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Chairman Ros-Lehtinen, Ranking Member Bass, and Members of the Subcommittee on Africa, Global Health, and Human Rights: Thank you for this invitation to testify at this hearing on the current crisis in the eastern DR Congo.

I have been working on the Eastern Congo for over eight years, including the past three as a member of the United Nations Group of Experts on the DRC. Previously, I worked with humanitarian organizations, research institutes and foundations as well as the United Nations peacekeeping mission in the DRC. The Group of Experts 2012 mandate recently expired on 30 November, during which I served as the as the Coordinator of our six-member team under Security Council resolution 2021. As such, I am no longer affiliated with the United Nations and the views I share today do not reflect those of the organization or that of the Group of Experts but rather strictly my personal perspectives, currently, as an independent observer.

The Group of Experts is a Security Council-mandated body which reports to the Council's Sanctions Committee. Its role is to investigate, document, and inform the Sanctions Committee of violations of the United Nations arms embargo on non-state actors in the DRC as well as related issues such as the illegal trade in natural resources and serious violations of international law, including the recruitment and use of child soldiers. The Group also provides the Sanctions Committee with a confidential list of names and entities to be considered for targeted sanctions on the basis of specific criteria flowing from the arms embargo. The Group is also responsible for monitoring the implementation of the measures imposed by targeted sanctions, notably an assets freeze and a travel ban for designated individuals and entities.

As a purely apolitical, independent, fact-finding mechanism of the United Nations, the Group of Experts seeks to avoid analyzing motivations or causes of the arms embargo violations and armed group financing which it documents. However, today, having stepped away from the UN, in addition to summarizing our key findings this year, in my personal capacity, I would like to share my understanding of the likely drivers of the Government of Rwanda's involvement in this conflict and subsequently examine several implications for the current quest for a political solution to the crisis.

Group of Experts' Findings

During the course of this previous mandate, The Group of Experts submitted several confidential communications along with two public reports to the Security Council's Sanctions Committee, an interim and a final. The latter became available on 21 November 2012, while the Security Council published the former on 21 June followed by a special Addendum on 27 June, which focused on Rwandan violations of the arms embargo in conjunction with the then nascent M23 rebellion.

We found that since the very outset of the M23 rebellion, the Government of Rwanda has provided direct military support to M23, facilitated recruitment, encouraged desertions from the Congolese army, and delivered arms, ammunition, intelligence and political advice to the rebels. Our investigations concluded that Rwanda, in fact, orchestrated the creation of M23 when a series of mutinies led by officers formerly belonging to M23's predecessor, the Congrès national pour la défense du peuple, or CNDP, were suppressed by the Congolese armed forces in early May. At the strategic level, Rwanda has also spearheaded fund-raising and membership drives for political cadres, even nominating the movement's political leadership and directly instructing them of their demands to be made before the Congolese government.

The Rwandan army has not only set-up an elaborate recruitment network within Rwanda to ensure a steady supply of new troops to M23, including children and even recycled former Hutu rebels of the FDLR, but they have also integrated their own officers and trainers within the M23 chain of command on the ground in North Kivu. Furthermore, they have deployed Rwandan army units on a permanent basis alongside M23 positions making the two forces nearly indistinguishable. During major offensive and military operations, the Rwandan army has deployed thousands of additional troops to reinforce M23 in their major attacks, such as the recent offensive on Goma.

While members of the international community have expected Rwanda to diminish its support in light of diplomatic and financial pressure, we found that such direct involvement had only increased with time. This is because, in essence, the rebels have become an extension of the Rwandan defense forces. M23's de facto chain of command culminates in the Minister of Defense of Rwanda, General James Kabarebe. To a considerable degree, the reality of the relation between M23 and the Rwandan army goes far beyond simple external support, as M23 does not exist separately from Rwanda as an autonomous entity.

In its efforts to depict a wide-ranging revolution against the Congolese government, Rwandan support to M23 also extended to many other Congolese armed groups, including those who had previously been anti-Rwandophone such as Raia Mutomboki. During the supposed cease-fire from August to October, Raia Mutomboki groups, on orders from M23's Colonel Sultani Makenga, carried out brutal ethnically motivated attacks, burning more than 800 homes and killing hundreds of civilians from Congolese Hutu communities in Masisi territory, whose militias refused to ally themselves with M23. In addition to the Hutu community in North Kivu, the ethnic Tutsi Banyamulenge community in South Kivu has also widely resisted recruitment efforts by M23, in large part because they understand so intimately the level of Rwandan control over the rebellion.

