

**Security Council**

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Letter dated 8 April 2019 from the Permanent Representatives of Germany, Peru and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

Germany and Peru, 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, would like to share the summary of the meeting of the Informal Expert Group held on 25 March 2019 on the situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (see annex).

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

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Permanent Representative of the United Kingdom to the United Nations



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Summary of the meeting of the Informal Expert Group on Women and Peace and Security on the situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, held on 25 March 2019

On 25 March 2019, the Informal Expert Group on Women and Peace and Security convened a meeting on the situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Members of the Security Council were briefed by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO), Leila Zerrougui, accompanied by experts from the Mission and the United Nations country team.

Council members asked several questions about the low levels of women's representation in politics and the high rates of conflict-related sexual violence; the current status of the new national action plan on women and peace and security and what can be done by the Security Council, the African Union and its continental results framework, or bilaterally by individual Member States, to assist in its implementation and enhance compliance; efforts to review the United Nations strategy and interventions vis-à-vis the recent and upcoming elections; and the role of the United Nations in engaging with non-State armed actors and in addressing the Ebola epidemic. Council members also asked about the new President's commitment to gender equality and to continuing the implementation of existing obligations on conflict-related sexual violence.

Below are the main points that were raised during the meeting:

- The presidential and legislative elections held in December 2018, after a two-year delay, resulted in the first peaceful transfer of power since the country's independence, with the inauguration of President Tshilombo Tshisekedi. The gubernatorial elections have been postponed, and the President has suspended the inauguration of the newly elected senators owing to allegations of corruption and other irregularities, but the Independent Electoral Commission is continuing its preparations to hold the delayed elections in Beni, Butembo and Yumbi on 31 March.
- The President has indicated on several occasions – including in his inauguration speech and on International Women's Day – that he is committed to finding ways of reaching gender parity in all government institutions. This presents an important window of opportunity for international partners interested in supporting Congolese women. The Special Representative of the Secretary-General will meet with the President to discuss some of the issues raised in this meeting, from entry points to increase women's political participation, including the representation of women in his Government, to advocating the continuation of the framework for and the investment in previous years in the Office of the Special Adviser to the President on the Prevention of Sexual Violence and Child Recruitment.
- Over 20 million women (52 per cent of the electorate) were registered as voters. The United Nations undertook several initiatives to support the participation of women in the elections. For example, the Mission engaged with hundreds of journalists on how to report on the elections without discrimination and gender biases, supported non-governmental organizations to build a "digital electoral clinic" to keep women candidates informed of all necessary administrative and

logistical details regarding the election, intensified mixed patrols to help mitigate electoral violence, strengthened networks of local women mediators in at-risk areas and invited women to use their media platforms to become better known. More than half of the politicians invited to promote their candidacies on Radio Okapi in the weeks preceding the elections were women, and of the 114 women candidates who spoke on air during those weeks, 11 were elected to the national and provincial assemblies. Ninety-seven women politicians, including candidates for the upcoming legislative elections in Beni and Butembo, received capacity-building support from the Mission. Through the facilitation of dialogues with traditional leaders and customary chiefs, two female customary chiefs were nominated in the National Assembly, with three more named as substitutes, compared with only one in 2006.

- These efforts did not translate directly into substantially increased levels of women's representation in executive or legislative positions, as provisional results indicate that women won only 10.5 per cent of seats in the National Assembly and 11 per cent in provincial assemblies. Among the 50 women elected to the National Assembly, over one third were re-elected. A positive exception is the partial and provisional results in the Senate, which indicate that women may have won 20 per cent of seats, compared with 5 per cent in the previous election.
- The low numbers are partly explained by the rejection of the introduction of quotas in the electoral law, the higher threshold of seats needed to be included in legislative bodies and the application of higher entry fees, all of which presented obstacles to women's participation and incentivized parties to opt for better-known and more established male candidates. The United Nations will continue to support women's organizations and politicians lobbying for the adoption of temporary special measures in the electoral law.
- The United Nations verified that there was an increase in incidents of conflict-related sexual violence in 2018, resulting in the highest number of verified cases since 2011, which, perhaps not coincidentally, was the last time that the country held elections. Areas of particular concern include North and South Kivu, as well as Ituri, Tanganyika and Kasai provinces. This trend has not abated in 2019. Although the armed forces and the police account for almost 30 per cent of cases, the majority of perpetrators continue to be armed groups and militias, especially in vast areas of North and South Kivu where there is very limited State authority, and typically during attacks on villages or roadside ambushes. The Mission's protection of civilians strategy includes early warning and timely information-sharing on incidents of conflict-related sexual violence, sensitization of non-State armed actors, enhanced patrolling in at-risk areas, joint protection assessments and delivery of post-rape care in affected locations. In addition, the Mission is integrating prevention and response measures into its disarmament, demobilization and reintegration strategy and is continuing to support efforts to enhance accountability for perpetrators, including as part of the implementation of the action plan of the Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. In 2018, 78 commanders of the Armed Forces signed individual commitments to prevent sexual violence.
- Women are particularly vulnerable in the Ebola epidemic because they often take care of the sick, prepare the funerals and have less access to information. Currently, women account for 57 per cent of all cases. The Mission is taking greater efforts to include women in its initiatives, as called for in resolution [2439 \(2018\)](#). For example, the United Nations conducted an Ebola information campaign recently in Beni territory aimed exclusively at pregnant women during their prenatal doctor appointments.

