



Security Council

Distr.: General
27 October 2020

Original: English

Letter dated 26 October 2020 from the Secretary-General addressed to the President of the Security Council

I wish to refer to paragraph 49 of Security Council resolution [2502 \(2019\)](#), in which it was requested that the Secretary-General engage with the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo to articulate a joint strategy and identify a set of measurable benchmarks that would allow for a progressive transfer of the tasks of the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) to the Congolese authorities, the United Nations country team and other stakeholders.

In this regard, I am pleased to share with you the joint strategy on the progressive and phased drawdown of MONUSCO.

(Signed) António **Guterres**



Annex

Joint strategy on the progressive and phased drawdown of MONUSCO, October 2020

I. Overview

1. In Security Council resolution [2502 \(2019\)](#), the Secretary-General was requested to engage with the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo to articulate a joint strategy and identify a set of measurable benchmarks that would allow for a progressive transfer of the tasks of the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) to the Congolese authorities, the United Nations country team and other stakeholders. In doing so, the Council stressed that the Mission's activities should be conducted in a manner that facilitated progress towards sustainable and inclusive peace and development, addressed the root causes of conflict and reduced the threat posed by domestic and foreign armed groups to a level that could be managed by the country's security forces, with a particular focus on the reduction of the threat to civilians.

2. To achieve that, the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and MONUSCO engaged in a series of discussions on the priorities, role and future efforts of the Mission with the aim of articulating a joint vision of the phased, responsible and sustainable drawdown and exit of the Mission. The onset of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic posed significant challenges to the conduct of this dialogue, which was able to resume following the gradual lifting of COVID-19-related restrictions in July 2020.

3. On 19 October 2020, MONUSCO and the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo validated the joint strategy, including the broad parameters that should govern the Mission's transition. MONUSCO will continue to engage in a comprehensive dialogue with the Government on the creation of the conditions for a successful, gradual and responsible exit of the Mission. To this end, the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and MONUSCO agreed to establish a joint working group aimed at defining the practical modalities of the transfer of tasks to the Congolese authorities, the United Nations country team and other stakeholders. Should the Security Council endorse the overall direction of the joint strategy, a United Nations transition plan will be developed, including further detailed measurable benchmarks, roles and responsibilities, risks assessment and mitigation strategies, as appropriate.

4. Given the complexity of the conflict environment in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the Government and MONUSCO agreed that the joint strategy should be based on a series of region-specific strategies, tailored to the needs of the six provinces outside Kinshasa, where the Mission is still present. It is envisaged that, in the coming years, MONUSCO will gradually consolidate its footprint in the three provinces where active conflict persists – namely, North Kivu, South Kivu and Ituri – while pursuing its good offices and work on institutional strengthening at the national level. As part of this process, the Government agreed that the Mission should be able to withdraw from the Kasai region, which is in a phase of post-conflict consolidation, by June 2021. In Tanganyika, recent improvements in the security situation should enable the Mission to reduce its military footprint in 2022, despite continued national armed group activity in the north and low-level intercommunity conflict in some areas. Pursuant to Security Council resolution [2502 \(2019\)](#), those timelines were, however, drawn with the understanding that the progressive and phased drawdown of MONUSCO would need to remain flexible, taking into account the evolving political and security situation in the country.

II. Assessment of the political and security situation

5. Following the peaceful transfer of presidential power and the formation of a coalition government in September 2019, the political situation has continued to normalize amid increasing domestic pressure for a tangible improvement in socioeconomic conditions. Most recently, political positioning ahead of the 2023 elections, discussions on electoral reforms and judicial proceedings against government officials and elected politicians have heightened tensions within the governing coalition, as well as within the broader political class. There is a risk that political manoeuvring and positioning ahead of the next elections could overshadow efforts to advance the key governance reforms and stabilization measures that the country needs. While the current political dispensation remains fragile, it also has the potential to sustain and advance the gains made to date, provided that all actors work towards that goal. It is as much a learning process for the members of the ruling coalition as it is for the opposition and civil society, who must learn to navigate a new political landscape and work to ensure that the peaceful transfer of power becomes a routine occurrence.

6. More than two thirds of the country are stable. The positive evolution of the political and security situation enabled MONUSCO to close eight locations across the country in 2019 in areas of relative stability while concentrating its presence in areas facing continued security and protection challenges. These are most acute in the Kivus and Ituri, characterized by the presence of foreign and Congolese armed groups engaged in multiple armed conflicts with the Government, which pose a threat to stability and the security of the civilian population. By contrast, in the Kasais and Tanganyika, the spontaneous demobilization of several armed groups following the peaceful transfer of presidential power has created new opportunities to address conflict drivers and tackle the long-standing development and humanitarian challenges affecting these regions.