Nevertheless, the Government of Rwanda continues to deny any involvement, despite its open advocacy on behalf of the rebellion. Rwanda has also repeatedly claimed that it was not consulted or given a right of reply to our investigations. This is not true. Despite the Government of Rwanda's refusal to receive us for any substantive meetings during our official visit to Kigali in May, we purposefully delayed the publication of the addendum to our interim report in order to provide the Rwandan Minister of Foreign Affairs an additional opportunity to comment on or provide any clarifications for the information the Group had gathered. However, not only did she decline to do so in a formal meeting explicitly requested by the Sanctions Committee, but later that same day, she proceeded to claim that her government was not privy to our findings. Following the publication of the addendum, we did meet again with the Government of Rwanda

in Kigali and took into consideration its written response to our interim report. However, we found no substantive element of our previous findings that we wished to alter.

We also thoroughly responded to each issue raised by the Government of Rwanda in a formal communication to the Sanctions Committee, which we later published as annex 3 of our final report. Most of the elements of the Rwandan rebuttal were not credible. For example, while in Kigali, they showed us a pile of demolished AK-47 rifles as proof that they had not provided 75 mm canon rounds to the rebels. Also, we easily observed open fields and grounds more than sufficient for sporadic training at Kanombe military base, something they claimed would have been impossible. We also confirmed the veracity of radio intercepts implicating Rwandan officers via commercial radios used by both the rebels and the Rwandan army, which according to Kigali would have been incompatible.

When Rwanda's substantive arguments in its defense were unconvincing, they turned to attacking the Group of Experts, claiming bias against Rwanda and even orchestrating a diplomatic and media campaign defending that I was a sympathizer of the Rwandan Hutu rebels of the FDLR and a denier of the Rwandan genocide. I later discovered that Rwandan officials in the Office of the Presidency had also concocted false testimonies with current FDLR officers promising rewards for media statements about my alleged involvement in providing the rebels with weapons. Nevertheless, the Government of Rwanda had previously recognized the objectivity of the Group's extensive detailed investigations on the support networks and financing of the FDLR in recent years. As the Coordinator this year, I personally oversaw the Group's cooperation with the ongoing trials of the President and Vice-President of the FDLR in Germany.

Rwanda has also claimed that the Congolese army has been supporting the FDLR. However, the Rwandan hutu rebels, at historically low numbers, have become further isolated from external support and are focused on self-protection in the face of attacks by the Congolese armed forces and M23 allies. While some criminal networks within the Congolese armed forces continue to sell small amounts of ammunition to the rebels, there is, however, no evidence of strategic cooperation between the FDLR and the Government.

In addition to Rwandan backing to M23, in our final report, we also thoroughly documented support for the rebels from important networks and individuals within the Government of Uganda. Senior Ugandan officials provided the rebels with direct troop reinforcements in Congolese territory, weapons deliveries, technical assistance, joint planning, political advice and facilitation of external relations. They also supported the creation and expansion of the political branch of M23 permanently based in Kampala even before President Kabila had ever authorized any interaction between the rebels and the Government of Uganda.

The Ugandan government officially acknowledged this support was indeed taking place in a meeting with the Group of Experts in early October. An appointed senior police officer stated that they would take actions to investigate and arrest those involved. The DRC government is fully aware of this support by individuals within the Government of Uganda, but has chosen not to denounce out of the hopes of convincing the Ugandans they have more to gain by working with Kinshasa than with Kigali in this current crisis.

In the light of the serious nature of our findings regarding external support from the Government of Rwanda and individuals within the Ugandan security services, we adopted elevated methodological standards for these investigations. Since early April 2012, the Group interviewed

over 100 M23 deserters including 57 claiming Rwandan nationality. During field visits, we privileged our own observations and research in conflict zones and along the borders. Furthermore, we also analyzed M23's weapons and military equipment found in arms caches and on the battlefield, satellite imagery of supply routes between M23 and Rwandan army posts, and intercepts of radio communications. Though, we consulted dozens of senior Congolese military commanders and intelligence officials as well as political and community leaders with intricate knowledge of regional developments, the DRC government was never the starting point of any of our information-gathering. During the initial stages of the rebellion government officials sought to even impede our access to key information about Rwandan involvement, preferring to deal with such issues discretely with Kigali themselves. Moreover, we communicated regularly with many active participants of the M23 rebellion and other armed groups, as well as current and former security officials and civil authorities within Uganda and Rwanda.

