



REPORT

REGIONAL MEETING OF PARLIMENTARIANS OF THE GREAT LAKES REGION

I. Introduction

1. The meeting of Parliamentarians of the Great Lakes Region, co-organised by the Secretariat of the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region and AWEPA, with technical assistance from the Joint AU/UN Secretariat, was held from February 26 to 28, 2007 at the *Palais du Peuple de la République Démocratique du Congo* in Kinshasa.

2. The eleven (11) core countries of the International Conference namely Angola, Burundi, the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Kenya, the Republic of Congo, Rwanda, Sudan, Uganda, the United Republic of Tanzania and Zambia were all represented at the highest level of Parliaments and Senates of the respective countries.

3. Representatives of Member States of the Group of Friends of the Great Lakes Region were also in attendance, including Canada and the Netherlands, in their capacity as co-Chairs of the Group, Belgium, South Africa as well as the United Nations Observer Mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo (MONUC), the United Nations Department of Political Affairs (DPA) and UN Agencies: UNDP, UNICEF, UNEP, UNIFEM and UNHCR.

4. Regional Parliaments from SADC and EALA (the East African Legislative Assembly) were also represented, as well as the Group of Women Parliamentarians of Central Africa.

5. The AMANI FORUM, an independent organisation of African Parliamentarians, active in seven of the eleven core countries also participated in the meeting.

II. Objectives of the Parliamentarians' Meeting

6. The objectives of the Regional Parliamentarians' Meeting convened a few months after the signing of the Pact on Security, Stability and Development of the Great Lakes Region by Heads of State and Government were as follows:

- To assemble Parliamentarians of the Region with a view to enabling them to develop a common understanding of the Pact on Security, Stability and Development for the Great Lakes Region, signed by Heads of State and Government of the countries concerned in Nairobi on December 15, 2006;
- To inform and sensitise Parliamentarians of the region on the various components of the Pact : the Dar es Salaam Declaration, the Regional Follow-up Mechanism, Programmes of Action, Projects and Protocols;
- To discuss the role of Parliamentarians in the ratification of the Pact as well as the mechanism for their involvement in the implementation of the same;
- To encourage ownership of the Pact by Parliamentarians with a view to facilitating its prompt ratification and implementation;
- To strengthen relationships between Parliamentarians within the framework of the process of the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region;

7. Prior to discussions on the content of various themes of the conference's agenda items, the Great Lakes Parliamentarians elected a Bureau for the meeting which was composed of:

1. Chairman : Mr. Christophe Lutundula Apala Pen'Apala, 1st Deputy Speaker of the National Assembly of the Democratic Republic of Congo;
2. Vice-Chairman : Mr. Charles Kakoma, Member of Parliament, Member of the Parliamentary Defence and Security Committee of the Republic of Zambia ; ;
3. Rapporteur : Mrs. Agnès Kayijire, Senator and Head of the Delegation of the Republic of Rwanda.

III. Opening Ceremony

8. The official opening ceremony was graced by the presence of His Excellency, Joseph Kabila Kabange, the President of the Democratic Republic of Congo. In his ceremonial speech, he welcomed participants and on behalf of the Congolese people, expressed gratitude to the organisers of the meeting.

9. He was gratified to note that most countries in the sub-region had realised that democracy is the only system capable of fostering the development of their populations, and that dialogue had emerged as the surest way to resolve conflicts.

10. He then reaffirmed the commitment of the DRC to hasten the ratification of the Pact and to pay its contribution towards the functioning of the Conference Secretariat. Lastly, President Kabila renewed the will of his country to respect all commitments spelt out in the Pact and confirmed the willingness of the DRC to host the next IC/GLR Summit in 2008.

11. Prior to this, in his opening remarks, the Speaker of the National Assembly of the DRC, evoked the bloody conflicts that have ravaged the region in the past two decades and launched a fervent appeal to Governments of the Region to do their level

best to ensure that such violent conflicts never reoccur. He then underscored the importance of the Pact on Security, Stability and Development of the Great Lakes Region before inviting the Honourable Members of Parliament and Senators to adopt a Declaration committing the respective Parliaments in the Region to ratify the Pact as soon as possible and define mechanisms for their participation in this building of new foundations comprising security, stability, democratisation and development of the region.

