

Appointment of a new EUSR for the Great Lakes: the EU must boost diplomatic efforts to ensure lasting peace and stability in the region.

Brussels, 2 September 2024 – The members of the Europe-Central Africa Network (EurAc) take the occasion to congratulate Mr. Johan Borgstam on his recent appointment as EU Special Representative (EUSR) for the Great Lakes region and wish him every success in his new role. We welcome his nomination which represents a significant step forward in the EU's commitment to fostering peace, stability and sustainable development, while signaling a renewed diplomatic engagement with the countries of the Great Lakes.

This appointment comes at a crucial time for the future of the region. Since the announcement of the EU renewed strategy for the Great Lakes in February 2023, the security situation has significantly worsened. The region remains plagued by violent conflicts that severely affect the daily lives of the population. The resurgence of the M23 in the eastern part of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) is heightening regional tensions and exacerbating an already precarious humanitarian situation. In total, more than 7 million people have been forced to flee the violence, including 6.4 million in the provinces of Ituri, South and North Kivu alone¹. In light of this crisis, the recent announcement of an indefinite ceasefire between Rwanda and the DRC offers a critical opportunity for the region. **The EU must leverage its diplomatic tools to support mediation efforts and find a political and regional solution that ensures lasting peace and security, ending decades of civilian suffering.**

The members of our network and their partners appeal for a long-term vision for the region. It is crucial that the revival of peace negotiations is supported by structural measures addressing the root causes of insecurity in Eastern DRC, critical to the proper implementation of the EU Great Lakes strategy and the stability of the whole region. This includes supporting the Congolese government in its efforts to strengthen the security and justice sectors and consolidate state institutions – especially important as the MONUSCO has begun its withdrawal from the three eastern provinces. Given the intricate link between the mineral trade and instability in the Great Lakes, effective management of natural resources is also fundamental. The EU must prioritize transparency, traceability, and inclusiveness as essential pillars of its present and future strategic partnerships with the countries of the region.

While acknowledging the importance of the security agenda, we emphasize that human rights and good governance deserve equal attention. We further note with concern the deepening trend of shrinking democratic and civic space within the Great Lakes, characterized by an increase in arbitrary arrests, intimidation, and harassment of human rights defenders, journalists, activists and opposition members. Civil society faces significant challenges that hamper its vital work in advancing social justice and the well-being of communities. Face with this reality, **we urge the new EUSR to prioritize the protection of human rights, democracy and good governance in his mandate.**

Through a Team Europe approach, we trust that the diplomatic skills and experience of EUSR Borgstam and his team will be instrumental in contributing to the restoration of peace and fostering sustainable development in the Great Lakes region. We look forward to a fruitful collaboration towards the common goals of peace, inclusive political participation, sustainable and equitable management of natural resources and full respect for human rights.

Europe-Central Africa Network and its members.

¹ [DRC Humanitarian situation report, 1 January to 30 June 2024](#), UNICEF, 23 August 2024