The Security Council and the Sanctions Committee have consistently supported the Group and our findings about external support to M23. Various African and western intelligence services, as well as independent inquiries by investigative journalists and research organizations have also confirmed the Group's conclusions concerning Rwandan violations of the embargo.

M23's Principal Demands

Throughout our work, the question most often posed to us was quite natural and logical: why? Why would Rwanda undertake such a risky and politically dangerous endeavor? Though, as I stated at the outset, it is not the work of the Group of Experts to establish causes or drivers of conflict, in the spirit of the great ambitiousness of my Rwandan colleagues, I will humbly attempt to analyze some of the stated motives behind this war, beginning with M23's key demands.

Since the rebellion's initial stages, the rebels have presented an assortment of demands and justifications for their rebellion. Many are characterized by varying degrees of inconsistencies, improvisation, and opportunism. When international journalists have interviewed Makenga, many observed that he had little grasp for any of the ideas he was supposed to be fighting for. I once sat through an hour-long speech by M23's spokesman about how it was, in fact, the western Congolese officers in the army who were actually discriminated against and not the Tutsis.

However, many of these demands are clearly inconsistent with the reality of the identities and past histories of M23's top leadership. While all armed groups construct political demands based on conjunctural analysis of what will bring them the greatest popular sympathies, the difference with M23 is that first, the contradictions are so glaring and second, the analysis and post-facto pretexts have largely been constructed by the Government of Rwanda itself. For the most part, Rwanda has sought to grasp at any idea or problem which might resonate with the Congolese population and which would give M23 a degree of legitimacy.

As per their name, first and foremost, the rebels have claimed that the government reneged on the 23 March 2009 peace agreements. However, this accord was merely an after-thought to formalize a bilateral deal between Kinshasa and Kigali which was predicated on the affording the latter with immense influence in the Kivus in exchange for arresting CNDP Chairman, Laurent Nkunda, and forcing the rest of the CNDP to join the national army under the leadership of Bosco Ntaganda. For many within the CNDP and the Rwandan government, the integration of the CNDP into the Congolese army was merely a tactical move, but never constituted a fundamental alteration of objectives. Some former CNDP officers have repeated that when

Rwandans convinced them to join the army, they told them that “be patient, we will arrive at the objective, trust us.”

The short-term deal, nevertheless, was immensely generous to Rwanda, the Congolese officers of the CNDP, particularly Ntaganda and his loyal officers, who took control over much of the army in the eastern Congo. Kabila’s appeasement of the rebels led to near-preferential treatment for these officers and Rwandan influence in the eastern Congo reached unparalleled levels at the end of 2011 through, for example, massive smuggling of minerals into Rwanda in collaboration with senior Rwandan army commanders.

Paradoxically, the rebels have also complained of the pervasive corruption within the Congolese army. Nevertheless, as some of the most important commanders in the eastern DRC, they were some of the worst perpetrators of salary theft, racketeering, and sale of national assets for private gain. When any efforts were made by the Congolese Military Prosecutor’s office to reign in these rogue officers, including Ntaganda and Makenga, ex-CNDP officers attacked prisons and assassinated opponents, intimidating Kabila with threats of returning to war. The original mutiny back in April was sparked, at least superficially, with the ex-CNDP officers refusing to take part in seminars in Kinshasa on the reform of the army.

Moreover, the rebels have claimed discrimination for Tutsi officers within the army and the killing of those former CNDP officers who had been re-deployed outside of the Kivus. While certain historical animosities cannot be denied, little credible evidence exists to support these assertions. On the contrary, former CNDP officers have been re-deployed to other provinces without any significant incidents and dozens of senior Tutsi officers within the Congolese army, including two regional commanders and over four-fifths of the ex-CNDP, have chosen not to join M23.

M23 has also made many claims about human rights, even though nine of its members and associates have been designated for sanctions by both the U.S. government and the UN’s Sanctions Committee, most for egregious violations of international law. During the current M23 rebellion, these same officers have recruited and trained hundreds of child soldiers, often killing those who attempt to escape. When they previously dominated the military command in the eastern DRC, M23 officers oversaw numerous mafia networks exploiting natural resources through forced labor as well as partaking in widespread violent land grabs.