7. Efforts by the Democratic Republic of the Congo to improve relations with Burundi, Rwanda and Uganda have laid the groundwork for greater regional cooperation on common security challenges. In this context, the implementation of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework for the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the region remains of critical importance to ensure a common approach to tackling the drivers of conflict in the eastern portion of the country through national and regional actions with the support of the international community. In that regard, MONUSCO will continue to exploit synergies with other United Nations presences in the Great Lakes and work closely with the Office of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for the Great Lakes Region on a range of issues, including the promotion of non-military measures to tackle the threat posed by foreign armed groups. The Mission is also committed to working closely with the African Union, the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region and the Southern African Development Community, among others, all of which play an essential role in promoting peace and development in the subregion.

8. The Democratic Republic of the Congo continues to face an acute, complex and multilayered humanitarian crisis affecting 25.6 million people. In 2020, the humanitarian community has sought to provide humanitarian assistance to some 9.2 million people, mainly those living in the conflict-affected areas in the eastern part of the country. Maintaining humanitarian access in these areas has become increasingly difficult owing to the fragmentation of armed groups and the localized nature of conflict. The country's humanitarian challenges have been further compounded by a confluence of epidemics, including of measles, cholera and Ebola. The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and efforts to stem the spread of the disease

have translated into additional humanitarian requirements. Restrictions on movement over the course of several months have also impeded aid operations.

9. MONUSCO and the United Nations country team, in collaboration with key national and international stakeholders, will continue to address the underlying causes of conflict and systemic challenges generating humanitarian needs within the framework of the humanitarian-development-peace nexus, referred to as the “triple nexus”. Through their positive impact on the durable stabilization of the target regions – primarily the Kasais and Tanganyika Provinces – collective efforts to implement the triple nexus will support the creation of an environment enabling development and facilitating the transition towards a post-peacekeeping context, allowing residual humanitarian needs to be addressed.

III. Desired end state and priority areas of engagement

A. End state

10. Reducing the threat posed by national and foreign armed groups to a level that can be managed by national authorities, as well as addressing the root causes of conflict, will enable the Mission’s exit.

B. Priority areas

11. MONUSCO will continue to employ its good offices to create an enabling political environment for the implementation of key reforms by the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo while supporting stabilization and the strengthening of core State functions. A key condition for the Mission’s sustainable drawdown is that, in the build-up to the 2023 elections, political processes will continue to be undertaken peacefully through the appropriate structures. MONUSCO will continue to focus its good offices on maintaining political cohesion and stability and addressing the root causes of conflict. This will entail continued engagement with all stakeholders, including the Government, political parties, civil society and women’s and youth groups, to encourage constructive dialogue and the peaceful management of political differences.

12. The protection of civilians will remain at the core of the Mission’s activities for the duration of its presence in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. This goes well beyond the conduct of military operations and will involve continued engagement with the Congolese authorities, local communities, civil society, women’s organizations and youth groups as part of an integrated approach that combines support for community reconciliation, the strengthening of the justice system, the professionalization of the security forces and monitoring and reporting on human rights abuses. To this end, the Mission will leverage political and military pressure on armed groups with a view to opening space for civilian actors to address the root causes of conflict, create a protective environment and advance local conflict resolution processes.

13. MONUSCO will concentrate its efforts in areas still affected by armed conflict and continue to improve early warning and response systems in order to ensure an effective response in the provinces where it maintains a presence. Protection through projection will remain a key component of the Mission’s efforts to provide physical protection and contribute to creating a protective environment. As troop levels are reduced progressively, the mobility and flexibility of the remaining forces will need to be enhanced to ensure effective coverage.

14. MONUSCO will continue to support the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo in the development of a national capacity to mitigate and dispose of explosive threats, as well as mark, register and safely manage weapons and ammunition. This will improve security for civilians and help to ensure the provision of such services following the Mission's eventual exit.

15. The Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo has clearly signalled its intent to pursue a new, community-based national disarmament, demobilization and reintegration approach as a core component of efforts to sustainably reduce the threat posed by armed groups. The development of a framework outlining key strategic, political, institutional, legal, coordination, financial and operational parameters for disarmament, demobilization and reintegration in the country is critical. The national framework will need to accommodate various tailored disarmament, demobilization and reintegration initiatives at the local level, including the implementation of tools related to disarmament, demobilization and reintegration, such as community violence reduction. It should also provide options for those armed groups ready to surrender and rejoin civilian life in a manner that supports communities and establishes the foundations for sustainable reintegration. Ensuring complementarity between community-based disarmament, demobilization and reintegration efforts and development and peacebuilding programmes targeting former combatants' communities of origin will be critical.

