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Special report of the Secretary-General on the strategic review of the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo

I. Introduction

A. Background

1. In its resolution [2348 \(2017\)](#), the Security Council requested the Secretary-General to conduct a strategic review of the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO), examining the continued relevance of all mandated tasks, priorities and related resources, as well as the necessity of adapting the Mission's mandate to the specific needs of the post-elections phase, with a view to: (a) providing the Council with options, no later than 30 September 2017, for a reduction of the Mission's force and civilian components in order to maximize the efficient use of the Mission's resources, to be delivered after the successful implementation of the 31 December 2016 agreement, and sustainable progress in reducing the threat of armed groups, taking into account the Mission's and the United Nations country team's comparative advantages and capacities and other relevant factors, with a view to transferring relevant activities to the country team and other relevant partners, as appropriate; and (b) in the light of the reaction of the Council to those options and following the successful implementation of the 31 December agreement, providing advice to the Council on an exit strategy in advance of the next mandate renewal.

2. The strategic review of MONUSCO builds on continuing efforts to streamline the work of the Mission and achieve efficiency gains, while taking into consideration political and security developments, available resources and the need to mitigate the impact of the adjustments on the civilian population. The present report is the result of extensive consultations with a wide range of Congolese stakeholders over a period of four months. In the present report, recommendations are provided on the strategic priorities of MONUSCO and corresponding adjustments to the Mission's posture and configuration during the current, pre-electoral phase, as well as options for a broader reconfiguration of the Mission during the post-election period, subject to the evolution of the political and security situation. Preliminary elements of a potential exit strategy are also identified.



B. Methodology

3. The strategic review began in May 2017 as a joint exercise between the field presence and United Nations Headquarters, led by the Department of Peacekeeping Operations and under the overall guidance of an integrated task force. The review followed the methodology prescribed in the United Nations Policy on Integrated Assessment and Planning and was structured in three phases.

4. The first phase was dedicated to producing a conflict analysis as the basis for determining the priorities of the United Nations and MONUSCO in the current period and following the implementation of the 31 December agreement. In that regard, three broad scenarios were identified: (a) successful implementation of the 31 December agreement, albeit with a delayed timeline (best case scenario); (b) incomplete implementation of the agreement (status quo); and (c) the collapse of the agreement (worst case scenario).

5. In the second phase, further consultations were held with the Permanent Representative of the Democratic Republic of the Congo to the United Nations, Security Council members, troop- and police-contributing countries, United Nations system agencies and subject matter experts, including through a workshop organized by the International Peace Institute and the Stimson Centre. A principal-level meeting was also held to validate the conflict analysis and agree on the broad parameters for the subsequent phases of the review.

6. In the third phase, a multidisciplinary review team, led by the Assistant Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations and comprising senior representatives of key Secretariat departments and members of the integrated task force, visited the Democratic Republic of the Congo from 28 July to 7 August 2017. The team travelled to Kinshasa, Kananga, in Kasai Central Province, and Goma and Katala, in North Kivu Province. The review team consulted MONUSCO counterparts, the United Nations country team, national and provincial government officials, the leadership of the national security forces, members of the Independent National Electoral Commission, representatives of the presidential majority and the opposition, civil society organizations, religious leaders, non-governmental organizations, the diplomatic corps and officials of the African Union, the European Union and the International Organization of la Francophonie in the country.

II. Key findings

A. Overview of the situation

7. The slow, incomplete and non-inclusive implementation of the 31 December 2016 agreement, coupled with a worsening socioeconomic context and increased repression by the national security forces, have fuelled discontent in the capital and the country's main urban centres. In the provinces, the manipulation of armed militias and ethnic tensions by a range of State actors and spoilers has contributed to a resurgence of intercommunal violence and the multiplication of conflict hotspots across the country over the past year and a half, including in the central and western Democratic Republic of the Congo, from where the Mission had withdrawn in recent years as the security situation improved.

8. Against this backdrop, there has been a sharp increase in human rights violations, which often go uninvestigated and unpunished. The Democratic Republic of the Congo also faces a vast humanitarian challenge, on a scale unprecedented over the past 10 years, with 3.8 million people — mostly women and children — internally displaced and 8.5 million in need of assistance. With no prospect of

elections taking place in 2017, the relative respite provided by the signing of the agreement is unlikely to last beyond the end of the year, potentially leading to an escalation of political tensions and rising insecurity, with adverse consequences for the human rights and humanitarian situation and likely repercussions for the region.

