



PRESS RELEASE

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The UN, ICGLR, SADC, AU and Regional and International Partners Discuss Collective Actions against COVID-19 in Support to the Countries of the Great Lakes Region

Nairobi, 18 June 2020 – Huang Xia, the United Nations Special Envoy for the Great Lakes region and Vera Songwe, the Executive Secretary of the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA), co-chaired a virtual round-table meeting on collective actions to mobilize resources and support in tackling the COVID-19 pandemic in the region.

The meeting brought together government officials from Burundi, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Rwanda and Uganda; multilateral and regional financial institutions, including the World Bank, International Monetary Fund, European Investment Bank, African Development Bank, African Export-Import Bank, Arab Bank for Economic Development in Africa, Trade Development Bank; the Guarantor institutions of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework agreement, namely the UN, AU, International Conference on the Great Lakes Region (ICGLR), Southern African Development Community (SADC); and several development partners such as the European Union, and UNDP.

Although the spread of the virus among the countries of the Great Lakes region has been slow and uneven, the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic is far from over. Recent findings from UNECA project the pandemic to cost the entire continent billions of dollars. The economic outlook in the countries of the region before the spread of COVID-19 appeared positive but, the current health crisis has brought a new set of challenges, including a disruption of intra-regional and foreign trade. Thus, the countries of the Great Lakes region are now facing a decrease in revenue combined with an increase in spending for tests, medication and medical equipment, as well as other economic and social measures to support the domestic private sector and the population at large.

“To echo the Secretary-General's call for international solidarity, multilateral regional financial institutions as well as bilateral and multilateral development partners have made numerous pledges and many of them have made commitments on funding for developing countries. Many countries of the Great Lakes already have access to these flexible and dedicated funds,” Special Envoy Xia told the participants in his opening remarks. “This meeting intends, therefore, to be a platform for interactive dialogue between the donor community and the beneficiaries, namely the Great Lakes governments, the regional economic communities and the private sector,” he added.

The specific objectives of the meeting were three-fold: (1) to arrive at a common understanding of the scale of the pandemic in the Great Lakes, and to collectively explore a regional approach to mobilizing resources to mitigating the impact on peace and security in the region; (2) to get clarity on funds availability, the procedures required to benefit from them, and the potential gaps to be filled for additional resources; and (3) to ensure that available funds are properly channeled to the Governments and communities that are most in need.

Given the unprecedented emergency generated by the global pandemic, participants urged the multilateral and regional financial institutions to engage with relevant entities at the national and regional levels to optimize access to funding instruments by member states and Regional Economic Communities. They stressed that available resources must flow to small businesses, households and individuals who are most in need. In this regard, they encouraged all development partners, in consultation with member states and Regional Economic Communities, to accelerate efforts to recalibrate relevant development programmes with a focus on the most vulnerable, and to ensure women and youth are at the centre of the COVID-19 response. They also encouraged the Guarantors of the Framework agreement to continue promoting a coordinated and ambitious response package to enable countries and the region to cope and recover from the socio-economic impacts of the pandemic.

This joint meeting was a follow-up of one of the commitments made by the Guarantor institutions of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework for the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the region on 2 April 2020 “to engage international financial institutions and partners to mobilize the resources required to address the economic implications of the COVID-19 pandemic in the region”.