

**Security Council**

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Letter dated 15 December 2020 from the Representatives of the Dominican Republic, Germany and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

The Dominican Republic and Germany, as Co-Chairs of the Informal Expert Group on Women and Peace and Security of the Security Council, and in close cooperation with the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, would like to share the summary note of the following meeting of the Informal Expert Group (see annex):

- The situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo

We would be grateful if the present letter and its annex could be circulated as a document of the Security Council.

(Signed) José Singer **Weisinger**

Ambassador

Special Envoy of the Dominican Republic to the Security Council

(Signed) Christoph **Heusgen**

Permanent Representative of the Federal Republic of Germany
to the United Nations

(Signed) Jonathan **Allen**

Chargé d'Affaires of the United Kingdom to the United Nations



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Informal Expert Group on Women and Peace and Security of the Security Council

Summary of the meeting on the Democratic Republic of the Congo, held on 9 November 2020

On 9 November 2020, the Informal Expert Group on Women and Peace and Security convened a meeting on the situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The members were briefed by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Head of the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO), followed by an overview of key recommendations provided by the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women) and additional observations shared by the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict.

Members of the Security Council asked questions about the impact of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic and the Ebola epidemic on the situation of women and girls in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Mission's response, obstacles to women's participation in local conflict mediation and the development of the new disarmament, demobilization and reintegration strategy, and planned projects to support women's economic empowerment, education and employment. Council members also asked questions about the gender-responsiveness and inclusivity of the Mission's transition plans, efforts undertaken to ensure that troop withdrawals do not undermine the work done by the Mission on gender equality and the protection of women, and the Mission's capacity needs with regard to women peacekeepers and gender expertise. Other questions were focused on the gender-sensitivity of humanitarian assistance and on the prevention of conflict-related sexual violence, including next steps following the mapping of places with a high risk of sexual and gender-based violence that the Mission had recently conducted.

The main points raised during the meeting were the following:

- MONUSCO supported the participation of women candidates in the past national elections. 21 out of 109, or 19 per cent, of elected senators are women, a notable increase compared with 4.6 per cent in 2006. While only small gains have been made with regard to women's representation in the National Assembly, it has a female leader for the second time. Twelve out of 66 or 18 per cent of the members of the Government are women, compared with 10 per cent in the previous Government. The Mission continues its efforts to expand the political space for women, including through addressing disparities in media coverage. For example, the Mission organized a training on gender-sensitive and non-biased coverage of women in politics for more than 500 journalists, of which 42 per cent were women, and significantly increased the airtime of women panellists in broadcasts aired by the United Nations radio station Radio Okapi. The Mission also organized workshops on gender-responsive budgeting and legislation for newly elected provincial assembly delegates and other administrative authorities and supported efforts by civil society to increase women's political inclusion, which resulted in the appointment of two female customary chiefs to the provincial assemblies in South Kivu and Kongo Central.

- The Government has shown a strong commitment to advancing the women and peace and security agenda. The United Nations has assisted the Government in finalizing its second national action plan for the implementation of Security Council resolution [1325 \(2000\)](#), and the related operational plan detailing the actions to be taken over a four-year period was validated by the Government in August 2020.
- The Mission continues to provide support for women's civil society organizations, women mediators and women peacebuilders and will engage them in the Mission's new approach to disarmament, demobilization and reintegration, which is more focused towards community-based reintegration than on integrating ex-combatants into the armed forces.
- Women and girls continue to be affected by the violent conflict in the east of the country and are subjected to a range of human rights violations and abuses, including sexual violence. The Mission's strategy is to include women as key actors in their own protection by strengthening women's leadership, participation and representation in conflict prevention mechanisms. Increasing the participation of women in community alert networks is particularly important. In some areas, 60 per cent of accurate local protection alerts reportedly come from women.
- The Democratic Republic of the Congo is the situation on the agenda of the Security Council with the highest number of parties credibly suspected of committing or being responsible for patterns of rape or other forms of sexual violence as listed in the report of the Secretary-General on conflict-related sexual violence ([S/2020/487](#)). From January to September 2020, the United Nations verified 777 cases of conflict-related sexual violence. The majority of violations have been conducted by non-State armed groups and a quarter by the State security apparatus. In 2019, the United Nations documented 1,409 cases of conflict-related sexual violence, which constitutes an increase of 34 per cent as compared with the previous year, which saw the highest number of cases since 2011. Because of chronic underreporting due to stigma, fear of reprisals and limited service coverage, these figures are believed to be only a fraction of the actual cases. These levels of sexual violence are linked to broader peace and security dynamics, including the circulation of small arms and light weapons, the illicit exploitation of natural resources, protracted interethnic conflicts, incomplete disarmament, demobilization and reintegration processes at the national level, inconsistent oversight over the security forces, massive population displacement and cycles of violence met with impunity.
- The Government has increased its efforts in the fight against impunity and the prevention of conflict-related sexual violence, including through the launch of the Congolese National Police action plan on the fight against sexual violence, which was signed after continued advocacy by the Mission and the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict. Furthermore, the Prime Minister signed an addendum to the 2013 Joint Communiqué between the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the United Nations on the Fight against Sexual Violence in Conflict. The Mission also conducted a mapping of high-risk areas for women and girls in connection with armed conflict, sexual and gender-based violence and other human rights violations in South Kivu and North Kivu. The Mission's military engages with local women in these areas, and the role of women peacekeepers in building trust with local communities is crucial.
- Judicial advances have been made in the fight against impunity for conflict-related sexual violence, especially within the military justice system. There have