1. Implementation of the 31 December 2016 agreement

9. The broad consensus underpinning the 31 December agreement has been steadily eroded by a lack of trust between the signatory parties and the increasing disaffection of the Congolese population with the political class as a whole. Opposition leaders, representatives of civil society and religious leaders deplored the non-consensual nomination of two members of a dissident faction of the Rassemblement des forces politiques et sociales de la République démocratique du Congo acquiesces au changement as Prime Minister and Chair of the National Council for Monitoring the Agreement and the Electoral Process as a demonstration of the broader scheme of the presidential majority to subvert the implementation of the agreement. By contrast, members of the Government and the presidential majority argued that the agreement was being implemented and lamented the fact that the wing of the Rassemblement led by Félix Tshisekedi had not only refused to engage constructively in the designation of the Prime Minister (the President of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Joseph Kabila, had requested that three names be submitted to him, while the Rassemblement was willing to put forward only one name), but also boycotted the subsequent consultation process leading to the appointment of the Chair of the National Council.

10. Despite the deep divergences within the Congolese political class, interlocutors on all sides, overall, reaffirmed the centrality of the agreement as the only viable framework for resolving the current crisis. In that regard, key government officials and members of the presidential majority insisted that Mr. Kabila had no intention of modifying the Constitution or seeking a third term, adding that they saw no need for him to publicly state what was already enshrined in both the agreement and the Constitution. They stressed that, in line with the ruling of the Constitutional Court on the implementation of article 70 of the Constitution, Mr. Kabila would remain in office until such time as his successor was elected. Opposition members stated, however, that they would not recognize the President beyond 31 December 2017, and many warned against what they saw as an elaborate plan to extend de facto Mr. Kabila's term in office well beyond 2017.

Electoral timetable

11. There was broad recognition across the range of interlocutors consulted by the review team that the time frame for elections set in the 31 December agreement would not be met, as the Southern African Development Community (SADC) and the African Union both acknowledged in recent communiqués. Key opposition figures indicated that they would be willing to accept the holding of elections beyond the end of 2017, provided that concrete steps were taken immediately to demonstrate the commitment of the authorities to the completion of the electoral process.

12. The Independent National Electoral Commission stressed that the delayed completion of the voter registration process resulting from the prevailing insecurity in Kasai and Kasai Central Provinces since August 2016 had posed a major setback. Nevertheless, the Commission was confident that, thanks to the improved security situation in those two provinces of the Kasai region, voter registration could begin. Even then, the Commission warned that there were major financial and logistical constraints that still needed to be overcome, which would have a bearing on the time frame.

13. The Commission also pointed out that the time frame agreed to by the signatories of the 31 December agreement had always been at odds with what it considered to be technically feasible. In that regard, the Commission had identified November 2018 as a realistic election date during the dialogue facilitated by the African Union that culminated in the signing of the agreement of 18 October 2016, which was eventually superseded by the 31 December agreement. Nevertheless, the Commission was mindful of the opposition's lack of confidence in the electoral process and acknowledged that any electoral calendar issued without the involvement of the United Nations and other international and regional partner organizations would be viewed with suspicion.

Confidence-building measures

14. Opposition leaders and representatives of civil society emphasized that little progress had been made in implementing the confidence-building measures envisaged in the 31 December agreement, which are essential to the creation of an environment conducive to the holding of peaceful, inclusive and credible elections. According to the United Nations Joint Human Rights Office, 170 persons remain in detention for having expressed their political opinions or exercised their constitutional rights. A general ban on demonstrations remains in place across the country.

15. On the other hand, key government officials maintained that the confidence-building measures were being implemented, as the President had signed decrees authorizing the liberation of political prisoners. The Minister of Justice contended that the so-called pending cases related to individuals charged with criminal offences not linked to their political activities. These, he added, could not be addressed in the context of the confidence-building measures foreseen by the agreement.

16. Overall, the review team was of the view that the measures taken by the Government fell far short of what the agreement provides for. The team repeatedly stressed to its government interlocutors the importance of taking the issue forward with good faith to defuse the prevailing tension and create a more conducive environment. Beyond the specific measures, it was felt that all sides needed to exercise the utmost restraint and refrain from actions likely to inflame the situation.

2. Security situation

17. Since 2016, the overall security situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo has deteriorated as conflict patterns have shifted and new hotspots have emerged around the country. Disputes over access to resources and land, intercommunal conflicts, ethnic grievances, poor governance, eroding State authority and legitimacy, the absence of the rule of law and a worsening socioeconomic situation remain key drivers of conflict in the country. However, all interlocutors were in agreement that the current political impasse and the continued uncertainty around the electoral timetable are fuelling much of the insecurity witnessed across the country over the past year.

