

Great Lakes Region
7 February 2001

Mr. Neewoor (Mauritius): First of all, I wish to thank you, Mr. Minister, for presiding over this important meeting. The delegation of Mauritius is very pleased to welcome Mr. Paul Kagame, President of Rwanda, to the Security Council Chamber this morning. We thank the President for his important briefing.

In the wake of the recent tragic event in Kinshasa, the Security Council received guarantees from Rwanda that it did not intend to take advantage of the situation. Similar guarantees were also received from Uganda. We are glad that these guarantees have been respected, and on that account, the situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo continues to remain largely peaceful.

There is no doubt that the Lusaka Agreement constitutes the only basis for peace in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and, indeed, in the whole Great Lakes region. Last Friday the new President of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, in his statement to the Security Council, reconfirmed his country's commitment to move the Lusaka process forward and to actively pursue the inter-Congolese dialogue. We would like to see all the parties to the conflict reaffirm their commitments similarly. We believe there is today an excellent opportunity for peace in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and in the Great Lakes region.

Indeed, for the last few weeks we have been hearing statements of commitment from the parties to the conflict to move the Lusaka process forward. Now is the time for these statements to be translated into concrete action by all those concerned. In this regard, the highest priority undoubtedly is the implementation of the disengagement plan signed in Harare in December. In this regard, we have noted with satisfaction that Rwanda has offered to go beyond the provisions of the disengagement plan and withdraw its forces to a distance of up to 200 miles. We welcome this positive commitment by Rwanda. Our goal, of course, is to bring about the withdrawal of all foreign troops from the Democratic Republic of the Congo at the earliest.

We are confident that the meeting of heads of State of the region in the coming days will add new impetus to the momentum already created to advance the Lusaka process. We call for the earliest deployment of phase II of the United Nations Organization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, in accordance with Security Council resolution 1332 (2000).

The dire conditions prevailing in the Great Lakes region are largely a result of the illegal circulation of and trafficking in small arms and light weapons and the use of mineral and other resources for financing paramilitary and organized rebel groups. We are therefore looking forward to the report and the findings of the United Nations panel on illegal exploitation of natural resources and other sources of wealth of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, which is due next month.

We are extremely concerned by the humanitarian situation arising from the instability in the Great Lakes region. All the countries of this region face the problems of refugees and internally displaced persons. Although the humanitarian relief agencies are doing a commendable job in alleviating their suffering, we would like to see the international community make more efforts to provide further assistance to these people, who find themselves in dire economic conditions. But there is no doubt that only when peace and stability are firmly established in all the countries of the region will the end of human suffering be ensured.

In conclusion, my delegation would like to add that no progress can be achieved unless the leaders of the Great Lakes region show their determination, will and commitment to engage fully in bringing stability and peace to the region. We believe that the time to do so is now.