been more trials for conflict-related sexual violence in the Democratic Republic of the Congo than in any other country monitored by the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict. Following the milestone conviction of Bosco Ntaganda by the International Criminal Court, Kokodikoko, the commander of an armed group faction, was convicted for crimes against humanity, including systematic sexual violence, by a military court in South Kivu.

- During the COVID-19 pandemic, the Mission has undertaken multiple initiatives to fight it. Women play an important role in conveying messages on how to curb the spread of the virus. The Mission also provides technical and financial support to the Government and administrative authorities, including supporting the ministry of State in charge of gender in developing a strategic document on the priority actions related to the women and peace and security agenda in the response to the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Reflecting on her personal experience in the Democratic Republic of the Congo since 2008, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Head of MONUSCO highlighted the progress that had been made on the women and peace and security agenda since then. She noted that, when one looked back at the previous 12 years, the role of women in advancing peace and security and the engagement of the United Nations on the issue had both undergone a fundamental shift in the right direction.

The following recommendations were made by either UN-Women, as the secretariat of the Informal Expert Group, the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict or the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for the Democratic Republic of the Congo during her briefing.¹ In view of the upcoming negotiations on the mandate of MONUSCO, and the joint strategy developed by MONUSCO and the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo on the Mission's transition, the Security Council should:

- Retain all existing references to women and peace and security in both the preambular and operational paragraphs of Council resolution [2502 \(2019\)](#), including taking into account gender considerations as a cross-cutting issue throughout the mandate and enhanced reporting by MONUSCO to the Security Council, as well as the current language on sexual and gender-based violence, including the references to the 2013 Joint Communiqué between the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the United Nations on the Fight Against Sexual Violence in Conflict and the 2019 Addendum thereto signed by the Government and the United Nations.
- Request that the Mission strengthen efforts for the promotion of a legal, political and socioeconomic environment conducive to the equal and meaningful participation of women in all spheres of decision-making at the national, provincial and local levels and in peacemaking initiatives. The Council should make this commitment explicit in the priority tasks related to stabilization, including in the reform of the security sector and the fight against impunity and the new disarmament, demobilization and reintegration strategy, focused on community-based reintegration.
- Emphasize the importance of ensuring that all humanitarian assistance is informed by gender analysis and data disaggregated by age, sex and disabilities,

¹ These recommendations are suggestions from United Nations participants in this meeting or the background note prepared by the secretariat of the Informal Expert Group ahead of the meeting, and not recommendations from the Informal Expert Group as a whole or from Council members.

supported by gender expertise and grounded in consultations with women's organizations.

- Recognize women's leadership role in mitigating the effects of the COVID-19 crisis and the disproportionate impact that the pandemic will have on women and girls, and call for a gender-responsive approach to pandemic response and post-pandemic recovery.

In addition, Council members and the Co-Chairs of the Informal Expert Group should:

- Urge the Government to fully support the Secretary-General's call for a global ceasefire amid the COVID-19 pandemic, which must include a cessation of sexual violence as a tactic of war.
- Urge the Government to expedite the establishment of a national reparations fund that eliminates barriers to reparations for victims of sexual and gender-based violence and ensures full compliance with court-ordered reparations.
- Ask for information and analysis on the growing threat of terrorism posed by Islamic State Central Africa Province and its specific impact on women and girls.
- Encourage police- and troop-contributing countries to increase women's representation in the uniformed components of the Mission.
- Ensure that funding for Gender Advisers and Women's Protection Advisers continues to be reflected in the Mission's regular budget.
- Request from the United Nations updated information and analysis on the implementation of the second national action plan on women and peace and security.
- Request from the United Nations an update on its plans to ensure that gender equality is central to transition planning in MONUSCO and rooted in gender-responsive conflict analysis, and whether funds and expertise to conduct such analysis and ensure its follow-up have been identified or mobilized.

The Co-Chairs closed the meeting, thanking the briefers for their participation and committed to follow-up on the important issues raised at the meeting.