Armed groups

18. The past year has seen a continued reduction in the strength of the main foreign armed groups still present in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo as a result of sustained military pressure from the Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (Forces armées de la République démocratique du Congo, FARDC) and MONUSCO and the Mission's ongoing disarmament, demobilization,

repatriation, resettlement and reintegration operations. Nevertheless, these groups still pose a threat to the civilian population in the areas in which they operate.

19. The Forces démocratiques de libération du Rwanda (FDLR) — albeit weakened by repeated military operations and internal divisions — maintain the largest number of combatants, ranging between 700 and 1,200 fighters, and are continuing their collaboration with Congolese armed groups in North Kivu and South Kivu Provinces. A number of Rwandan refugees are being pressured by FDLR not to register, preventing those who wish to return to Rwanda from doing so.

20. The Allied Democratic Forces (ADF), operating in the Beni area of North Kivu Province, currently have an estimated strength of between 250 and 350 combatants. Although ADF have not carried out targeted and systematic attacks against civilians since the beginning of 2017, they have conducted sporadic attacks against civilian populations and settlements in recent weeks, albeit of a much lower intensity in comparison with the trends in the past year.

21. The Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) has fewer than 100 combatants in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, who continue to move between the Central African Republic, South Sudan and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The recent departure of the Uganda People's Defence Forces troops that had been deployed in the Central African Republic as part of the African Union-led regional task force, and of the troops from the United States of America that had been supporting them, has led to an upsurge in attacks by LRA against civilians in Bas-Uélé and Haut-Uélé Provinces.

22. The Forces nationales de libération, which operate in the southern tip of South Kivu Province, have around 300 combatants and pose a latent threat. The recent crisis in Burundi has seen the emergence of other groups that use the Democratic Republic of the Congo as a base for their operations.

23. By contrast, there has been an increase in the number and strength of Congolese armed groups, which operate over a wider geographical area. They include the Force de résistance patriotique de l'Ituri (FRPI), which has 300-400 combatants; the Nduma défense du Congo-Renové in North Kivu, which has 200-350 combatants; and Mai-Mai Kata Katanga, which has 200 combatants. Repeated attempts by the Government to negotiate the surrender of those armed groups have failed.

24. There has been a worrying proliferation of Mai-Mai groups across North and South Kivu Provinces, which has been facilitated, to some extent, by the sudden vacuum created by the redeployment of FARDC to address the security crisis in the Kasai region. Many of the groups, some of which amount to little more than criminal gangs, are supported by political and State actors. Some have espoused ethnic or anti-Government agendas and have attempted to form coalitions. New alliances of armed groups, such as the Mouvement national pour la révolution, in North Kivu, and the Coalition nationale du peuple pour la souveraineté du Congo, in South Kivu, seem to be deliberately targeting the Congolese security forces and symbols of State authority.

Local and ethnic conflicts

25. The upsurge in violent ethnic and local conflicts observed in several areas across the Democratic Republic of the Congo, including the recently relatively stable western provinces of the country, is a major cause for concern. While the conflicts reflect long-standing tensions, politicians from across the political

spectrum, as well as individuals with a track record of fomenting violence to advance their individual agendas, have played a part in fuelling these conflicts.

26. In North Kivu Province, violent incidents have pitted armed groups from the Hutu and Nande communities against one another. These armed groups, which were formed along ethnic lines, have carried out ethnically motivated attacks against civilians, resulting in dozens killed or wounded and villages burnt down.

27. In Tanganyika Province, clashes between the Luba and Twa communities have led to large-scale atrocities and the destruction of villages and camps hosting refugees and internally displaced populations. Equipped with traditional weapons, rival militias have raided each other's villages in a continuing spiral of revenge attacks, prompting thousands to flee. The fighting risks spreading to other ethnic communities and areas in the province.

28. In the Kasai region, the Kamuina Nsapu militia has committed large-scale abuses and launched attacks against State actors and symbols, schools and churches in at least four provinces in the region. In addition to clashing with the security forces, Kamuina Nsapu elements, some of whom have ties to the Luba and Lulua communities, have also fought against the Bana Mura militia, which generally comprises members of the Tshokwe, Pende and Tetela communities. The Bana Mura has received support from prominent political figures in Kasai Province and has allegedly received weapons from State security forces and local chiefs. The worst of the violence was witnessed in certain parts of Kasai and Kasai Central Provinces, where close to 90 mass graves were discovered in recent months.

29. The situation, however, appeared to have had a relative respite during the visit of the review team. The conflict has triggered a large-scale humanitarian crisis: 1.4 million people have been internally displaced, of whom 850,000 are children and 52 per cent are women or girls, while 31,278 people have fled across the border into Angola; 1,878 children, including 658 girls, have been separated from the militias since the beginning of the conflict. In Kananga, representatives of civil society underscored the need to ensure that humanitarian assistance reaches those in need and stressed the importance of ensuring that those responsible for the crimes committed over the past year and a half are brought to justice so that the process of healing can begin among affected communities.

