



# Security Council

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## Letter dated 6 December 2023 from the Permanent Representatives of Switzerland, the United Arab Emirates and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

Switzerland and the United Arab Emirates, 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 note of the meeting of the Informal Expert Group 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.

*(Signed)* Pascale **Baeriswyl**  
Permanent Representative of Switzerland to the United Nations

*(Signed)* Lana Zaki **Nusseibeh**  
Permanent Representative of the United Arab Emirates  
to the United Nations

*(Signed)* Barbara **Woodward**  
Permanent Representative of the United Kingdom  
to the United Nations



## **Annex to the letter dated 6 December 2023 from the Permanent Representatives of Switzerland, the United Arab Emirates and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General**

### **Informal Expert Group on Women and Peace and Security of the Security Council: summary of the meeting on the situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, held on 6 November 2023**

On 6 November 2023, 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 in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Head of the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO), Bintou Keita, accompanied by colleagues from MONUSCO and the United Nations country team. The meeting concluded with an overview of key recommendations provided by United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women) and additional observations on conflict-related sexual violence shared by the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict.

#### **Questions from Council members**

Members of the Security Council asked questions about women's safe participation in the electoral process and accountability for the threats and harassment against women, both as candidates and voters. The participants also asked several questions about the transition process of MONUSCO: gaps and challenges in women and girls' protection during the transition process, the transition's impact on women and peace and security, human rights and the monitoring of conflict-related sexual violence, and the Government's commitment and capacity to implement women and peace and security priorities. They also raised questions about women's economic empowerment, tailored approaches and opportunities to address reports of conflict-related sexual violence in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo, and the implementation of the law on reparations for victims of conflict-related sexual violence.

#### **Main points raised at the meeting**

- Regional initiatives for peace continue, albeit at a slower pace. In the Luanda process, there are no women directly involved, as the discussions are held by the Presidents of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Rwanda and Angola. In the third round of the Nairobi process, 1 of the 127 delegates from the armed groups was a woman, and women made up 40 per cent of participants from civil society and affected communities, and 30 per cent of the facilitation team. Much effort was invested by the United Nations in improving women's representation since the first round of consultations, in which no women were involved.
- Preparations for the general elections, scheduled for 20 December, are ongoing. Women make up 17 per cent of the candidates at the national level, 28 per cent at the provincial level and 43 per cent at the communal level. Two of the 26 presidential candidates are women and their candidacies have been validated by the Constitutional Court. More support is needed, including funding, to ensure the participation of women candidates is meaningful.
- Women electoral candidates face hate speech and harassment, both online and offline, and fear reprisals and censorship. The United Nations has provided the

Government with information regarding specific cases of violence against women in politics and has supported the establishment of women's situation rooms as a mechanism to detect potential attacks on women voters, candidates or observers. MONUSCO has engaged through good offices and advocacy with political parties on this matter. The recently adopted Digital Code includes provisions against disinformation and harassment of women online, including strong sanctions for violations. MONUSCO works with the national authorities, including the Deputy Prime Minister for Interior and Security, to support women's safety and security during the election campaign and on election day.

- Continued violence and armed conflict in the Democratic Republic of the Congo have a severe impact on women and girls, especially in Ituri, North Kivu and South Kivu. In the eastern part of the country, Mouvement du 23 mars (M23) and other armed groups have increased their attacks, causing increased internal displacement. Internally displaced women and girls are at a heightened risk of sexual violence, sexual slavery, abduction, forced marriage and exploitation, including owing to the wide presence of armed groups around and within the sites for internally displaced persons.
- Sexual and gender-based violence is prevalent beyond the conflict areas, and this is exacerbated by food insecurity and women's socioeconomic situation. There is an urgent need for more integrated multisectoral centres where survivors can receive medical, legal, psychological and socioeconomic support.
- Owing to a lack of access, not all cases of conflict-related sexual violence can be verified by the United Nations. In some of those areas, civil society organizations are the ones documenting and responding to conflict-related sexual violence.
- MONUSCO and the United Nations country team engage with the armed groups in the Democratic Republic of the Congo through different programmes, such as the Disarmament, Demobilization, Community Recovery and Stabilization Programme. MONUSCO works with the national counterparts to ensure that women are included in disarmament and reintegration programmes, that these are designed in a gender-responsive manner, that more women are recruited to the defence and security forces, and that the police and armed forces are educated on the topic of positive masculinity.
- At the community level, MONUSCO also engages women to be part of the early warning and early response mechanisms, supports women mediators and equips local women leaders with skills to prevent violence.
- In a letter addressed to the President of the Security Council on 1 September 2023 ([S/2023/648](#)), the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo requested the United Nations to start the Mission's withdrawal before the end of this year. The renewal of the Mission's mandate is scheduled for December 2023. The United Nations emphasized that it is important to ensure that the gains made in the area of women and peace and security are not lost in the context of a reconfiguration of the United Nations presence in the country. MONUSCO continues its transition in line with the special report of the Secretary-General on this matter ([S/2023/574](#)), and the statement by the President of the Security Council adopted on 16 October ([S/PRST/2023/5](#)). This includes ensuring that the eventual withdrawal of the peacekeeping mission does not leave a security vacuum and gaps in the protection of civilians, in particular in settlements and in camps for internally displaced persons. A significant scale-up of State-building support will be needed at the provincial level. The same applies for women and peace and security. For example, the Democratic Republic of the Congo is implementing its second national action plan on women and peace and

security and UN-Women is supporting the Government in an assessment of its implementation, and there is a clear need for decentralization and greater investment in local and provincial mechanisms.