Nevertheless, M23 similarly demands good governance, though, they have attacked and appropriated numerous state assets provided by donors, including recently, 33 vehicles previously donated to the Congolese police. Government institutions within rebel-controlled territory have also been systematically looted, including the electoral commission’s equipment for voter registration.

M23 also claims they are fighting for the 50,000 Tutsi refugees who remain in Rwanda. A rebellion which displaces over 500,000 can hardly defend the rights of 50,000 refugees. The glaring contradiction with the nearly 500,000 newly displaced persons as a result of their offensives, however, has led M23 to de-emphasize this demand recently. Moreover, in 2011, former CNDP officers told me that it was indeed Rwanda who did not want these refugees to return home so that they would remain “a card to play in future negotiations with Kinshasa.”

In recent months, M23 has increasingly claimed that they want a review of the discredited and fraudulent 2011 Presidential elections, in an attempt to attract the sympathies of a broader

constituency and further weaken Kabila. Nevertheless, the CNDP party was part of the President's electoral alliance and many top M23 commanders orchestrated massive fraud on his behalf. Ironically, while President Kabila was tremendously popular in the eastern Congo during his 2006 elections, it was precisely his peace deal with Rwanda and the CNDP, including all of the extra privileges and special treatment that they received while within the army, which bolstered opposition to his government in the Kivus. Though he was advised to accept made this sacrifice of his popularity in hopes of long-term peace with Rwanda, with enormous encouragement and praise from members of the international community including the UN peacekeeping mission, today's contexts reveals that was a critical strategic error.

Finally, Rwanda and M23 have stated that the Congolese army's military operations against the Rwandan Hutu rebels of the FDLR have failed and the group remains a threat. However, not only did the Rwandan Minister of Defense recently state that the FDLR could never threaten Rwanda, but the rebels are currently at all-time low numbers after thousands have been demobilized by the UN. Further demonstrating that this is not about the Hutu rebels, M23 has even incorporated splinter groups of the FDLR and recycled FDLR soldiers amongst its ranks. While still in the army, many of M23's officers consistently prioritized seeking control over mines and timber over substantive operations against the Hutu rebels. Furthermore, covert operations by the Rwandan army using Congolese proxy militias who would later become proxies of M23 physically eliminated dozens of key rebel commanders. Combined with the UN-backed operations in South Kivu, in early 2011, the FDLR was largely defeated and on the run. Objectively, the greater security threat to Rwanda is represented by Tutsi political opponents who have fallen out with President Kagame in recent years.

Rwanda's Regional Strategy

Now, if it's not really about the claims and demands of the March 23 2009 agreements, or genuine good governance, development, human rights, the FDLR, refugees etc. then what does Rwanda really want? It appears that it is not a pretext or justification invented after the fact that caused this war, but rather I suspect Rwanda's regional strategic objectives are driving their involvement.

Despite the extremist paranoia about "balkanization" which has been so prevalent for many years amongst the Congolese traumatized by multiple foreign invasions, only one of the rebel demands has any lasting explanatory power and that is federalism.

Rwandan involvement and orchestration of the M23 rebellion becomes more comprehensible when understood as a determined and calculated drive to spawn the creation of an autonomous federal state for the eastern Congo. There has been speculation over whether Rwandan involvement was driven by security interests, or its economic interests, or ethnic/cultural ties, but a federal state for the eastern Congo would encapsulate all of these issues. Any negotiations should avoid other distracting smokescreen issues and focus on tackling this extremely challenging one.

Prior to the November 2011 elections, one of the most senior intelligence officers within the Rwandan government discussed with me several possible scenarios for the secession of the eastern Congo. Reflecting the thinking of many of his colleagues, he asserted that because the Congo was too big to be governed by Kinshasa, Rwanda should support the emergence of a federal state for the eastern Congo. He said, "Goma should relate to Kinshasa in the same way that Juba was linked to Khartoum," prior to the independence of South Sudan.