30. In Kongo Central and Kinshasa, the Bundu Dia Kongo/Bundu Dia Mayala movement, a politico-religious group originating from Kongo Central Province and led by a parliamentarian, Ne Muanda Nsemi, has targeted strategic facilities and attacked the Congolese security forces. Mr. Nsemi has repeatedly called on the President to step down, while also inciting violence against "Rwandans", a reference to Kinyarwanda speakers from the Hutu and Tutsi communities. On 7 August 2017, violence perpetrated by the group in Kinshasa and neighbouring Kongo Central resulted in the deaths of 70 people.

3. Human rights

31. According to the United Nations Joint Human Rights Office, since the beginning of 2016 there has been a sharp increase in the total number of human rights violations perpetrated across the Democratic Republic of the Congo; 2,822 human rights violations were documented during the first half of 2017, in comparison with 2,343 over the same period in 2016. This deterioration is a direct result of widespread violations of civil and political rights in a context of shrinking democratic space, the excessive use of force by the national security forces and the increase in local conflicts and inter-ethnic violence.

32. The national security forces are an increasing source of insecurity for the civilian population. According to the United Nations Joint Human Rights Office, 57 per cent of the human rights violations documented since the beginning of 2017 can be attributed to State agents. The national security forces have used disproportionate force in the context of shrinking democratic space and widespread impunity and have fuelled the conflict in certain areas of the Kasai region through widespread acts of violence affecting civilians and civilian infrastructure and support for proxy militias. They have also committed an increasing number of violations of fundamental rights and freedoms. The problem is compounded by the long-standing practice of integrating former members of armed groups into FARDC without proper vetting.

33. Armed groups and militias have continued to commit serious human rights violations. Overall, FRPI and Mai-Mai combatants are the principal perpetrators of human rights violations in the conflict-affected areas. Of particular concern is the human rights situation in the Kasai region, where the Kamuina Nsapu militia has committed brutal crimes, including killing, maiming, sexual violence, widespread destruction and the recruitment, use and abduction of children, as well as attacks on schools and hospitals. In Tanganyika Province, militia groups have also committed serious abuses against the population; the United Nations Joint Human Rights Office has confirmed 21 cases of rape committed by Twa militias since the beginning of 2017.

34. In meetings with the review team, several key government officials reaffirmed their commitment to ensure that perpetrators of human rights violations, including members of the security forces, are brought to justice. Nevertheless, high-profile trials of members of ADF and FARDC in North Kivu Province and members of Kamuina Nsapu and FARDC in Kasai Central and Kasai Oriental Provinces did not lead to the conviction of officials bearing command responsibility for the crimes committed. While the Vice-Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs reassured the review team of the Government's continued readiness to collaborate with the United Nations Joint Human Rights Office, he also deplored what he described as "systematic accusations" levelled by international actors against the national security forces and underscored the need for the United Nations to show greater respect for the sovereignty of the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

4. Humanitarian and socioeconomic situation

35. The Democratic Republic of the Congo is facing one of the worst humanitarian crises in Africa, with over 10 per cent of the country's population in need of humanitarian assistance. There are 3.8 million internally displaced persons, of whom 2 million are women or girls, while the country hosts over half a million refugees from Rwanda, the Central African Republic, South Sudan and Burundi. Food security has deteriorated sharply; 7.7 million people, including 5.2 million children, were facing an acute food insecurity and livelihood crisis as of June 2017, compared with 5.9 million people in June 2016. While humanitarian needs in the Democratic Republic of the Congo have continued to increase over the past year, funding shortages and restrictions on access owing to logistical, political and security issues have seriously hampered the humanitarian response. The degree of violence and insecurity in the country is reflected in part by the number of Congolese who have sought refugee status in neighbouring countries, requiring a humanitarian response at the regional level. At present, there are over 621,700 refugees from the Democratic Republic of the Congo in the region, representing the third largest refugee caseload in Africa, with recent influxes into Angola and Zambia.

36. The plight of the population in the Democratic Republic of the Congo is compounded by extreme poverty and a deepening economic crisis. The Democratic Republic of the Congo ranks 176th out of 188 countries in the human development index and forty-eighth out of 54 countries on the Ibrahim Index of African Governance. Eighty-two per cent of the population lives below the absolute poverty line of \$1.25 per day per person, which represents one of the highest poverty rates in the world. The inflation rate is expected to reach 52 per cent by the end of 2017. As the Minister of Finance explained to the review team, if left unaddressed, the current situation could easily trigger widespread unrest across the country. The Government was therefore taking steps to increase domestic revenue.

