

**Statement by the Netherlands
co-Chair of the Group of Friends
Ambassador Fred Racké
on the occasion
of the Regional Inter-Ministerial Committee meeting,
Lusaka, 22-23 July 2005**

Your Honour, the vice-President of the Republic of Zambia,
Your Excellency, Minister Kikwete, Minister of Foreign Affairs
and Chair of the Regional Inter-Ministerial Committee,
Honourable Ministers,
Your Excellency, the Special Envoy a.i. of the Chairman of the
African Union Commission,
Your Excellency, the Special Representative of the Secretary
General of the United Nations,
National Coordinators,
Ladies and gentlemen.

On behalf of the Netherlands co-Chair of the Group of Friends
of the Great Lakes Region, I am pleased to address this
Regional Inter-Ministerial Committee in Lusaka, for the mid-term
review of the second phase of the Conference on Peace,
Security, Democracy and Development, preparing for the next
Summit in Nairobi.

The origin of this Conference goes back to quite some time ago. The President of the UN Security Council on 20 November 2003, but recalling an earlier statement as far back as 1997, called for the holding of an international conference on peace, security, democracy and development in the Great Lakes region of Africa. This Conference, with the participation of all governments of the region of the Great Lakes and Central Africa and all others concerned, was to be organised with a view to achieving a sustainable peace, security and stability for all countries in the region.

Right now we are very pleased to note that, since the preparations for the Conference started in 2003, the overall development of the political situation in the Region has improved remarkably. In the Democratic Republic of Congo preparations for national elections are continuing. I would also like to mention in this respect, in particular, the peaceful elections in Burundi and congratulate the transitional government and the people of Burundi on this historic achievement.

We look forward to the completion of the electoral process in Burundi on the 19th of August and the investiture of the newly elected President of the Republic on the 26th of August, when the transition will formally come to an end. The Netherlands

government remains committed to give diplomatic support to the efforts of the Regional Initiative on Peace in Burundi and will continue to convince the last rebel movement, Palipehutu-FNL, to join the political process and lay down their arms.

The first Summit in Dar es Salaam, on 19 and 20 November 2004 was a landmark and a historic event. The Declaration adopted, and solemnly signed at the Summit by all Heads of State of the Region, presents a common vision and includes principles and actions that reflect African ownership as well as African solidarity and partnership. It contains the building blocks to turn the region into an environment in which all people can enjoy security and prosperity and can build their own futures, free from fear of conflict, aggression and genocide.

We can build on the successes of the first phase of the Great Lakes Conference. The Conference has shown a large degree of political commitment and mobilised the region. It also proved that a formula where governments, civil society, women and youth work together as partners enriches the debate and strengthens the sense of ownership.

The Conference has in fact become a platform for a continuous and dynamic dialogue between former warring parties. The Conference is therefore already applying the process it was

supposed to establish. Very encouraging is, in this respect, that the National Coordinators of all eleven core countries have been able to agree amongst themselves to present a concept-paper on the “Follow-up Institutional Mechanism” for the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region. Such a harmonious joint effort to assume full ownership of the implementation of the decisions by Heads of State in Nairobi would have been unthinkable only a few years ago.

The second phase of the Conference was heralded by the meeting of the Regional Inter-ministerial Committee (RIMC) in Kigali, in February this year. During this meeting, you gave political direction to the Conference by identifying a range of themes for protocols and plans of action that could form part of the Security, Stability and Development Pact for the Great Lakes Region, that is to be concluded during the second summit in Nairobi. Your National Coordinators and the experts have worked on the difficult task to colour these plans of action and protocols in. They have, over the past few months worked on a series of project documents that should give body to the of protocols and plans of action identified.

The Group of Friends has welcomed the outcome of the discussions in the Technical Thematic Taskforces (TTTFs) and hope that the projects that are being developed be made

concrete, feasible and include a calendar for implementation with benchmarks that are both realistic and ambitious. We also hope that in further consideration synergies with already existing mechanisms will be sought and duplication will be avoided.

Discussions in the Technical Taskforce on Peace and Security for example, were already very encouraging in this respect. Participants agreed that disarmament and repatriation of foreign armed groups remained an urgent priority for peace and security in the region. A coordinated strategy on this would be most welcome, but to be effective must include and draw on the experience of all parties concerned, notably the two UN-missions in the region, and support, rather than duplicate, the recent decisions of the African Union's Peace and Security Council on this issue.

