

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

Statement by Ms. Sandrine Lusamba UN Security Council Briefing on the Democratic Republic of the Congo 11 December 2023

Mr. President, Excellencies,

I am pleased to be here once again today to share our thoughts on the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO). My name is Sandrine Lusamba and I am the National Coordinator of Solidarité Féminine Pour La Paix et le Développement Intégral (SOFEPADI)—a Congolese organization that campaigns for the defense and promotion of women's rights.

Since my last briefing to the Security Council in 2021, the security situation in my country has further deteriorated despite the presence of MONUSCO peacekeepers and other national and foreign military forces in the country, under the helpless and disappointed gaze of the local community.¹

The Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) is now at a crossroads. For the first time in about a quarter of a century, soon we will no longer host a United Nations peacekeeping operation. However, apart from a press release announcing that the Government of the DRC and MONUSCO had agreed on a plan to disengage the mission, civil society has little information and is questioning the content of this plan.²

The UN Country Team mapped the protection activities and capacities of UN agencies, which were identified as part of MONUSCO's mandate. However, this mapping effort was not sufficient in terms of needs analysis and did not take into account the contributions or participation of civil society and local, national and international NGOs. This process has failed to allow for the full, equal and meaningful participation of women and the inclusion of youth, as required by UN Security Council Resolution 2594 when a UN mission is in transition, and the series of Women, Peace and Security (WPS) resolutions that the Council has adopted since 2000.³

In the run-up to the elections, we are witnessing a further rapid deterioration of the security situation in North Kivu province, where intense fighting has led to displacement of more than 200,000 people since the beginning of October 2023, as well as in Ituri province where attacks on civilians and civilian infrastructure have increased.⁴ Sites for internally displaced persons (IDPs) and schools have been targeted, with more than 550,000 people forced to flee since the beginning of the year.⁵

Gender-based violence (GBV) is one of the greatest threats to protection and one of the least resourced sectors in the humanitarian response—even though the international community's commitment to ending this scourge is at the center of the WPS agenda.⁶ The Council has adopted several WPS resolutions that commit to ensuring a "survivor-centred approach" when GBV occurs—but this is not the case for women and girls in the DRC. Very few GBV survivors in eastern DRC have timely access to medical care and psychosocial support, much less the possibility to seek legal advice or rebuild their livelihoods for resilience.⁷

MONUSCO's withdrawal is pushing civil society organizations, including those led by women, to consider both the opportunities for transferring some of MONUSCO's tasks and the risks of such a withdrawal.⁸

When it comes to opportunities, some activities of MONUSCO's Civil Affairs Section could be transferred to local NGOs in accordance with commitments to localize humanitarian assistance.⁹ This transfer would be aligned with the skills, expertise and areas of intervention of NGOs, and it would require NGOs to receive the necessary resources and support to take on and carry out these responsibilities in a sustainable and quality manner.

For example, NGOs could carry out social cohesion projects that include the organization of inter- and intra-community dialogues and action research.

NGOs could take over some of the activities of MONUSCO's child protection section alongside UNICEF and the UN Country Team. Local NGOs with experience in child protection are the experts in their communities and

should have the means and resources to take on greater responsibilities for monitoring, reporting and responding to grave violations against children per Resolution 1612.

Similarly, MONUSCO's Gender Section has been an important ally when it comes to fighting impunity for GBV. They recruited forensic doctors with expertise in GBV for the production of forensic evidence to improve access to justice for victims of sexual violence. It is essential that this work continues. Local women's organizations with GBV expertise, who have the trust of survivors, are a logical partner to take on this role.

There are, of course, many risks associated with the withdrawal of MONUSCO, including:

- The deterioration of protection of civilians and the protection of IDP sites, including in areas not accessible to the armed forces and the police.¹⁰
- Lack of monitoring and reporting on human rights by the Joint Human Rights Office. This will also have a negative impact on the early warning system and will lack verified data on GBV that the UN system uses to report on human rights in the DRC and, more broadly, to monitor violations of women's rights. In discussions with other women's organizations in the DRC, we are also concerned that human rights defenders and peacebuilders, especially women leaders in these positions, may also face increased harassment and other protection threats.
- Increased unemployment as a large part of MONUSCO's civilian workforce from the local community will lose their jobs.
- Closure of Radio Okapi, which serves as an essential, independent community platform to spread messages freely and without distinction, and to advance mobilization against GBV.