B. Assessment of the Mission's activities under the current mandate

37. In its resolution [2348 \(2017\)](#), the Security Council extended the mandate of MONUSCO until 31 March 2018 and decided that the Mission's strategic priorities would be to contribute to the protection of civilians and support for the implementation of the 31 December 2016 agreement. The Mission was also mandated to carry out other tasks relating to human rights; gender mainstreaming and women, peace and security; children and armed conflict; rule of law and justice support; disarmament, demobilization, repatriation, resettlement and reintegration and security sector reform; and stabilization.

38. The interlocutors of the review team were unanimous in acknowledging the contribution of MONUSCO to peace and stability in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Most actors in the opposition and civil society, both in Kinshasa and the provinces, expressed deep concern over the reduction of the Mission's authorized troop and police ceilings in the current political and security context. By contrast, key government officials felt that further troop reductions were warranted in areas where the security situation had improved and called for the pace in the strategic dialogue to be accelerated and for the force to be adjusted to better address what they referred to as "asymmetric" threats, a view shared by some civil society actors.

39. On the political front, my Special Representative has continued to provide his good offices to the signatories of the 31 December agreement in a context of deep mistrust between the Government and the opposition. Interlocutors on both sides of the political divide expressed their appreciation to the review team for the efforts of the Special Representative, although it is clear that greater political will from both sides remains essential to move the political process forward, as is enhanced regional engagement backed by a united Security Council.

40. MONUSCO, in coordination with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), has played a critical role in supporting the voter registration process, whose successful completion remains a prerequisite for the holding of credible elections. Women make up 48 per cent of the 40 million voters registered to date in a country in which they have historically been excluded from political processes and currently occupy less than 10 per cent of all public offices. All interlocutors were in agreement that the continued logistical and technical support of the Mission, in accordance with Security Council resolution [2348 \(2017\)](#) and in close cooperation with other regional and international partners, remains critical to ensure the holding of free, fair, inclusive and credible elections.

41. The review team found that over the past six months, the Mission has made a concerted effort to achieve its priority objectives in a shifting security landscape that has placed a major strain on its limited resources. The reduction of 8.5 per cent in the Mission's budget for 2017/18, which necessitated cuts to MONUSCO military, police and civilian personnel, have further constrained the Mission's

ability, as configured currently, to effectively deliver on its core protection of civilians mandate in a country roughly the size of Western Europe in which the army and police are poorly paid, are often manipulated by State actors for their own ends and, at times, pose, through their abuses, a significant threat to the population, compounding the challenges linked to the activities of the armed groups they are supposed to combat.

42. Further progress has been made towards transforming the MONUSCO force into a more agile, flexible and responsive tool, including by “unlocking” the Intervention Brigade of the force from the Beni area. In recent months, the Intervention Brigade has undertaken operations against FDLR and has repulsed a number of attacks by Mai-Mai across North Kivu. Some progress has also been made towards removing caveats and amending Statements of Unit Requirements to give the Force Commander the latitude to employ forces where they are most required. To that end, sector boundaries have been redrawn to reflect the changing security environment and allow for the increased mobility of troops without the requirement for advance consultation with concerned troop-contributing countries. The Mission should be commended for its response to the situation in the Kasai region, where, in the space of a few months, it was able to re-establish a significant presence in an area from which it had largely withdrawn, in order to help to prevent a further deterioration of the situation.

43. The Mission’s disarmament, demobilization, repatriation, resettlement and reintegration programme has achieved considerable progress in disarming and reintegrating FDLR and other foreign ex-combatants; more than 32,000 foreign ex-combatants and their dependants, mainly ex-FDLR, have repatriated to Rwanda since 2002. In 2015 and 2016, the Mission’s support for phase III of the national disarmament, demobilization and reintegration programme facilitated the demobilization of 5,583 ex-combatants from Congolese armed groups.

44. Furthermore, the Mission has made some gains in the fight against impunity. Sustained and vigorous human rights monitoring, investigations, documentation and reporting, as well as the support provided to the Congolese military justice system in the context of joint projects involving MONUSCO and UNDP, notably the Prosecution Support Cells, have led to 745 convictions over the past five years, including for conflict-related sexual violence crimes. MONUSCO recently coordinated the surrender and transfer to the national judicial authorities of Ntabo Ntaberi Sheka, a rebel commander designated on the Consolidated United Nations Security Council Sanctions List, who was wanted for his command responsibility in the rape of at least 387 civilians in 2010, in North Kivu Province. With the support of MONUSCO and the United Nations Children’s Fund, FARDC has been child-free since 2015.

