

INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON THE GREAT LAKES REGION

ADDRESS BY THE CANADIAN CO-CHAIR
OF THE GROUP OF FRIENDS OF THE GREAT LAKES REGION
Ambassador Anne Leahy

Regional Inter-Ministerial Committee Meeting, Lusaka, July 22, 2005

Minister Kikwete, Chair of the Regional Inter-Ministerial Committee,
Ministers,

Special Envoy of the Chairman of the African Union Commission,
Special Representative of the Secretary-General of the United
Nations,

National Coordinators,

Ladies and Gentlemen.

On behalf of the Group of Friends, I wish to thank the Zambian Government and its National Preparatory Committee for its warm hospitality and for the considerate attention it has shown to us all. We wish to recognize the astute leadership of Zambia's Special Envoy and National Coordinator, our friend Siteke Mwale, as he deftly chaired this week's Regional Preparatory Committee. We also recognize the commitment of our chair, Minister Kikwete, to the success of the Conference as he is with us today, taking time out from his

other very important challenge as the Chama Cha Mapinduzi candidate in the forthcoming Tanzanian presidential elections.

Our meetings in Lusaka take place a mere sixteen weeks away from the Summit. They were meant to allow ministers to assess progress made in the crafting of the Pact for Security, Stability and Development and to exchange views on the future of the ICGLR including the Pact's implementation phase. At the previous meeting five months ago in Kigali, ministers outlined the main thrusts that should guide national experts in drafting the programmes of action and protocols that will bring to life the Dar Declaration.

Experts have since debated, examined or approved over sixty projects and protocols. These experts have come from national parliaments, various non-governmental organizations, women and youth organizations, media, and business, as well as government departments. They have contributed pragmatic suggestions and have placed before us their expectations that should be given due importance given the role they will play in the implementation phase.

The Regional Preparatory Committee has put before this meeting its assessment of the technical deliberations based on

projects prepared by the joint secretariat. We appreciate their contribution as they have worked tirelessly to support the Technical Thematic Task Forces.

Ministers will recognize that much progress has been achieved; they will also recognize that the Regional Preparatory Committee and its experts groups require further specific guidance to enable them to concentrate on those projects that are necessary as opposed to desirable if we are to lay a firm basis for the medium and long term. In the most important area of peace and security, it is encouraging that countries are agreed on what are the top priorities. Such clear priority setting has been more difficult to reach in other areas, notably economic infrastructure projects. Here, it will be challenging but important that countries value regional interests first and foremost in determining the key projects for immediate implementation in the Pact's Action Plan.

The Group of Friends is looking forward to the assessment that Ministers will make at this meeting and that will direct the experts on how to finalize programmes and protocols in the sixteen weeks remaining before the Summit.

We would like to express our hope that the Action Plan will reflect the regional character of the conference and set out responsibilities and competences. It should also contain a timetable and bring out the added value of the regional approach compared to existing instances.

As we address the challenges before us, it is however appropriate to acknowledge just how much this Conference has already achieved in the essential task of building and enhancing confidence among its members. We should be inspired by this achievement and draw on it

We have a sense that over the past weeks, the Conference has acquired a new dynamic. On the basis of the work undertaken in the formulation of programmes of action, we saw national experts take the initiative and address region's immediate and pressing concerns in their own formulation. Most importantly, although such projects involve the countries at the epicentre of the region, the other countries of the Great Lakes Region supported them because they recognized the vital interests they share at the level of the entire region.

Two such projects are the "Disarmament and repatriation of all armed groups in the Eastern DRC in accordance with the

Lusaka agreement” and the “Revival of the Communauté économique des Pays des Grands Lacs”. They also illustrate how this Conference can add value in relation to security initiatives and economic activities undertaken in other contexts. This should be a hallmark of the ICGLR.

Another example of this new dynamic is the intense discussion that is taking place on various aspects of the issue of the illegal exploitation of natural resources. Given the vast extent of natural resources in the region, they inevitably impact on the governance, stability and development of this region. Participants in the Conference have remarkably succeeded in addressing a most difficult issue, the disarmament of armed groups in the region.

Likewise, with respect to the issue of illegal exploitation of natural resources, the Group of Friends hopes that it will be possible for them to reach a common understanding and agree to address the issue on a technical and dispassionate basis. As there is presently no other forum that offers the countries of the region the possibility to tackle jointly the various aspects of this issue, success in this instance would be a crucial achievement for the Leaders in this Conference. Considering the importance of the issue, and in response to the

suggestion make in the RPC, the Group of Friends is ready to support this specific process in any useful way.

For the Group of Friends, the cases mentioned above represent tangible results to which the population of the region can relate as well as the international community and by which the success of the Conference will be measured.

The Group of Friends has responded to the invitation to support the Conference since its inception because its members believe in its premise that the resolution of conflicts around the Great Lakes is essential if the entire region is to live in peace and recover its economic potential. The most pressing issue is the peaceful conclusion of the transition processes in the DRC and in Burundi. Let me take this opportunity to commend Burundi and Burundians for successfully bringing its electoral process to its final stage. We also commend the DRC for staying the course at a critical time and for launching its electoral process with the registration of voters. We assure Burundi and the DRC of our continued support.

Chair,

Yet another step has been taken by national coordinators in the shaping of the ICGLR. Earlier this week, the national coordinators shared their initial concerted views on the “Follow-up Institutional Mechanism for the ICGLR”. The Group of Friends was impressed by the stated principles of ownership in the establishment of a new regionally-owned mechanism designed to support the Heads of State as they oversee the implementation of their commitments. We are heartened to see that the proposal is predicated on the Leaders’ commitment to allocate the necessary resources to fund the mechanism, that it takes due account of existing institutions and that it also reflects the on-going discussions within the African Union on continent-wide structures.

Further ahead, we will look forward to the views that you will develop on the “Special Reconstruction and Development Area”. We, your long-time partners in the region, will be most interested in how this Area will impact on the implementation of existing projects and activities, particularly those to which the members of the Group of Friends have contributed substantially over many years. Referring back to the concept paper on the Follow-up Mechanism, we note that the approach on financing that establishes a distinction between the set-up of a mechanism to be owned by the member states and

developmental activities proper corresponds to the approach that members of the Group of Friends generally take.

The Group of Friends wishes to pursue its dialogue with the core countries on the pressing issues in the region that are the focus of this Conference, on the desired outcomes of the Nairobi Summit and the region's prospects. The Co-Chairs of the Group of Friends will shortly propose a meeting at ministerial level to take place prior to the next meeting of the RIMC.

The Group of Friends is looking forward to your discussions and directions that will be imparted to the regional experts and the RPC which will carry us forward in the home stretch to the Nairobi Summit.

Thank you.