12. Other speakers who successively mounted the podium to address the meeting, particularly the co-Chairperson of the Group of Friends of the Great Lakes Region, the representative of the Joint AU/UN Secretariat, the Belgian Ambassador to the DRC, the Vice-Chairman of AWEPA and the Executive Secretary of the Conference Secretariat of the International Conference of the Great Lakes Region, made interventions on the need to:

- Establish a permanent framework for dialogue and sharing of experiences among Parliamentarians so as to progressively lay the foundations for a promising and mutual future.
- Accompany and complement international initiatives of respective Governments through parliamentary diplomacy.
- Examine the modalities for the participation of Parliamentarians in the overall implementation of the Pact; establish and operationalise the Regional Forum of Parliamentarians with a view to enabling them to consistently play a regulatory role in all aspects of the Pact for its effective implementation.

IV. Review and Discussions of Agenda Items

13. During the three-day meeting, Parliamentary delegations from the Great Lakes Region listened to five (5) successive presentations made by H.E. Ambassador Liberata Mulamula, the Executive Secretary of the Conference Secretariat and Senior Staff of the Joint AU/UN Secretariat respectively.

14. The various presentations, summaries of which appear below, provided an opportunity to adequately inform Parliamentarians of the Great Lakes Region of the general philosophy underlying the International Conference on Peace, Security, Democracy, Good Governance, Economic Development, Regional Integration and Humanitarian and Social Issues. They also allow them to penetrate the new vision of the relationship between core countries as well as the quintessence of the Nairobi Pact and its components which include the Dar es Salaam Declaration, Protocols, Programmes and the Special Fund for Reconstruction and Development of the Great Lakes Region.

General Presentation of the Pact on Security, Stability and Development in the Great Lakes Region, the Regional Follow-up Mechanism and the establishment of the Conference Secretariat

15. Ambassador Liberata Mulamula, Executive Secretary of the Conference Secretariat made a brief presentation on the Pact on Security, Stability and Development. In this regard, she outlined the various components of the Pact which

is composed of the Dar es Salaam Declaration, Protocols, Regional Programmes of Action, the Regional Follow-up Mechanism and the Special Reconstruction and Development Fund. She further explained the structure of the Regional Follow-up Mechanism in which the Heads of State and Government, including the Troika, have a role to play in the peaceful settlement of disputes, the Inter-Ministerial Regional Committee and the Conference Secretariat whose head office is in Bujumbura, Burundi.

16. She concluded by urgently appealing to Parliamentarians to take ownership of the Pact, hasten its ratification and participate in its implementation. Further, she urged Governments to disburse the requisite funds for the functioning of the Conference Secretariat and to contribute to the Special Fund for Reconstruction and Development.

Peace and Security Dimension in the Pact

17. During the presentation on the Cluster pertaining to Peace and Security, the priority axes of the Pact were highlighted particularly the Protocol on Non-Aggression and Mutual Defence in the Great Lakes; the concept of joint security management of common borders which should result in the establishment of a collective security architecture from the twelve identified security zones; and missions given to the Regional Follow-up Mechanism to translate the vision enshrined in the Pact in concrete terms, structured around the Summit and its Troika, the Regional Inter-Ministerial Committee (RIMC) and the Conference Secretariat. The Speaker emphasised the fact that this mechanism will work in synergy with existing conflict resolution and settlement mechanisms at the level of the United Nations, the African Union and RECs. He mentioned the other projects adopted in that cluster particularly those related to disarmament and repatriation of armed groups in Eastern DRC, the fight against trans-national crime and terrorism, as well as the fight against the proliferation and illicit trafficking of small arms and light weapons.

Democracy and Good Governance Dimension in the Pact

18. The Democracy and Good Governance Cluster in the Pact was summarised in four points: Objectives of the Pact, Vision of the Dar Es Salaam Declaration, Protocols, Programmes of Action and Projects. During the presentation, it was underscored that the Pact is a joint effort based on the Dar Es Salaam Declaration which is the expression of the commitment and the will of Heads of State and Governments to combat all forms of discrimination and promote the participation of all social actors in the management of public affairs.