III. Recommendations on proposed adjustments to the Mission during the pre-electoral phase

45. The field visit confirmed that the Democratic Republic of the Congo currently finds itself in the second scenario identified in the conflict analysis. It is evident that the non-consensual and partial implementation of the 31 December agreement and uncertainty over the holding of elections are fuelling the continued deterioration of the security, human rights and humanitarian situation witnessed across the country. In the meantime, the national political crisis has hampered efforts to address the economic downturn that continues to undermine the living standards of an increasingly frustrated population, whose faith in the country’s political class is eroding rapidly.

46. The Democratic Republic of the Congo is likely to remain in the current situation for the foreseeable future, although the possibility of a rapid deterioration cannot be ruled out, in particular as the deadline for the holding of elections, as foreseen in the 31 December agreement, approaches. The sections below are therefore focused on the required adjustments MONUSCO will need to enable it to address the challenges of the current, pre-electoral context, in particular with regard to its core political, protection of civilians and human rights responsibilities.

A. Mission priorities

47. The review team found that without progress on the political front, the security, human rights and humanitarian situation is likely to deteriorate further, with profound implications for the stability of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the wider region. As noted by the High-level Independent Panel on Peace Operations, lasting peace is achieved through political solutions and not through military and technical engagements alone. In the immediate term, the Mission must continue to focus its efforts on preventing the country's relapse into violent conflict by creating conditions conducive to the holding of free, fair and credible elections, leading to a peaceful transfer of power, in accordance with the Constitution.

48. With the way forward on elections still unclear, MONUSCO will need to take further steps to reorient its activities around two key strategic priorities, namely: (a) support for the implementation of the 31 December agreement, in order to pave the way for credible elections; and (b) protection of civilians and human rights monitoring and reporting, to mitigate, to the extent possible, the impact of the prevailing crisis on the civilian population. MONUSCO is already taking steps to respond to the shifting political and security environment in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. In the current financially constrained environment, it is all the more essential that the Mission further streamline its activities around a limited set of priorities while seeking ways to leverage the presence of the United Nations country team and key external partners in areas that fall outside of its core areas of responsibility but are essential to sustain peace and promote longer-term stability and development in the country.

1. Support for the implementation of the 31 December 2016 agreement

49. As indicated above, the national political crisis is the main driver of the increase in violence and human rights abuses witnessed across the country over the past year and a half, aggravating the humanitarian situation and compounding an economic crisis that has fuelled popular frustration and raised the spectre of widespread social unrest. At this critical juncture, the Mission's political strategy will need to be focused on achieving tangible progress towards the holding of free, fair and credible elections within the framework of the 31 December agreement. This will require extensive good offices and engagement with interlocutors across the political spectrum, including the Government, opposition parties and civil society, as well as enhanced outreach to regional and international partners with tangible leverage. Equally critical is the need for an integrated approach in which the political and technical aspects of the work of the United Nations are mutually reinforcing. A dedicated senior adviser, reporting to the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, could assist him in his efforts to create an environment conducive to the holding of peaceful, inclusive and credible elections and keep the electoral process on track through his good offices.

50. The finalization of the voter registration process and the publication of a credible and realistic electoral calendar are essential to restore confidence in the

political transition. While MONUSCO is ready to play its part in supporting the efforts of the Independent National Electoral Commission, the involvement of the African Union, SADC and the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS), alongside long-standing international partners such as the European Union and the International Organization of la Francophonie, is critical to help to overcome the mistrust that has undermined the political process since the signing of the 31 December agreement. Increased logistical and financial support from African countries with the necessary capacities would be an important symbol of the continent's commitment to the success of the transition in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The modalities of such cooperation are described in further detail below.

51. The request by the Independent National Electoral Commission to the United Nations and other regional and international partners for assistance in elaborating a credible and realistic electoral calendar could provide a valuable opportunity to build confidence in the electoral process by enhancing the level of international support and engagement, with full respect for the independence of the Commission. Such engagement could entail regular evaluations of the electoral process and, if need be, public statements aimed at sustaining pressure on all parties to maintain the momentum towards elections.

52. Whatever steps are taken to manage the publication of a new electoral calendar, a further postponement of the elections is likely to elicit strong reactions among the political class and the wider population, hence the need for immediate measures to avoid a further escalation of tensions. Although interlocutors within the Government and the opposition were keen to shift the burden of responsibility towards each other, there was recognition on both sides that steps are required to keep frustrations from boiling over. In this regard, there was a degree of openness to the idea of MONUSCO and the African Union, working with the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights, as required, to conduct an inventory of confidence-building measures that could be undertaken in the immediate to short term, while efforts are under way to resolve the outstanding emblematic cases, which would need to be dealt with separately. Such measures would, necessarily, include a commitment from all sides to refrain from inflammatory rhetoric.