During our official meetings with the Rwandan government in Kigali in July, the Rwandan delegation consistently stated that our report was simply a distraction and would slow down the process of reaching the definitive solution for the infinite problems of the Congo. When pushed further, several representatives did not hide the fact that the only solution they had in mind was indeed: federalism. Not surprisingly, the Rwanda has openly aided and abetted self-declared Congolese secessionists such as Jules Mutebutsi, Akim Muhoza, and Xaviar Ciribanya so as to set the bar high enough to position federalism eventually as an acceptable compromise. On the day that M23 reached Goma, Rwandan government media surrogates began demanding the “right of self-determination.”

During several internal meetings of M23 for mobilization, senior government officials, including the Minister of Defense’s special assistant openly affirmed that establishing this autonomous state was in fact the key goal of the rebellion. Several M23 commanders and allies have also openly confirmed in interviews I conducted as part of the Group of Experts. Numerous journalists have also confirmed that M23 commanders are increasingly putting this objective at the top of their agenda. One spokesperson recently stated to the New York Times, “We want more than decentralization, we want federalism,” and “The eastern parts of Congo’s interests are in eastern Africa.”

Even senior Ugandan security officials also acknowledged that this was the aim of the Rwandans in this M23 war. One officer, who was himself involved in supporting M23 in cooperation with the Rwandans, told us, “they’re thinking big. . .you need to look at South Sudan.” The objective of federalism also helps to explain in part, the involvement from individuals within the Ugandan government. If Rwanda achieves its goal, then Ugandan would need to ensure that their own cultural, security, and economic interests in the eastern DRC were not jeopardized.

Rwanda’s deeply ingrained federalist vision is born out of the geopolitical regional strategy adopted by Kigali’s leadership. A federal autonomous state for the eastern Congo would cement and guarantee Rwanda’s already extensive influence over military, political, economic, and cultural aspects of life, similar to that Syria in parts of Southern Lebanon. The Government of Rwanda, to its great credit, since the horrific events of the genocide in 1994, has exhibited unparalleled ambition and determination to rebuild its country and has achieved remarkable advancements in human development. However, that same ambition and determination has led Rwanda’s leaders to erroneously adopt this inherently destabilizing long-term geopolitical strategy based on undermining the reconstruction and stabilization of the eastern Congo in the hopes that perpetual instability would engender radical governance reforms.

This objective also explains why Rwanda has consistently sought to depict all armed groups in the eastern DRC as one single united front against Kinshasa. Although, building this coalition is a lot more difficult in practice, in our meetings with them, the Rwandan Minister of Defence and Head of the Army both justified and advocated on behalf of all armed groups in the eastern DRC, including the extremely brutal Raia Mutomboki.

Furthermore, the Rwandans have undertaken every effort to depict the Congo as a “big black void” playing on Colonial portrayals of Joseph Conrad’s Heart of Darkness calling the Congolese State “fictitious.” Rwandan diplomats have incessantly stated that “the Congo has always been a mess, it’s a lost cause” and insinuated that radical structural change would be required to salvage it.

TIMING OF THE REBELLION

The next question then would be: why now? Early 2012 was indeed a ripe moment to make a definitive push for Rwanda's strategic objective for several reasons.

First, nearly everyone, including the Rwandans, expected that following what was likely going to be a discredited 2011 electoral process, that there would be widespread chaos and protest, not only in Kinshasa but in other parts of the Congo as well, thereby presenting an window for the emergence of eastern uprising against Kinshasa. As Kabila had built up close ties with Rwanda in the interest of peace, he had become dramatically less popular in the eastern Congo which had previously been his base. The challenge for Rwanda would be how to channel that animosity away from Kigali and towards Kinshasa, playing on decades of weak central government leadership in the eastern Congo. On top of this, there was a serious political rival in the form of Vital Kamerhe, the first real eastern-based opposition leader. Kabila's was now facing two fronts of opposition, including the lingala-speaking west which had already been extremely hostile towards him, often calling him a "Rwandan imposter." Even in Kabila's lone remaining stronghold, pre-electoral popular support for secessionist movements had increased in mineral-rich Katanga province to the south of the Kivus.

Secondly, the greater stability in the eastern DRC, following a second Presidential term, could accelerate the development of state capacity and institutions in the eastern Congo which would progressively diminish the chances of a dramatic push for radical governance reform. Furthermore, the Rwandans grew weary that the Congolese would adopt measures of economic independence of the eastern Congo through, for example, the establishment of a mineral smelter in Kisangani, which would dramatically shift the Kivu mineral trade away from Rwanda.