- Currently, 3.6 per cent of the military component and 12.3 per cent of the police component of the Mission are women. In 2019, gender parity strategies were adopted for both the force and the United Nations police, and women participating in the operational activities of the United Nations police increased by more than 45 per cent from the first to the last quarter of 2018. The proportion of women recruited to international posts increased from 26.3 per cent in December 2016 to 29.3 per cent in February 2019, while the goal of MONUSCO is to reach 36 per cent by June 2019. The number of women on the rosters from which the Mission recruits for most posts is low, and retaining women will be especially difficult as MONUSCO enters a period of downsizing, as current rules favour the longest-serving staff, who are typically men.
- MONUSCO is the first peacekeeping mission to adopt gender markers to assess, improve, monitor and report on the Mission's gender-responsiveness, and this is having a tangible impact in many areas of its work.

The United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women), as the secretariat of the Informal Expert Group, highlighted some of the recommendations shared in writing with the Informal Expert Group members. These included:

- In view of negotiations for a new Security Council resolution on the Democratic Republic of the Congo, it is imperative that the Council retain all the strong language on women and peace and security that was included in paragraphs 6, 8, 10, 19, 36, 37, 39, 40, 41, 51, 57 and 60 of resolution [2409 \(2018\)](#), paying special attention to paragraph 39, in which the Security Council requested MONUSCO to take fully into account gender considerations as a cross-cutting issue throughout its mandate and to assist the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and other relevant stakeholders in ensuring the participation, involvement and representation of women at all levels, including in the creation of conditions conducive to the holding of elections, protection of civilians and support to stabilization efforts through, inter alia, the provision of gender and women's protection advisers, and further requested enhanced reporting by MONUSCO to the Council on this issue.
- Given that the national and provincial governments have not yet been formed, the Security Council should add "good governance and the consolidation of peace efforts" to the task list contained in paragraph 39 and the different areas of work in which MONUSCO should ensure women's participation.
- As part of the Mission's protection of civilians mandate and priority tasks (para. 36), the Mission should engage regularly with women's organizations and women-led violence prevention initiatives and monitor and report on threats to women's civil society organizations and on measures taken to protect women politicians, candidates, activists and human rights defenders.
- The Council should call on the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and its international partners to ensure adequate funding for the implementation of the second national action plan on women and peace and security and the action plans based on the 2013 joint communiqué on conflict-related sexual violence.
- Given the importance of supporting stronger gender analysis of the conflict in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, paragraph 33, in which the Security Council underlined the importance of enhanced political and conflict analysis, should reflect that gender issues must be taken into consideration in order to address the root causes of ongoing violence. Any new strategic review of MONUSCO or other mission planning processes should ensure the inclusion of

gender expertise in order to safeguard gains relating to women and peace and security in any United Nations reconfiguration.

- The Co-Chairs of the Informal Expert Group, together with other Council members, should engage with their counterparts from the Democratic Republic of the Congo to enquire about: the status of the second national action plan on women and peace and security; the demands by civil society for the release of human rights defenders and peace activists, including women; the overdue establishment of an interministerial committee and a national council on gender parity; the implementation of the 2008 electoral law, in which political parties are requested to consider gender parity when establishing their lists; and the enactment of the pending law on the prevention, control and reduction of small arms and light weapons and their ammunition and the ratification of the Arms Trade Treaty and the Kinshasa Convention, as the national plan on small arms and light weapons launched in March 2018 identified a strong correlation between these weapons and both rape and domestic violence.

The Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict complemented these suggestions with further recommendations on conflict-related sexual violence. In particular, the Office called for immediate assistance in providing support and protection to bring as many of the victims of the mass rape in Walikale in 2010 to testify in the ongoing trial of Ntabo Ntaberi Sheka and Serafin Lionso in Goma and requested that the Security Council remain seized of this emblematic case in line with its early engagement and the statement by the President of the Security Council dated 17 September 2010 ([S/PRST/2010/17](#)); noted that the action plan on sexual violence of the national police, which was finalized in March 2018, had not been signed by the previous Minister of the Interior and should be prioritized by the new Government; encouraged the allocation of dedicated resources to the monitoring, analysis, and reporting arrangements working group and the team of the Senior Women's Protection Adviser to support the engagement of the United Nations with armed groups on conflict-related sexual violence, while reiterating that in any negotiations with armed groups there must be clearly defined "red lines" and that de facto or de jure amnesties for conflict-related sexual violence are expressly prohibited in Security Council resolution [2106 \(2013\)](#), which requires perpetrators to face prosecution; and stated that individuals being demobilized or integrated into defence and security institutions should be thoroughly vetted in line with the Council's resolutions. Finally, the Office called for the new President to uphold the commitments to address conflict-related sexual violence made by the previous Government in the 2013 joint communiqué and its subsequent 2016 road map and to allocate resources from the national budget to accelerate the implementation of those commitments, including through a proper handover between the newly appointed Special Adviser to the President on Youth and Combating Violence against Women and the former Special Adviser to the President on the Prevention of Sexual Violence and Child Recruitment.

The Co-Chairs closed the meeting and expressed their intention to follow up on the recommendations raised at the meeting.