53. In this delicate phase, it is critical that the public messaging by the international community on the political process is coherent, balanced and appropriate, in order to avoid playing into the hands of radical elements on both sides of the political divide. This may help to assuage those within the presidential majority who feel that Mr. Kabila's intentions are being unfairly characterized by some members of the international community. This will need to be accompanied by intensified efforts at all levels of the United Nations to coordinate more closely with the African Union and other key regional actors, which can play a useful role in steering the transition to a successful conclusion. Further details on how this could be achieved are provided below.

2. Protection of civilians and human rights

54. In the absence of a broader political settlement, efforts by MONUSCO to protect civilians under threat of physical violence, monitor, investigate and report on human rights abuses and fight impunity will remain critical. In the pre-electoral phase, the main focus of the Mission's protection work will be on reducing the threat posed to civilians by armed groups through the uniformed and civilian components of the Mission, as well as limiting the impact of election-related violence, including abuses by State security forces against people seeking to exercise their fundamental civil and political rights.

Comprehensive approach to the protection of civilians

55. The Mission's comprehensive approach to the protection of civilians will require presence and capability in parts of the Democratic Republic of the Congo affected by armed groups, as well as in urban hotspots. The Mission should have the ability to address protection threats in Kinshasa and intervene in multiple locations anywhere in the country on a scale comparable to its current deployment in the Kasai region. Given the vastness of the country, the widening array of threats faced by the population and the limited resources at the disposal of MONUSCO, the Mission's overarching strategy will be to focus on the prevention, de-escalation and resolution of conflicts in the first instance, while shifting from protection through presence to protection through projection and capitalizing on the wide array of civilian protection tools available to the Mission, with the MONUSCO force working in combination with the police component. To this end, the Mission will build on the lessons learned from its response to the conflict in the Kasai region.

56. In a context of heightened political tensions, in which abuses by the national security forces pose an ever-increasing threat to the population, the Mission's approach should, at its core, target the political dimensions of conflict and insecurity in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. MONUSCO will need to enhance its political engagement with the government authorities and the leadership of the security forces at the national and provincial levels, as well as with local administrators and community leaders, to remind them of their primary responsibility for the protection of civilians, particularly in the run-up to and during elections. Given the surge in human rights violations attributable to members of the national security forces, the provision of blanket support to FARDC should be reviewed and made available on a case-by-case basis, in strict compliance with the human rights due diligence policy on United Nations support to non-United Nations security forces.

57. Strategic communications around the protection of civilians that stress the authorities' primary role and duties with respect to human rights should be strengthened. Regional stakeholders should also be engaged, at the strategic level, to use whatever leverage they may have to limit the scope for abuses by national security forces. Ways to enhance, in a mutually reinforcing manner, the role of United Nations mandate holders relating to protection should also be explored extensively.

58. Over the years, MONUSCO has developed a broad range of protection tools, such as community alert networks, community liaison officers, joint protection teams, mobile monitoring and response teams and joint assessment missions. As the Mission shifts towards protection through projection, it will need to expand and make full use of these tools to ensure an effective response to protection threats in priority areas of concern. In parallel, MONUSCO will also need to improve its strategic communications and strengthen its community-level engagement to build confidence among local populations in its ability to respond to threats in a timely manner. The successful implementation of the Mission's comprehensive strategy on protection would also require the strengthening of certain key sections, such as the United Nations Joint Human Rights Office and the Civil Affairs Section, through the addition of dedicated, rapidly deployable staff. In the meantime, the Mission should also continue to address the ongoing threat posed by explosive hazards on the civilian population, Mission personnel and humanitarian actors.

59. The Mission's good offices and advocacy at the local and national levels will need to be supported by enhanced information collection, stakeholder mapping and conflict analysis to produce the desired results. It will be critical for MONUSCO to expand and strengthen its early warning capacity, especially in areas where the force

is not present, through greater situational awareness; human rights monitoring; information collection; trend and hotspot analysis, including with a gender lens; planning; and prioritization. The Mission should also increase the exchange of information with United Nations and non-United Nations human rights and humanitarian actors through dedicated mechanisms, in particular in areas affected by the closure of MONUSCO bases. The Mission should continue to ensure that the concerns and perspectives of women and girls are taken into account across the board, from early warning to community alert mechanisms and mitigation strategies.

60. MONUSCO should continue to use mobile monitoring and response teams to respond to threats or investigate events, particularly in areas where the Mission's presence is limited, such as the western Democratic Republic of the Congo. In urban centres, the police component will provide a measure of protection from election-related threats through its presence and continued advocacy with the national police on the use of non-lethal force, as well as training and support to the security forces to improve public order management and command and control. The police component would also support the development of key oversight mechanisms, such as the Inspectorate General of the Congolese National Police.