"Congo fatigue" amongst the donor community footing a hefty annual bill for MONUSCO also would be fruitful ground for proposing more radical and definitive solutions to the eastern Congo. Reflecting this sentiment, in the midst of the crisis, a western diplomat asked me sincerely "is the eastern Congo, after so many years of violence, really a viable entity? Maybe we should start thinking of more definitive and lasting arrangements for it" This sense of desperation and hopelessness for the Congo reaches such levels that even recently the New York Times published an op-ed advocating for letting the country fall apart.

Fourthly, prior to M23, there had been increasingly less willingness to accept Bosco Ntaganda abuses and impunity as well as greater pressure to restrict the ex-CNDP's parallel chains of command. If Ntaganda had been ever arrested, as demanded by human rights organizations, this would have significantly curtailed and diminished Rwandan influence and military power in the eastern DRC. Furthermore, after fifteen years there is decreasing receptivity for endless cycles of the integration of former rebels, thus rendering more vital the achievement of the objective sooner rather than later.

Moreover, many former CNDP officers would vehemently resist any efforts by the Congolese government to re-deploy them outside of the Kivus and reign in their wide-spread mafia and racketeering networks. This inevitably reconciled latent divisions amongst Tutsi commanders forming a common front willing to work with Rwanda in order to protect their own personal business interests, despite previous overtures from some of these officers to back Rwandan dissidents like General Kayumba Nyamwasa.

Finally, the Rwandan role in the integration process of the ex-CNDP provided them with a particular opportunity to position themselves as the peacemaker in such a crisis whereby they could push for the adoption of a pre-conceived solution, such as federalism. From the very

beginning of this crisis, Rwanda has been clamoring for “political negotiations about governance,” I suspect for these very reasons.

IMPLICATIONS FOR NEGOTIATIONS

So, what does this mean for the current negotiations? If Rwanda’s geopolitical aspirations are so ambitious, then what can we expect from negotiations, particularly when it has demonstrated in recent weeks that it has the upper hand on the battlefield? Without addressing federalism, all other issues could be solved, but the likelihood that the war would subside would appear to be very low, if this is indeed the Rwanda’s principal objective. Many observers repeat calls for addressing root causes to cycles of violence in the eastern DRC and yet there is little mention of Rwanda’s strategic objectives for the eastern DRC, in and of themselves, as constituting a critical root cause. For his part, Kabila feels very strongly about negotiating the March 23 agreement, but talks will inevitably falter unless the key issue of federalism is put front on center on the negotiating agenda.

Rwanda has argued that its national interests are best served by regional stability and cross-border trade with the eastern DRC. Certainly, this is the case in the long term, but if they do achieve an autonomous federal state for the eastern Congo in the short term despite massive instability, from a strategic perspective, this will have more than compensated for the loss of some donor assistance and the life-line the FDLR are currently experiencing.

This conclusion begs several questions. Will federalism be truly negotiable in Kampala, or ever? Will the US and others in the international community support a federal solution for the eastern Congo with full knowledge that this was likely Rwanda’s primary objective in the first place. Will Rwanda be rewarded for its persistence? How could the foreign-driven birth of a federal state, stopping just short of secession, be considered legitimate internationally? Can objective negotiations take place on this issue when the talks are being framed by both Rwanda and Uganda? Will the examples of South Sudan and northern Mali impact discussions? Diplomats commonly affirm that Rwanda can and must be part of a solution. The Rwandans also incessantly complain of finger-pointing and defend that they are part of the solution to the current crisis and not the problem. Which solution though, should be the question?

The “solution” for this crisis appears to have been identified before first shots were fired. Rwanda knew what the solution they wanted to propose and therefore needed to orchestrate a crisis which would be expansive enough to justify such a solution. When the Congolese state and its security force actually performed well and defeated the initial ex-CNDP mutiny, the Rwandans had to step in overtly and drive the crisis more directly, defying international pressure when this involvement became extremely evident.

Stepping back from the current dynamics, federalism in and of itself is neither, inherently, a good or bad proposition, but when driven by a neighboring state which would benefit enormously from it, federalism can be problematic to say the least. It should be born out a democratic political debate within the DRC and exclusively amongst Congolese and not through political negotiations orchestrated and facilitated by Rwanda and some of its allies within Uganda.