16. The Government, with the support of MONUSCO, is determined to press ahead with reforms aimed at strengthening the core rule of law and security-related functions of the State. Accountability for perpetrators of violence against civilians, including those engaged in grave human rights violations, war crimes, crimes against humanity and illegal commercial relations with armed groups, will be prioritized going forward. MONUSCO will continue to support the Government and national human rights institutions to promote and protect human rights, fight impunity and strengthen the justice system – both military and civilian – in particular the criminal justice chain.

17. The Mission will work increasingly through the MONUSCO-United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) joint justice programme for the period 2020–2024, which is aimed at strengthening national capacity and increasing the sustainability of the reforms undertaken in the context of the national justice reform policy for the period 2019–2026 and the corresponding priority action plan. MONUSCO will also support national criminal accountability for serious crimes in order to enhance trust and confidence in State security forces by holding them to account for crimes committed by their members. This will include support for priority prisons in conflict-affected areas, in particular in the management of high-risk prisoners and prison intelligence related to armed group detainees. Initially, the focus will be on the Kasais and Tanganyika, with a view to transferring all of the Mission's work in these areas to the joint justice programme in the next three years.

18. The sustainability of the Mission's drawdown will depend on the extent to which the national security forces are able to manage the security situation in areas where armed groups are present and active. In this regard, the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and MONUSCO agreed to devise a plan on ways to strengthen the capacity of the defence and security forces. The continued enhancement of the Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo operational and logistical capacity to carry out and expand effective operations against national and foreign armed groups and local militia, hold and maintain positions in a durable manner and ensure the protection of civilians will be critical in this regard. Tangible progress will need to be made towards ending sexual violence committed by members of the national security forces and ensuring accountability for human rights violations at all command levels.

19. Along with these efforts, MONUSCO will continue to support the Government's five-year national police reform plan. In close coordination with the United Nations country team, the Mission will also focus on strengthening the Government's capacity to engage in local and community policing while also supporting the Government's efforts to promote greater accountability within the national police, through the strengthening of the Inspector General function.

20. Efforts to strengthen the capabilities of the national security forces must go hand in hand with the extension of effective and legitimate State authority to areas formerly controlled by armed groups and where the population does not have access to basic services. The need for stabilization and peacebuilding will outlast the Mission's lifespan. Joint projects have therefore been developed with the United Nations country team through the Peacebuilding Fund and the Stabilization Coherence Fund in the framework of the International Security and Stabilization Support Strategy to ensure a smooth handover of stabilization-related activities to the national stabilization and reconstruction programme, with the support of the United Nations country team, as the Mission draws down. In line with the triple nexus approach, priority thematic areas for joint funding will include the community-based reintegration of former combatants; transitional justice; reconciliation and social cohesion; inclusive local governance, with an emphasis on the participation of women; and the promotion of durable solutions for displaced populations.

21. The illicit, cross-border movements of armed groups and weapons and the illegal exploitation of natural resources continue to be major drivers of conflict in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Controlling and managing illicit economic activities can only be effectively achieved through strengthened State institutions and presence. MONUSCO and the United Nations country team will engage with the major partners represented in the Donor Coordination Group, including the World Bank and the African Development Bank, to explore how best to bring about a shift from illicit economies to those that provide legal work opportunities while ensuring that those who continue to engage in such activity are held accountable, reducing the incentives to form and join armed groups. This will help to expand the tax base available to the Government for the provision of basic services. MONUSCO will also prioritize support for the authorities of the Democratic Republic of the Congo in strengthening its approach to the control of small arms and light weapons, in line with relevant international arms control standards and treaties, including the Nairobi Protocol for the Prevention, Control and Reduction of Small Arms and Light Weapons in the Great Lakes Region and the Horn of Africa and the Central African Convention for the Control of Small Arms and Light Weapons, Their Ammunition and All Parts and Components That Can Be Used for Their Manufacture, Repair and Assembly.

22. It is critical that the Democratic Republic of the Congo and its neighbours continue their ongoing efforts to improve regional cooperation through regular information-sharing with regional security forces and coordinated action to interdict cross-border flows of arms, combatants, conflict minerals and other natural resources; prosecute those responsible; and advance economic integration. A strong and well-coordinated regional platform will be critical to the successful handover of the Mission's current efforts to support the disarmament, demobilization, reintegration and resettlement or repatriation of foreign armed groups operating on Congolese soil.

