to restore peace and security in the country. It is urgently needed before it is too late.

I thank you.