

**Symposium on Access to Justice and Fighting Impunity  
of Sexual Violence in the Great Lakes region**

7 – 9 July 2016 in Entebbe, Uganda

Statement by Said Djinnit Special Envoy of the UN Secretary-General for the  
Great Lakes Region

*Protocol*

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*His Lordship Bart Katureebe, Chief Justice of the Republic of Uganda*

*Ambassador Mhuri Muita, ICGLR Executive Secretary*

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*Ambassador Zachary Muita, ICGLR Executive Secretary*

*Distinguished Participants*

I wish to thank the Government of Uganda for hosting this important Symposium on Sexual and Gender Based Violence. The Government of Uganda has indeed been a key partner in the implementation of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework for the Democratic Republic of Congo and the region, and the ICGLR Pact on Security, Stability and development in the Great Lakes region, and this has been ably demonstrated by Uganda's willingness to host the ICGLR Regional Training Facility on Sexual and Gender Based Violence in Kampala. I am certain this training facility can become a centre of excellence to effectively address the ugly spectre of sexual violence in the region.

I was therefore very happy to have the Office of the Special Envoy work closely with the Executive Secretariat of the ICGLR and the Regional Training Facility in organizing this Symposium through financial contribution from the Trust Fund established in my Office to support the implementation of PSC Framework objectives. As you may be aware, a priority objective of the Regional Action Plan of the PSC Framework is to support the operationalization of the ICGLR Regional Training Facility. Accordingly, the Office of the Special Envoy will continue to work closely with the ICGLR and partners in this regard. I would like to take this opportunity to thank the international donor community, led by the Governments of The Netherlands, Ireland, Norway, UK and Belgium for their generous contributions to the Trust Fund. I look forward to continuing our collaboration with the Facility, the AU and other partners on a variety of initiatives that can contribute to eradicating sexual violence in the Great Lakes region, and look forward to your deliberations on concrete actions that can make access to justice possible for victims of sexual violence crimes.

Sexual and gender based violence against men and women is a heinous crime which unfortunately is one of the most prevalent human rights violations in the world. It affects all people and is not hindered by social, economic, or gender boundaries. The effects of such violence are detrimental to the health, dignity, security, and autonomy of its victims, and are also very destructive to families, communities, and entire regions.

In the Great Lakes region the commission of sexual and gender based crimes has been a persistent problem for years. Much has been done by national governments, regional and international partners to address these crimes – whether committed during conflict, post-conflict, or in the home. However, much more remains to be done as the number of sexual violence crimes remains unacceptably high.

I consider the fight against sexual and gender based violence as paramount to the establishment of peace and security in the region. Winning this battle can make a significant contribution to ensuring that all girls and boys, and all women and men, are able to live free from sexual violence in their homes and communities. As a result, supporting initiatives that can prevent sexual violence crimes from happening in the first place, and supporting action that can hold individuals to account for crimes committed, are key priorities in the implementation of my mandates.

The 2013 *Peace, Security, and Cooperation Framework for the DRC and the region*, signed by the 13 Heads of State of the region, reaffirms commitments made by the ICGLR Heads of State in the *ICGLR Pact on Security, Stability, and Development in the Great Lakes region*, and its protocols, including the *ICGLR Protocol on Prevention and Suppression (punishment) of sexual violence against Women and Children in the Great lakes region*, and *the Protocol on Judicial Cooperation*. Like the Pact, the Framework seeks to address root causes of conflict. Recognizing the critical need to fight impunity, it calls on the Heads of State to neither harbour nor provide protection of any kind to persons accused of war crimes, crimes against humanity, acts of genocide, crimes of aggression, or persons falling under the UN sanctions regime. It also calls on them to facilitate the administration of justice through judicial cooperation in the region. Acts of sexual violence, which have been used regularly and almost daily as weapons of war during conflicts in the region, figure prominently in ICGLR, AU and UN strategies to implement these commitments.

Alongside of the PSC Framework, the Roadmap of the Office of the Special Envoy and the recently endorsed UN Great Lakes Regional Strategic

Framework prioritise efforts to prevent, respond to and suppress sexual and gender based violence. Our Office has been collaborating with national governments and national, regional and international partners on a variety of initiative that facilitate the fulfilment of these commitments. For example, we recently convened two meetings with the Directors of Prosecutions Services of ICGLR countries in order to share experiences on judicial cooperation and develop an overview of challenges and best practices. Recognizing the importance of judicial cooperation in the fight against impunity, there are plans underway to establish a Great Lakes Judicial Cooperation Network with the ICGLR. The proposed Network will be of great assistance in the quest for stronger accountability for sexual violence crimes.

With partners, including the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict, Femmes Africa Solidarité, Fonds des Femmes Congolaises, ICGLR and UN Women, we have also created the Women's Platform for the PSC Framework, which provides grants to grassroots women's organizations in Burundi, the DRC, Rwanda and Uganda. The Platform is a key vehicle that recognizes that gender equality, gender justice, and sustained peace building can flow from women's participation and leadership in conflict resolution and recovery processes. A number of grants have been made to organizations working on addressing sexual and gender based crimes, primarily in the area of access to justice and support to victims. Indeed, next week I shall have the distinct pleasure to hear directly from the women who have received such grants in a meeting scheduled in Goma, eastern DRC. The women of the Platform will likely also have suggestions that can further support efforts to prevent, prosecute and respond to sexual and gender based crimes in the region.

Despite the prevalence and harmful impact of sexual and gender based crimes, the topic remains shrouded in a culture of silence. That you have gathered today, helps to break this silence. At this symposium, high-level experts with experience in matters relating to access to justice for victims of sexual and gender based violence from all the Great Lakes countries, have the opportunity to engage in dialogue, to share best and worst practices, and to learn from counterparts. In doing so you will be making a significant contribution to ending sexual and gender based violence and re-enforcing the usefulness and value of the Regional Training Facility.

As you deliberate over the next few days, take advantage of this opportunity to learn from each and come out with strong recommendations for further action that can engage organizations and governments, and the women and men of the ICGLR countries to take collaborative action to stop sexual violence before it happens and to ensure victims have access to justice. This could be through the development of special mechanisms to fast track SGBV cases, strengthening the institutions responsible for justice and security, or recommendations that are specific to the ICGLR Regional Training Facility to make it the Center of Excellence we all know it can be.

I Thank you for your attention.