IV. Phased drawdown and exit

23. The Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo agreed that the Mission's drawdown will be conducted in a phased manner on the basis of conditions on the ground in the following types of settings:

(a) In areas characterized by a post-conflict situation, namely the Kasai region and most parts of Tanganyika Province, the drawdown of the Mission's military presence will be accompanied by a temporary surge in its police presence and intensified efforts by its civilian component to strengthen the core functions of the State and build local conflict resolution capacities. A triple nexus approach will be pursued, with the involvement of government authorities, the United Nations country team, the humanitarian country team, the World Bank, the Peacebuilding Fund and relevant partners, to advance long-term processes aimed at reducing humanitarian needs, advancing the consolidation of peace and paving the way for sustainable development;

(b) In areas predominantly affected by local armed groups and intercommunal violence, namely, the northern areas of Tanganyika and Ituri Provinces, the Mission intends to maintain its military presence and a capacity to respond to threats against civilians with a gradual drawdown in these areas, based on a careful assessment of conditions on the ground. In order to facilitate the Mission's gradual withdrawal from these areas, MONUSCO will also continue to support efforts to strengthen the presence and core functions of the State, with a focus on the rule of law, conflict resolution and support for dialogue and reconciliation, transitional justice and community peacebuilding;

(c) In areas affected by armed conflict of a more structural, deep-set nature involving both national and foreign armed groups, as well as intercommunity violence – namely, North Kivu and South Kivu Provinces – the Mission will maintain a robust force, police and civilian presence to ensure comprehensive protection of civilians. The areas will be the last two from which the Mission will withdraw. To facilitate the withdrawal, MONUSCO will continue to address the root causes of conflict through a targeted, sequenced and coordinated approach to stabilization. Close cooperation with the Special Envoy for the Great Lakes Region to address the regional dimensions of the ongoing violence in these areas, including through the implementation of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework, will also continue to be privileged throughout the transition process.

24. Working closely with the national and provincial authorities, MONUSCO has developed a series of targeted, area-based strategies, each of which adopts a comprehensive approach towards mandate implementation in the areas where the Mission is present.

Kasai and Kasai Central Provinces

25. The Kasai region is in a post-conflict phase, and the situation now allows for a responsible and sustainable departure of the Mission. Consequently, MONUSCO has already begun to phase out its presence and intends to cease its operations in the Kasais by June 2021.

26. For the remainder of its time, MONUSCO will work closely with the United Nations country team to support provincial governments in the development of a Sustainable Development Goals-based provincial development plan and the implementation of the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework at the provincial level. The United Nations-wide presence in the Kasais will be focused on rebuilding social cohesion, leading to the establishment of locally led and owned mechanisms for addressing conflict. The United Nations will help to build the capacity of the territorial administrators, chiefs of sectors and mayors to discharge their responsibilities as part of the territorial decentralized entities. It will also support the establishment of local committees for neighbourhood security geared towards enhancing security governance.

27. Within the framework of the joint justice programme, the United Nations presence in the Kasais will focus on increasing the capacity of the police and civilian justice institutions to strengthen the penal chain while working with civilian and military prosecutors to reduce arbitrary arrests and detention. The United Nations will provide technical support to local justice authorities to ensure that they can investigate and prosecute cases of international crimes and will work to strengthen security and improve conditions in prisons and strengthen staff capacity through recruitment, training and improved working conditions.

28. The United Nations Joint Human Rights Office, which will maintain a presence after the departure of MONUSCO, will collaborate with the Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Congolese National Police to support the full implementation of the national action plans on combating sexual violence and will also support the implementation of transitional justice measures in Kasai Central and Kasai Provinces.

Tanganyika Province

29. From early 2019 onwards, large numbers of Twa and some Bantu militia laid down their arms, leading to an improved security situation, although some challenges remain. The Mission's withdrawal from most of Tanganyika Province could be envisaged by early 2022 at the latest, provided that recent security gains are consolidated, including a further voluntary return of internally displaced persons. The Congolese authorities recognize that continued support from MONUSCO will be required to address residual armed group activity along the border with South Kivu. It is assessed that this support can be provided through the projection of MONUSCO forces from South Kivu without requiring the maintenance of a force presence in Tanganyika.

30. Systematic discrimination against the Twa remains an underlying cause of tension, with continuing potential for violence. This is a long-term governance issue that the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo will continue to address with the support of key United Nations partners and non-governmental organizations. Furthermore, transhumance and conflict between the nomadic cattle herding and farming communities, as well as land conflicts and customary conflicts, remain prevalent in the province. These issues will be addressed by the provincial government in cooperation with relevant partners and do not require the presence of the Mission in order to make progress. Accordingly, MONUSCO will gradually reduce its military footprint in the province and transition to a solely civilian and police presence aimed at consolidating the gains made thus far and ensuring that the eventual withdrawal of the Mission from the province is sustainable.