The international community appears willing to overlook Rwanda’s involvement and the horrific human rights records of some of M23’s commanders in order to help usher in a hurried solution to “put out the fire” and immediately halt the immense humanitarian cost of this war. More so now that Rwanda has shown that it will consistently deploy its troops across its border to ensure

that M23 will always prevail on the battlefield. Militarily, the Congolese army proved more than capable of defeating the original mutineers, but since Rwanda established M23 and has repeatedly deployed its own army alongside the remnants of the mutineers, a military solution is likely off the table. Furthermore, MONUSCO has shown it is not willing to deploy troops to fight foreign armies.

Now that M23 has recently re-positioned itself just north of Goma in order to exert leverage on the negotiations, it is unlikely that Rwanda will accept a face-saving “out” strategy as in 2009. Rwanda is determined to win. They know that this may be their last chance as well. As such, Rwanda is likely to continue its war until they have obtained what they sought out to achieve. The costs have already been too high for Rwanda to settle for anything less now.

CONCLUSION

At this current juncture, the key question should be what solution will Rwanda deem to sufficiently fulfill its strategic objective which could leave the window open to gradually reverse their progress towards those ends through the strengthening of the independence of the Congolese state in the eastern Congo.

Could more regional economic integration satisfy Rwanda in the short term? Regional integration is objectively very positive, but it must be predicated on States with equal standing and mutual respect. Recent history proves that allowing for economic integration without first building up the Congolese state, whose officials hold the primary responsibility, will not deter Rwanda from pursuing its strategic goal. The 2009 “rapprochement” between the DRC and Rwanda was praised internationally because it openly recognized and accepted the reality of Rwandan influence in the Kivus. The logic was that if Rwanda was allowed to establish cross-border economic projects above the table, then it would no longer need to go under the table. However, Rwandan strategists likely saw these initiatives as stepping stones towards the achievement of their ultimate objectives and not as ends in and of themselves.

Consequently, if federalism is indeed the key issue at stake then there is a clear need for a process which examines decentralization as an alternative. Decentralization is foreseen as part of the Congolese Constitution, including the expansion in the overall number of provinces. Potentially, a negotiated agreement which accelerated the decentralization process and made it appear as if it would lead to real federalism could constitute a reasonable compromise. This is, if we are willing to accept that there is no real military option which definitively deters Rwanda’s determination to obtain its objectives. However, a process whereby the Congolese State is not built up first and then deconcentrated to the various provinces with autonomous institutions could yield disastrous results. As such, the key challenge, in such a compromise would be the close donor accompaniment of such a decentralization process in order to insulate initially weak local institutions from external influence or cooptation.

Furthermore, any decentralization process in the DRC must equally prioritize the strengthening of the presence of central government throughout the country. The vast majority of Congolese in the eastern Congo identify strongly with the Congo as one a nation. Many do not want their own governance to be outsourced to neighboring states. They want Kinshasa to govern the eastern Congo proactive, fairly, efficiently, and in a balanced respectful fashion.

Another key aspect of deterring against Rwandan cooptation of a Congolese decentralization process, seeking to transform it into federalism, would be to aggressively back large-scale

infrastructure and industrial projects which would enhance the DRC's economic independence standing vis-à-vis its neighbors, in the short term. One such example of these types of projects would be the remodeling of the Goma airport to international standards, allowing free movement of goods and people from the eastern Congo directly to global commercial hubs.

With time, Rwanda could confront a tipping point where its economic incentives would begin to favor treating the DRC on an equal footing as other neighbors such as Kenya or Tanzania. While this will not resolve Rwanda's cultural and security concerns in the eastern DRC, addressing the economic sphere will go a long way to re-molding the Rwandan geopolitical strategy for the Great Lakes region.

In short, the best case scenario for the current bleak situation is for the DRC to seize upon current negotiations to address head-on Rwanda's desire for a federal state in the eastern Congo by convincing Kigali that it may achieve that aim through the Congo's pre-existing decentralization legislation. Then, the international community must robustly support the DRC's central and provincial institutions and economic infrastructure to slowly diminish unfettered external control and meddling. Local elections, which had been scheduled to take place this year, could provide the framework for such discussions.

Thank you for the opportunity to share with the findings of the Group of Experts and my perspectives on Rwanda's role in the crisis. I would welcome any questions.