But there are also challenges. Over the past few months, we have experienced how a great number of subjects and related projects have been identified; subjects that are in itself important and relevant but are not all of them of vital importance when looking at the main goal of the ICGLR. We have seen how easy it is to divert from the original purpose of the Conference. The Netherlands, as co-chair of the Group of Friends, call upon you all to overcome these challenges. We

can only find durable solutions to problems, if we focus on the root causes and essence thereof. Therefore, we look forward to your political guidance.

It is in this light that the Group of Friends will look forward to the outcome of the Conference. We hope that the Conference and the second Summit in Nairobi will represent a genuine effort to concretely advance the agenda for peace and stability. It is therefore needed, in our view, to focus on the heart of the region and give priority to the core essence and aim of this Conference: to create sustainable peace and stability. Joint efforts can lead to the desired result. The Group of Friends will continue to give the core countries and the Conference its full support therein. We are and remain genuine Friends and partners of the Great Lakes Region. But our capacity to support, Mr. Chairman is not boundless. So choices will have to be made and priorities will have to be identified. We sincerely hope that the choices will be made by the core countries of the Conference themselves, in the spirit of full ownership. It is better that you set the agenda for the future of the Region. But allow me, Mr. Chairman, as co-Chair of the Group of Friends, nevertheless to express the hope that in the coming months, leading towards the second Summit in Nairobi, it will be possible to make the necessary choices and to identify priorities. This can best be done by establishing linkages and to

rise above discussion of projects individually. Political choices are called for. Referring this issue back to the technical experts is not a way forward.

We would encourage participants in the Conference to be realistic in their expectations of new extra funding for projects agreed by this Conference. The Group of Friends is prepared to support those projects that prove to be genuinely innovative and add clear regional value to existing processes.

Partnership

The Great Lakes Conference should be considered as one of the main platforms for discussing the causes of the conflicts endemic to the Great Lakes region and finding solutions to which all involved are committed. As co-Chair of the Group of Friends I wish to reaffirm our political, diplomatic, financial and technical support to make the Conference a success, while fully respecting your ownership. But it is important the Conference's outcomes reinforce the region's hard-won peace processes, rather than distract from them through duplicating their work.

In the first phase of the Conference, we chose to enhance this support and strengthen the partnership between the Group of Friends and the members of the Conference by organising a

Round Table at the political level. During this meeting, which took place on 18 November 2004 in Dar es Salaam and was chaired by the Netherlands Minister for Development Cooperation, Mrs. Agnes van Ardenne, and the Canadian co-chair, Ministers of the region and ministers from the Group of Friends had the opportunity to exchange views on important issues related to the Conference.

During the upcoming days, your political guidance will set the direction regarding the focus of the Conference and the desired outcome of the second Summit. As co-chair of the Group of Friends, on behalf of minister van Ardenne, I would like to invite you to a second Round Table in September, in the margins of the High-level Plenary Meeting of the General Assembly of the UN in NY. This Round Table will give us the opportunity to exchange views on your concept-paper on the “Follow-up Institutional Mechanism for the ICGLR” and other related issues like the Specific Reconstruction and Development Area. It will also give us the opportunity to discuss what you consider the priorities that will lead to a successful outcome of the Conference.

Closing remark:

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen, let me conclude on behalf of the government of the Netherlands, as co-chair of the Group of Friends, by expressing our deep appreciation for the fact that Minister Kikwete has taken the time to chair the Regional Inter-Ministerial Committee; time, that in his busy schedule as candidate for the upcoming presidential elections in Tanzania, has undoubtedly become a scarce commodity.

Also, let me express my gratitude to the Zambian government for the gracious hospitality it has shown us by hosting this meeting of the Regional Inter-ministerial Committee, and the preceding meeting of the Regional Preparatory Committee.

Finally, let me thank the Special Representative of the Secretary General of the United Nations, Ibrahima Fall, and the Special Envoy of the Chairman of the Commission of the African Union, ambassador Bah, for their tireless efforts, personal commitment and dedication with which they are fulfilling their mandate.

Thank you.