In light of these observations, I make the following recommendations:

First, in line with the Secretary-General's call, women must be placed at the center of the work of MONUSCO and the UN Country Team.¹¹ Women must lead decision-making in all areas, including humanitarian action, and lead decisions on the investment of resources and energies so that the response focuses on the most marginalized and at-risk groups.

Second, MONUSCO and the UN Country Team should work with local and national NGOs to develop specific indicators to measure the protection and promotion of women's human rights, including in the areas of GBV, attacks on women human rights defenders, sexual and reproductive health and rights, and women's meaningful participation. These indicators should be used to determine whether the security situation is actually improving or not, and to drive early warning efforts.

Third, the Security Council should require the government and all other actors to integrate a human rights-based and survivor-centred approach throughout humanitarian action, in order to fulfill their obligations under international humanitarian law and further ensure that efforts to address the climate crisis and manage natural resources are gender-responsive.

And finally, the international donor community must not abandon the people of the DRC. The government must be supported in order to fulfill its protection responsibilities. The humanitarian response plan must be fully funded and women-led and women's rights organizations must have access to sufficient resources and continuous funding.

Thank you for your continued attention.

¹ NGO Working Group on Women, Peace and Security, "UN Security Council Briefing on DRC by Sandrine Lusamba," 30 March 2021, <https://www.womenpeacesecurity.org/resource/un-security-council-briefing-on-drc-by-sandrine-lusamba/>.

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² MONUSCO, Office of the Spokesperson and Media Relations, “Press Release: The Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and MONUSCO sign a disengagement plan for the withdrawal of the Mission,” 22 November 2023, <https://monusco.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/pr-the-government-of-the-democratic-republic-of-the-congo-and-monusco-sign-a-disengagement-plan-for-the-withdrawal-of-the-mission.pdf>.

³ United Nations Security Council, Resolution 2594 (S/RES/2594), 9 September 2021, [https://undocs.org/S/RES/2594\(2021\)](https://undocs.org/S/RES/2594(2021)). United Nations Peacemaker, “Security Council Resolutions on Women, Peace and Security,” <https://peacemaker.un.org/wps/normative-frameworks/un-security-council-resolutions>.

⁴ East African Community, “Press Statement: Concern over the deteriorating security situation in North Kivu and negative propaganda against the EACRF,” 12 October 2023, <https://www.eac.int/statements/2884-concern-over-the-deteriorating-security-situation-in-north-kivu-and-negative-propaganda-against-the-eacrf>.

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⁵ Norwegian Refugee Council, “DR Congo: An unprecedented crisis goes ignored,” 22 August 2023, <https://www.nrc.no/news/2023/august/drc-an-unprecedented-crisis-goes-ignored/>.

⁶ UNFPA, “Gender-Based Violence continues to surge in eastern DRC,” 8 September 2023, <https://reliefweb.int/report/democratic-republic-congo/gender-based-violence-continues-surge-eastern-drc>.

⁷ CARE International, “Health sector in DRC crumbles amidst conflict negatively impacting survivors of sexual assault,” 14 November 2023, <https://www.care.org/news-and-stories/press-releases/health-sector-in-drc-crumbles-amidst-conflict-negatively-impacting-survivors-of-sexual-assault/>.

⁸ “DRC crisis: Civil society leaders urge UN Security Council to act,” 8 December 2023, <https://reliefweb.int/report/democratic-republic-congo/drc-crisis-civil-society-leaders-urge-un-security-council-act>.

⁹ Inter-Agency Standing Committee, “IASC Guidance on Strengthening Participation, Representation and Leadership of Local and National Actors in IASC Humanitarian Coordination Mechanisms,” 5 July 2021, <https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/operational-response/iasc-guidance-strengthening-participation-representation-and-leadership-local-and-national-actors>.

¹⁰ United Nations Meetings Coverage and Press Releases, “Mission Drawdown in Democratic Republic of Congo Must Not Create Stability Vacuum, Jeopardize Civilian Protection, Senior Official Tells Security Council,” 26 June 2023, <https://press.un.org/en/2023/sc15334.doc.htm>.

¹¹ UN News, “Women and girls must lead battle against ‘widespread and interlinked crises’,” 14 March 2022, <https://news.un.org/en/story/2022/03/1113872>.