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UNITED NATIONS SECURITY COUNCIL
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PREVENTION AND RESOLUTION OF CONFLICTS IN THE GREAT LAKES REGION

**Statement by H.E. Ms Gillian Bird
Ambassador and Permanent Representative
of Australia to the United Nations**

(As delivered)

Thank you Mr President

The history of conflict in the Great Lakes Region underscores that the trajectory towards peace is rarely linear.

Burundi is a prime example. A country that had just begun to heal from the wounds of its civil war is today, again, facing renewed conflict.

Australia is deeply concerned by the lack of progress in resolving Burundi's recent crisis, and reports of **human rights** abuses.

Australia calls on all parties in Burundi, including the authorities, to take immediate steps to end torture, sexual violence, arbitrary detention, enforced disappearances and extrajudicial killings.

Human rights violations are important early indicators of the potential for atrocity crimes. Respect for human rights must be central to building sustainable peace.

As Burundi's situation demonstrates, **regional and international support** for sustained political dialogue and early preventive action are key to consolidating peace. Australia welcomes recent engagement by the Burundian authorities with the African Union High-Level mission, the UN Security Council and the Secretary-General. However, we urge Burundi to also engage – without preconditions – in mediation talks led by the East African Community. This requires genuine engagement with opposition groups.

Critically, mediation talks, together with broader peacebuilding efforts must be **inclusive** of all, particularly women, youth and civil society, if they are to address the grievances that foster conflict.

Mr President

We note with concern that implementation of commitments under the *Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework for the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the region* (PSCF) has recently been limited.

In this context, we welcome the agreement on the resumption of military cooperation between the armed forces of the DRC and MONUSCO, and today's launch of the *UN Great Lakes Regional Strategic Framework*, which aims to support the implementation of the PSCF.

Australia is particularly pleased that the Regional Strategic Framework outlines practical steps to address **violence against women and girls** in the region.

We also commend the Regional Framework's focus on ending the culture of **impunity** through strengthening institutions, empowering civil society organisations and enhancing judicial cooperation.

Ultimately, countries need to address the root causes of conflicts - this includes historical and economic grievances, lack of economic opportunities, resource scarcity and competition.

In this light, we would welcome further discussion of the critical role of domestic resource mobilisation and enhanced economic integration in regional stability.

As we know all too well, economic growth and prosperity, particularly when derived from **natural resources**, can either fuel conflict – as we have seen in the Eastern DRC – or be a driver of sustainable, inclusive growth.

Peacebuilding, particularly in the Great Lakes Region, must pay particular attention to improving the management and transparency of natural resources, as well as ensuring that the benefits of economic growth are shared equitably.

Mr President,

The path towards a peaceful, stable society is hard travelled, with many examples where countries have emerged from conflict, only to relapse. Indeed, the history of the Great Lakes Region highlights that achieving just, meaningful and lasting peace requires sustained effort – from conflict prevention and resolution actions, through to reconciliation and recovery.

Australia welcomes attention on these issues and I look forward to continuing to work with you to advance the cause of sustainable peace, including as co-chairs of peacebuilding resolution negotiations, which are nearing completion.

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