- The Mission and United Nations country team are currently preparing a common country analysis, which will guide the development of the new United Nations Sustainable Development Country Framework 2025–2029 in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Strong ownership of the women and peace and security agenda and transitional justice by the Government will be essential. Additional human and financial resources are needed for the country team to take over some of the functions and tasks undertaken by MONUSCO.
- In the first semester of 2023, the number of United Nations-verified grave violations against children in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, which includes sexual violence, was up by 40 per cent in comparison with 2022. The report of the Secretary-General on conflict-related sexual violence has covered the Democratic Republic of the Congo for over a decade, and had the country listed again with the highest number of United Nations-verified incidents of conflict-related sexual violence. The latest report (S/2023/413) lists 21 parties to the conflict in the Democratic Republic of the Congo as credibly suspected of committing or being responsible for patterns of rape or other forms of sexual violence in situations of armed conflict, which represents close to half of the parties listed annually in the report of the Secretary-General. Of the listed parties, 19 are non-State actors and two are State actors.
- The Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Congolese National Police are included in the list. Since 2013–2014 they have undertaken formal commitments, cooperated with the United Nations and have action plans in place. Some progress has been made in prosecuting these crimes, particularly through the military justice system and significant investment by MONUSCO in this area. Sustaining this work during the transition and in a post-transition context will be crucial, including the continuation of the monitoring, analysis and reporting arrangements for addressing conflict-related sexual violence.

### Recommendations

The following recommendations were made by UN-Women, as the secretariat of the Informal Expert Group.<sup>1</sup>

In the upcoming negotiations on mandate renewal, the Security Council should retain the references to women and peace and security made in its resolution [2666 \(2022\)](#), and consider including the following language in the operative paragraphs:

Demands the full, equal and meaningful participation of women in peace processes from the early stages and at all levels, including in regional initiatives, as well as in their implementation and monitoring, and as beneficiaries and participants of the operationalization of the national Disarmament, Demobilization, Community Recovery and Stabilization Programme;

Stresses the importance of a gender-responsive transition process and requests the United Nations to regularly consult with women's civil society organizations across the country on all aspects of the transition, to ensure that comprehensive gender analysis and technical gender expertise are included

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<sup>1</sup> 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, in consultation with other United Nations entities, including the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict. They are not recommendations from the Informal Expert Group as a whole or Council members.

throughout the process, and to monitor the impact on women and girls of any reconfiguration of the United Nations presence in conflict-affected territories (in line with resolution [2594 \(2021\)](#), para. 6);

Welcomes progress towards stronger representation of women in decision-making, and encourages the consideration of additional measures to promote women's participation in politics, including temporary special measures and protection mechanisms for women as candidates and voters and an adequate policy response to gender-based hate speech and restrictions on women's organizations;

Requests the Government and the United Nations to address the serious protection crisis in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo and ensure that gender-based violence and grave violations against children are taken into account in the options for the reconfiguration of the United Nations presence in the region;

Stresses the need to ensure that incidents, patterns and trends of conflict-related sexual violence, as established by the monitoring, analysis and reporting arrangements for conflict-related sexual violence, continue to serve as the basis for reporting to the Security Council, as well as evidence-based engagement and advocacy and programmatic response by the United Nations;

Requests regional organizations involved in peace and security processes in the Democratic Republic of the Congo to take women and peace and security considerations into account in all their interventions, and report thereon in relevant forums, including the Security Council;

Commends the adoption of a law on the protection and reparations for victims of conflict-related sexual violence, and encourages international partners to support the Government in its full implementation, including allocating adequate resources to the reparations fund for timely disbursement;

Urges the authorities to accelerate implementation of the addendum to the joint communiqué on addressing conflict-related sexual violence and the respective plans of the Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Congolese National Police, and the national and provincial action plans on women and peace and security;

Stresses the importance of the inclusion of local women's organizations in the planning and delivery of assistance, and calls upon international partners to provide long-term and flexible funding to local women-led and women's rights organizations.

When renewing the Democratic Republic of the Congo sanctions regime and extending the mandate of the Group of Experts on the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the Security Council should consider adding a stand-alone listing criterion related to sexual violence, request the Secretariat to include the necessary gender expertise in the Group of Experts, and request the Group of Experts to integrate gender as a cross-cutting issue across its investigations and reporting. The sanctions committee should consider listings related to conflict-related sexual violence, in view of the information presented by the Group of Experts.

The Co-Chairs thanked the Special Representative of the Secretary-General and the representatives of MONUSCO and the United Nations country team, and all participants.