31. The Mission and the United Nations country team, in particular the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, will focus on helping to create the conditions necessary for the return of displaced persons by facilitating mediation between the Twa and Bantu to enable internally displaced persons and local leaders to return to their villages. This will be accompanied by efforts by the United Nations to encourage former combatants to refrain from returning to the forest and resuming fighting, including providing support for viable reintegration opportunities and tailored community violence reduction projects. This will also entail creating security conditions conducive to the provision of humanitarian assistance, including in the initial phases of return of internally displaced persons. At the same time, the Mission will work with the Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Congolese National Police to develop a plan for the continued protection of civilians following the Mission's withdrawal. A deepening of the triple nexus approach to further reduce humanitarian needs and strengthen peace and development initiatives will also advance those goals.

32. MONUSCO and the provincial authorities will continue to work together to develop a disarmament, demobilization and reintegration approach in line with international standards. The Mission will also continue to engage with the United Nations country team on the implementation of activities funded through the Peacebuilding Fund in support of community-based reintegration. The Mission's human rights component will assist the Government with the screening of former combatants from both the Bantu and Twa communities so that perpetrators of serious human rights abuses can be identified.

33. The MONUSCO force will, in the short term, increase its footprint in Nyunzu to consolidate achievements and avoid a reversal of security gains in the area. Support will be given to Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo troops and the Congolese National Police in the Nyunzu and Bendera areas to enhance their effectiveness and increase the confidence of the local population in the security forces, leading to a gradual withdrawal of the force and a handover of security responsibilities to State authorities, supported by the United Nations police. Responsibility for security support for the provincial authorities in Kalemie will be transferred to the United Nations police.

34. Relevant provincial entities, including members of the Protection of Civilians Unit within the provincial Ministry of the Interior, will be trained so that they are able to take over responsibilities for the protection of civilians with the support of relevant United Nations country team members, who will progressively expand their protection activities. Access to justice will be improved through the continued provision of technical and logistical support to enable the authorities to investigate grave human rights violations, crimes against humanity and war crimes; the deployment of mobile courts; and further training of justice personnel and Congolese National Police investigators. The Mission will work closely with the United Nations country team and endeavour to ensure that judicial protection measures and psychosocial support services are put in place for witnesses and victims, especially of conflict-related sexual violence.

35. MONUSCO will take a series of measures to strengthen Kalemie prisons while continuing to monitor detention conditions and train prison authorities in human rights. The Mission will provide a wide-ranging training programme to the Congolese National Police, along with basic logistical support. A stabilization programme will help the provincial authorities to address the root causes of the Twa-Bantu conflict, implement the recommendations of the peace forum held in Kalemie in February 2017 and support local peace committees. Discussions are ongoing with UNDP and other United Nations country team members for longer-term support for this effort. The Mission will work with civil society organizations to help to constructively engage with local leaders and provincial authorities to address community conflicts. Training will be provided to women's and youth organizations to counter hate speech, incitement to hostility and violence in their communities.

Ituri Province

36. The period since January 2020 has been marked by a serious escalation in violence against civilians and security forces in Ituri. A key feature of the violence is the multiplication of areas affected by it, notably Djugu and Mahagi, but also northern Irumu, where a new armed group, the Front patriotique et intégrationniste du Congo, has emerged. The violence has also been characterized by brutal attacks against civilians, including rape, looting, the destruction of houses, the killing of women and children and large-scale displacement. Young people, many under 15 years of age, have been recruited by all armed groups. The role that the exploitation of and trafficking in natural resources continues to play in sustaining these conflict dynamics

remains of concern. Equally, the cross-border dimensions of the conflict in Ituri pose a potential threat to regional peace and security if not fully addressed.

37. For the next year at least, MONUSCO aims to maintain its current military, police and civilian presence in Ituri Province. A drawdown will only be possible once the following conditions are in place:

- (a) A successful conclusion to the ongoing Force de résistance patriotique de l'Ituri peace process, with the group safely disarmed, demobilized and reintegrated;
- (b) A negotiated solution to the crisis in Djugu and Mahagi, enabling the disarmament of the assailants and a substantial reduction in violence;
- (c) A process established to address underlying grievances;
- (d) The return home of internally displaced persons in a safe and sustainable manner;
- (e) Progress made in efforts to combat impunity.

38. In order to help to create the conditions for a responsible exit from Ituri, MONUSCO will focus primarily on strengthening the rule of law and local mediation efforts while using its good offices to open political space. The Mission will aim to create an environment conducive for the United Nations country team, non-governmental organizations and relevant partners to engage in community-based reintegration efforts and institution-building, leveraging partnerships for long-term interventions. They will focus on professionalizing the security services in a manner that builds the people's trust in them, supporting the civilian criminal justice system, building administrative capacity to manage and resolve land disputes and supporting local efforts to resolve intercommunity conflict. A disarmament, demobilization and reintegration process focused on community-based reintegration and violence reduction programming, along with transitional justice initiatives, will also be supported.