19. In addition, the Speaker recalled that the Pact is an instrument of Regional and Good Governance before presenting the five Protocols which constitute the legal instruments, programmes of action, sub-programmes and projects that are the technical planning instruments.

Economic Development and Regional Integration Dimension in the Pact

20. The presenter of the above Cluster established the existing links between peace and development and in so doing underlined the importance of promoting the private sector and sensitising transboundary communities on the concept of Transborder

Development Basins within the framework of the programme of action. He also highlighted the problem of the management of natural resources and indicated that the creation of a Regional Mechanism for the Certification of Natural Resources was envisaged. He concluded by expounding on the Protocol adopted for this purpose. The latter will make the Zone operational, institute the Special Reconstruction and Development Fund and legally establish Transborder Development Basins.

Humanitarian and Social Issues Dimension in the Pact

21. The presenter of the Humanitarian and Social Cluster in the Pact which is based on the political priorities and guidelines identified in the Dar es Salaam Declaration underscored the fact that the related Programme of Action has two sub-programmes that are composed of seven priority projects. It is envisaged that a Coordination Committee on Humanitarian and Social Issues will be set up. Its mandate will involve monitoring the implementation of the Programme of Action.

22. The Legal Expert engaged by the Joint AU/UN Secretariat of the International Conference took the opportunity to draw the attention of Parliamentarians to the necessary legislative actions to take at the national level with a view to translating the Protocols into mandatory standards. To illustrate this, he indicated that Member States should criminalise sexual violence and review laws on succession to enable women and children inherit from their deceased spouses and/or parents, among others.

23. He also presented model laws developed within the framework of the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region which were adopted by regional legal experts to serve as guidelines to the legislators in their efforts of tailoring the Protocols to fit in with domestic law.

Ratification Procedures and Role of Parliamentarians in the Ratification of the Pact

24. The member of the Joint AU/UN Secretariat who made a presentation on this agenda item reminded participants of traditional ratification procedures. He then illustrated his presentation using concrete regional examples while referring to procedures in force in the DRC, CAR and the Republic of Congo.

25. In conclusion, he sensitised Parliamentarians who are the legitimate representatives of populations on the need to put the human person at the centre of development and democracy.

Role of Parliamentarians in the Implementation of the Pact

26. In his intervention, the speaker who presented this item spoke about actions that would ensure the effective implementation of the Pact, and consequently parliamentary prerogatives. He specifically mentioned:

- Participation in political dialogue to support efforts by Government efforts in peaceful conflict prevention and resolution,

- Mobilisation of internal and external resources and in particular, contributions to the Conference Secretariat by Member Countries, contributions to the Special Fund, contributions to specific projects,
- The need to harmonise national policies with the Pact's programmes of action and projects,
- Domestication of protocols within the national legal framework,
- Dissemination of the Pact and sensitisation for its ownership by populations of the region,
- Involvement of Parliaments in the monitoring and evaluation of the implementation of the Pact.

27. Lastly, the speaker presented the project on the Regional Parliamentarians Forum developed by regional experts and adopted by the Regional Inter-Ministerial Committee as one of the possible intervention instruments.

Recommendations

28. After the presentations, participants engaged in a question-answer session between the Honourable Members of Parliament/Senators and the presenters, on the basis of which the following recommendations were proposed and adopted.

To Parliaments of Member States of the Conference

Parliaments should:

1. take the necessary steps to authorize the prompt ratification of the Pact on Security, Stability and Development for the Great Lakes Region;
2. sustain the dialogue initiated at the Kinshasa meeting and establish a Regional Parliamentarians Forum of the Great Lakes Region founded on the new vision of the Pact;
3. participate in mobilising resources, both internally and externally, and ensure the inclusion of the necessary resources for the implementation of the Pact in national budgets while playing their role as the budgetary authorities;
4. sensitise their respective electorates on the Pact, hence contributing to making it accessible to the general public;
5. use the constitutional mechanisms with regard to information and control of Government actions in order to be informed of progress made in the implementation of the Pact;
6. establish a network of women Parliamentarians in the spirit of resolution 1325 of the United Nations Security Council and promote gender in the Great Lakes Region;
7. also create a Follow-up Committee comprising the eleven core

countries whose mandate shall be to study the technical modalities for the realisation of the Forum;