39. Political engagement, at all levels, remains key to address the ongoing challenges in Ituri Province. MONUSCO will employ its good offices to address political and institutional instability at the provincial level, working with all relevant actors to encourage the peaceful resolution of disputes. In Djugu and Mahagi, political engagement with armed groups will be backed by military pressure, when required, to stop the violence and to disarm combatants, while the Mission will continue to support the intercommunity dialogue led by the provincial government.

40. In Irumu, the implementation of the Force de résistance patriotique de l'Ituri process will require sustained political engagement with provincial and local actors, as well as with the private sector and development partners, to create sustainable reintegration opportunities. Disarmament, demobilization and reintegration programmatic activities such as cantonment should only be pursued once political blockages have been successfully addressed. MONUSCO will also support the efforts of the provincial government to overcome tensions and improve relations between the Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Lendu and Bira communities.

41. Protection of civilians will remain at the core of the Mission's work in the province. Priorities in Djugu and Mahagi will be the protection of internally displaced persons, the prevention of child recruitment and security along key roads. In Irumu, the focus will be on the spillover of the Allied Democratic Forces from North Kivu and on activities of the Front patriotique et intégrationniste du Congo and the risks to the security of Bunia town. The Mission will consolidate a robust force presence in areas affected by violence in Djugu territory, with future deployments based on discussions with partners in the framework of the Senior Management Group on Protection and other existing mechanisms for the protection of civilians.

42. The MONUSCO force's laydown, including the area of responsibility of its Intervention Brigade, has also been redrawn in response to Allied Democratic Forces activity in southern Irumu. Local protection mechanisms will be strengthened, and there will be an increased number of United Nations police patrolling in Bunia, including jointly with the Congolese National Police. The Mission will strengthen early warning capacities and expand community alert networks, including advocacy with cellular providers for greater coverage in areas affected by violence. MONUSCO will also continue to monitor, investigate and report human rights violations and abuses with the support of United Nations police forensic experts. Substantial support will be given to civilian and military justice actors in efforts to combat impunity.

43. Addressing the priorities outlined above will extend beyond the likely lifespan of MONUSCO. The Mission will, therefore, initiate joint programming with relevant United Nations country teams, funds and programmes, including through the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework, by mapping the key infrastructure improvements required to enable the extension of State authority throughout the province. The Mission will also work closely with national and provincial authorities to engage with partners on initiatives aimed at promoting sustainable economic development as a means of transforming conflict dynamics in the province.

North Kivu

44. The Grand Nord region of North Kivu Province remains an area of entrenched conflict involving both national and foreign armed groups. As a result, protection of civilians concerns remain high. Recent Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo operations have successfully dislodged the Allied Democratic Forces from several of their strongholds. However, maintaining recaptured territory has proved challenging, despite the Mission's support. The displacement of the Allied Democratic Forces into territories where Mai-Mai groups are operating has increased the number of protection hotspots. Security vacuums have created an opportunity for Mai-Mai groups operating in south Lubero to expand their areas of operation, resulting in armed clashes and divisions within several groups. Dozens of local armed Mai-Mai groups continue to operate in the area. Insecurity has caused fresh waves of displacement, adding to existing humanitarian pressures.

45. The Petit Nord region of the province is characterized by deeply entrenched conflicts that are strongly shaped by regional dynamics and struggles over the control of natural resources. The conflicts introduce a level of volatility into the area, which significantly complicates efforts to resolve conflict and move towards stabilization. Shifts in recent decades in the demographics of the Petit Nord have resulted in ethnic rights and access to land and political power becoming the subject of conflicting narratives that are often irreconcilable and are thus susceptible to manipulation and incitement to violence. The narratives have resulted in the creation of numerous self-defence militia.

46. A long-standing issue contributing to instability has been the presence of foreign armed groups, notably the Forces démocratiques de libération du Rwanda-Forces combattantes abacunguzi. For many years, the group has controlled territory and resources and taxed Congolese citizens in large parts of North Kivu and South Kivu. While the military wing has been weakened considerably, its command structure remains intact. In opposition to the Forces démocratiques de libération du Rwanda-Forces combattantes abacunguzi, and strongly supported by the Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the Nduma défense du Congo-Rénové has, in recent years, seized control of a large swath of territory in Walikale, Lubero, Masisi and Rutshuru territories, taking on a de facto governance role by controlling local economic opportunities, taxation and other forms of revenue collection. An internal split in July

2020 led to infighting, creating a window of opportunity for rival armed groups, including the Forces démocratiques de libération du Rwanda, to occupy Nduma défense du Congo-Rénové positions and control access to resources. Those developments have had a major impact on the protection of civilians, with consistently high levels of human rights violations and abuses and renewed displacement of populations.

47. Maintaining a strong MONUSCO presence in the medium term remains essential. Bringing the threat posed by armed groups to a level that can be managed by the national authorities will require the following actions:

(a) Progress in the disarmament, demobilization and sustainable community-based reintegration of local armed groups operating in the area and the repatriation and resettlement of foreign combatants and their dependents to their countries of origin or a third country;

(b) Progress in addressing underlying causes of conflict related to the distribution and management of resources and land;

(c) Progress towards the creation of conditions conducive to the safe and sustainable return of internally displaced persons;

(d) The initiation of processes to support the restoration of State authority, including the management of external borders;

(e) Progress in efforts to combat impunity.

48. A continued robust MONUSCO force presence will remain vital for the protection of civilians and to neutralize armed groups. The Mission will ensure the better utilization of its intelligence capabilities in order to prevent violence rather than simply react to it. In coordination with the local authorities, it will reach out to local communities through joint civil-military dialogue in order to assess protection needs, raise awareness of its protection of civilians activities and build confidence between local actors and MONUSCO.

49. While MONUSCO will continue to support the Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo in their fight against armed groups in the Grand Nord and the Petit Nord areas, organized crime remains a serious threat, both in terms of its linkages to armed group activity and its negative impact on peace and stability in these areas. The Mission's intelligence architecture will be strengthened to address this source of insecurity, led by the Serious and Organized Crime Unit of the United Nations police.

50. The failure of military action to bring about a definitive solution to conflict in the Beni area has led to calls from local politicians and other leaders for negotiated solutions. MONUSCO will support and encourage broad-based dialogue and outreach initiatives to various armed groups and actors, under the leadership of the provincial government, with the overall objective of identifying viable solutions and reducing violence in the Beni area. In parallel, MONUSCO will continue to engage with the Special Envoy for the Great Lakes to identify regional solutions to the Allied Democratic Forces threat.

51. Land disputes have long been an underlying cause of conflict. The Mission is working to develop a more integrated approach to them, including by mapping the correlation between harvesting seasons and recurring cycles of conflict in order to anticipate specific conflict hotspots and develop corresponding protection of civilians plans, in consultation with specialized agencies. Similarly, efforts to strengthen the Mission's understanding of the linkages between access to and/or control of mining areas and conflict will enhance the ability of MONUSCO and the Government to tackle insecurity.

52. Joint efforts led by the Government and MONUSCO to strengthen the rule of law will be focused on the development of a functioning justice sector; the professionalization of the police, justice and corrections systems; and an inclusive transitional justice and community reintegration process through the MONUSCO-UNDP joint justice programme and projects funded by the Peacebuilding Fund. The Mission's Justice Support Section and the United Nations Joint Human Rights Office, assisted by United Nations police forensic experts, will support the Congolese military justice authorities in the conduct of priority investigations, prosecutions and detention. The United Nations Joint Human Rights Office will provide support to victims and witnesses and facilitate their legal representation before, during and after these trials while continuing to promote the adoption of legislation on protection of victims, witnesses and human rights defenders.

53. The United Nations police will support the efforts of the Congolese National Police to improve adherence to minimum standards in the maintenance of law and order and the protection of civilians from physical violence. Skills related to defusing and, if possible, mediating community-level disputes and violent conflict will be developed, and community policing capabilities and approaches will continue to be strengthened to improve security in the larger urban areas. The United Nations police will continue to assist the national police in the demilitarization of public order management, adherence to the principles of democratic policing and respect for human rights through awareness-raising activities and joint monitoring with the United Nations Joint Human Rights Office.

54. Reinforcing the capacity of local structures at the level of the decentralized entities, which, under the Constitution, are mandated to exercise local governance functions, remains a central component of long-term stabilization efforts in North Kivu. The International Security and Stabilization Support Strategy will continue to be implemented in the Kitshanga area in support of the priorities that have been identified jointly with the provincial government, aimed primarily at strengthening community cohesion. In addition, work will begin in 2021 in a new priority zone of north Bwito/south Lubero, where the Strategy, through the Stabilization Coherence Fund, is set to begin with a project on democratic dialogue and women and peace and security, leading to the implementation of a return, reintegration and socioeconomic recovery component. To counter the re-use of former combatants in armed groups, the community reintegration projects of the Strategy will be focused on at-risk young people and former combatants in the area.

South Kivu

55. South Kivu's topography, proximity to international borders, history of migration and limited State presence provide an environment conducive to the presence of local and foreign armed groups. Reducing the level of violence in the province will require a sustained effort to address its root causes and key drivers, while tackling the networks that sustain these conflicts and their regional dimensions. MONUSCO will continue to work closely with the Government in the following main conflict areas: Uvira, the Hauts Plateaux and the Ruzizi plain; Shabunda and Walungu; Kabambare (in Maniema Province) and Fizi; and Kalehe and Bunyakiri, all of which present their own specific sets of challenges. The threat posed by the complex activities of the Mai-Mai Yakutumba network, which operates in those areas, and the illicit extraction of natural resources that funds it and other armed groups will need to be addressed.