8. take steps to ensure the internalisation of Protocols contained in the Pact in national legislative systems;

To Governments of Member States of the Conference

Governments should:

1. take steps to immediately pay up contributions due to the regular budget of the Conference Secretariat to enable the latter begin its activities;
2. further take the necessary measures to ensure contributions to the Special Reconstruction and Development Fund;
3. take steps to ensure the internalisation of Protocols contained in the Pact in national legislative systems;
4. honour the commitments and obligations resulting from the signing and ratification of the Pact;
5. harmonise their national laws within the framework of the implementation of the Protocol on the Repression of Sexual Violence against Women and Children;
6. propose bills to facilitate the implementation of the Protocol on the Protection and Assistance of Internally Displaced Persons;
7. within the framework of the Protocol on the Right to Property by Returnees, review their land and succession laws in order to integrate the necessary provisions;

29. The Parliamentarians invited Ambassadors of Member States of the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region accredited to the Republic of Burundi to form a Working Group to the Conference Secretariat and cooperate with the latter in the implementation of the Pact.

To the Conference Secretariat

The Conference Secretariat should:

1. assist Parliaments of the Region to establish the Regional Forum of Parliamentarians of the Great Lakes Region by organising in this regard, at an appropriate time another meeting of Parliamentarians of the Great Lakes Region ;

2. assist Parliaments of the Great Lakes Region to make the Pact accessible to the general public on a national scale ;
3. create an ad hoc unit or structure under its remit in tandem with the establishment of Parliamentary Forum of the Great Lakes Region ;

To the International Community

Parliamentarians shall request:

1. the United Nations and the African Union to assist the Great Lakes Region in its peace-building and reconstruction efforts;
 2. Development partners, including those within the Group of Friends of the Great Lakes Region, to continue providing their political and diplomatic support to the region and further urge them to contribute to the Special Reconstruction and Development Fund.
30. In addition to the foregoing recommendations, Parliamentarians of the Great Lakes Region underscored :
1. the importance of sanctions in the event of violation or refusal to implement the Pact ;
 2. the fight against corruption in the Region ;
 3. the need to speedily make the Conference Secretariat operational ;
 4. the special attention given to child soldiers who must be demobilised and socially reinserted ;
 5. the need to mobilise significant internal resources, so that external resources are considered additional assistance to internal efforts ;
 6. respect of commitments undertaken by Governments of the Region in the Pact ;
 7. the importance of environmental protection ;
 8. the need to develop a positive synergy between Governments on the one hand, and Parliaments, on the other hand, within the framework of implementation of the Pact ;

31. They noted that the Pact's Programmes and Projects take into account initiatives and actions being implemented by other international institutions, particularly the African Union, the European Union and the United Nations.

32. Parliamentarians of the Great Lakes Region further invited Peoples of the Region to demonstrate more solidarity and launched a solemn appeal to their Heads of State and Government to concert all their energies so that Africa's Great Lakes Region will never again be the arena of violence and bloody conflicts.

33. Before concluding their proceedings, Parliamentarians of the Great Lakes Region held a closed session in order to discuss a strategy for their involvement in the implementation of the Pact and the follow-up of recommendations of the Kinshasa meeting.

34. In this regard, they agreed on the following:

1. The experience of the Parliamentary Forum composed of Parliaments from Burundi, Rwanda, Kenya, Sudan, Tanzania and Uganda as well as that of other African countries (SADC, CEMAC...) will be drawn upon to better develop and structure the Great Lakes Parliamentary Forum. The Conference Secretariat will be charged with compiling and availing all the necessary documentation to Parliamentarians of the Great Lakes Region in preparation for their next meeting ;
2. A Committee comprising Heads of Delegation of the 11 core countries, including members of the Bureau of the Meeting will be established with a view to ensuring a follow-up to the Kinshasa Conference and preparing the next Great Lakes Parliamentarians meeting in collaboration with the Conference Secretariat.

VI. Conclusion

34. The meeting in which Parliaments of the eleven core countries participated took place in a cordial and constructive environment which facilitated the adoption of the Kinshasa Declaration and the Regional meeting report by acclamation.

Done in Kinshasa on February 28, 2007