56. The sustainable drawdown of MONUSCO from South Kivu will depend on the following actions:

(a) Progress towards the extension of State authority and the development of solutions to critical issues, such as land rights and citizenship, while also enhancing regional engagement and cooperation on key security issues;

(b) A reduction in the size and capabilities of the major armed groups operating in the area – particularly Mai-Mai Yakutumba – to a level at which security forces can manage them and the local authorities are able to disarm and demobilize them, with foreign combatants returning to their countries of origin and local combatants being part of a sustainable community-based reintegration process;

(c) The establishment of processes aimed at tackling the underlying problems and grievances that have given rise to violence and human rights violations and abuses, in particular conflict-related sexual violence;

(d) Progress towards the creation of conditions conducive to the safe and sustainable return of internally displaced persons.

57. In the Hauts Plateaux area surrounding Minembwe, the Mission's efforts will be focused on addressing continued tensions linked to identity, which are often stoked by external politicization and manipulation, resulting in increased attacks against civilians, the systematic burning of villages and large-scale population displacement. MONUSCO will continue to support the Government's efforts to extend State authority to the Hauts Plateaux, which will ultimately require a political solution. The Mission is working with the provincial authorities on a multipronged political strategy for the resolution of conflict in Minembwe and the Hauts Plateaux, recognizing its complexity and relationship to other political processes.

58. The MONUSCO force will continue to support broader protection efforts through mobile deployments and intensified patrolling in high-risk locations, where the radius of patrolling will also be expanded. The Mission will work with the civilian authorities, the Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, other security forces, civil society and partners to develop a longer-term plan for the protection of civilians. It will work closely with humanitarian actors to enable the delivery of humanitarian assistance to the local population. Substantial support will be provided to civilian and military justice actors in efforts to combat impunity by the police, justice and corrections capacities of the Mission.

59. In Kalehe, joint efforts will be focused on pacifying and stabilizing the strategic border area with North Kivu. Priority will be given to confidence-building among communities and the restoration of State authority in the area while engaging with armed groups to secure the release of children, address conflict-related sexual violence and identify pathways to disarmament.

60. Addressing the threat posed by Mai-Mai Yakutumba will require significant investment both politically and militarily, but remains essential to stabilize South Kivu and its bordering areas. The long-term objective is the effective disarmament and demobilization of this group while significantly reducing the levels of illicit exploitation of natural resources in the area where it is active. The more immediate goal is to gradually reduce Yakutumba's reach and strength through outreach and the targeting of smaller groups in the coalition that may be willing to surrender. This will require efforts to disrupt the flow of arms to the group and its freedom of movement while also supporting some targeted programmes to improve livelihoods and generate employment opportunities in order to reduce the incentive to join armed groups.

V. Strategic partnerships

61. Creating the conditions for the Mission's sustainable drawdown will require strengthened coordination between the Mission and the United Nations country team in support of the key stabilization and peacebuilding priorities outlined above. The United Nations presence as a whole will seek to capitalize on and expand existing strategic partnerships with multilateral institutions, regional actors and key bilateral donors, whose engagement will be key to achieve progress in these critical areas and deepen the triple nexus approach while ensuring national and local ownership and leadership of the transition process. The Mission will seek to mobilize and sustain international political engagement and support, both technical and financial, for the critical governance reforms to be undertaken by the Congolese authorities as prerequisites for long-term stability and sustainable development.

62. The Mission and the United Nations country team will encourage, promote and support the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals as a stabilization tool at the local, provincial and national levels, in close collaboration with the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Collaboration with the Peacebuilding Support Office on flagship peacebuilding projects aimed at reinforcing social cohesion, strengthening inclusive local governance and fostering durable solutions for conflict-related displacement of populations, starting with the Kasai and Tanganyika Provinces, will remain a critical component of efforts to create an enabling environment for the Mission's responsible withdrawal.

63. Going forward, it will be critical that the key partners of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, including international financial institutions, the European Union, the African Union, the Southern African Development Community, the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region and other subregional organizations, work together to ensure the provision of coherent and mutually reinforcing support for the Government and people of the Democratic Republic of the Congo as they tackle the country's remaining stabilization and peacebuilding challenges. The United Nations will deepen its engagement with those partners in the months and years ahead, with a view to maximizing complementarity and exploiting synergies, as it gradually reconfigures its presence in response to the evolving situation on the ground. Closer collaboration with the World Bank in the framework of its Strategy for Fragility, Conflict, and Violence and in support of the achievement of priority stabilization objectives aligned with the International Security and Stabilization Support Strategy framework, notably in the eastern portion of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, will be of critical importance.