Reduction of the threat posed by armed groups

61. The Mission's efforts to reduce the threat posed by armed groups would be focused on FDLR, ADF and FRPI. As part of its comprehensive approach to the protection of civilians, the Mission has developed tailored strategies for these priority armed groups, involving engagement with government authorities, community leaders and other influential actors; disarmament, demobilization, repatriation, resettlement and reintegration activities and support for national disarmament, demobilization and reintegration initiatives complemented by community violence reduction projects; unilateral force operations; support for military operations by FARDC and, where necessary, joint operations with FARDC under specific conditions and in strict compliance with the human rights due diligence policy; and information collection. The overarching objective of these strategies is to minimize the impact of the activities of the armed group on the civilian population and reduce them to a level that can be managed by the Congolese security forces.

62. An exclusively military approach to the upsurge in Mai-Mai groups, which is linked in large part to the uncertain political context, is unlikely to have a meaningful impact. A comprehensive response, backed by integrated analysis and including high-level engagement with the Congolese authorities at the national and provincial levels, as well as community engagement at the local level, is required to deal with this problem. The Mission's strategy should also seek to weaken any political support provided to these groups and disconnect them from the local population, including by helping to expose those responsible for manipulating armed groups for their own ends where information thereon is available.

Human rights monitoring and the fight against impunity

63. Human rights monitoring, investigating and reporting remain key protection tools. In a context of shrinking political space, MONUSCO will need to robustly monitor the degree of respect for civil and political rights and freedoms and report publicly on progress and continuing challenges. This will enhance the ability of the Mission to identify perpetrators and push for accountability, which is critical to prevent further abuses. The United Nations Joint Human Rights Office will also have a key role to play in monitoring and reporting on the implementation of the confidence-building measures envisaged in the 31 December agreement.

64. The Mission's senior-level advocacy with Government officials and the leadership of national security institutions will be critical to promote respect for human rights, restore confidence in the national security forces and further implement United Nations action plans to end and prevent sexual violence and child recruitment. The United Nations Joint Human Rights Office, including through the Senior Women's Protection Adviser, will also have a key role to play in enabling the senior leadership of MONUSCO to take early action and engage at the appropriate level through its monitoring and reporting, interaction with communities and analytical work. The Office's efforts, as well as those of the Senior Women's Protection Adviser, to ensure accountability for grave human rights violations and conflict-related sexual violence, including through support for mobile courts and participation in joint investigation teams, will remain critical, as will the joint support provided to the military justice system through the Prosecution Support Cells.

65. The United Nations Joint Human Rights Office and the Senior Women's Protection Adviser, with the support of the Team of Experts on the Rule of Law and Sexual Violence in Conflict, should continue to support FARDC and the national police in implementing the Joint Communiqué between the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the United Nations on the Fight Against Sexual Violence in Conflict and related action plans, with particular emphasis on strengthening accountability as a critical aspect of protection, deterrence and prevention. The delisting of FARDC and the national police in the report of the Secretary-General on conflict-related sexual violence depends on the cessation of sexual violence and the full implementation of their commitments under the Joint Communiqué. Monitoring and reporting on grave violations against children, as requested by the Security Council in its resolution 1612 (2005) and subsequent resolutions, will also remain a key protection tool and provide an opportunity for MONUSCO to engage strategically with parties to conflict, exert political pressure and equip parties with tools to end and prevent grave violations against children.

66. The MONUSCO secretariat should continue its advisory role with regard to human rights due diligence with the Mission's senior leadership on appropriate support for FARDC and the national police that is in line with the United Nations human rights due diligence policy. In this regard, the Mission's support for the security forces should be guided by risk assessments and continue to be linked to the degree of respect demonstrated by FARDC and the national police for international human rights standards and fundamental political rights and freedoms. Such support should be withdrawn where there is a clear failure to adhere to those standards.

Support for the establishment of security conditions favourable to the delivery of humanitarian assistance

67. MONUSCO should, where possible and in full compliance with humanitarian principles, continue to do its utmost to facilitate humanitarian access and ensure the safe delivery of humanitarian assistance to those who need it. MONUSCO should provide security to humanitarian workers, facilities and assets, when requested and within the limitation of its capabilities. To this end, the Mission should participate, as requested, in joint mechanisms with humanitarian actors to coordinate its support for humanitarian assistance.

68. The reconfiguration of the force will inevitably have an impact on humanitarian access to certain areas. In this regard, it will be of key importance to analyse the humanitarian dimension of any force reduction and mitigate the potential impact by drawing on lessons learned from areas from which MONUSCO has already withdrawn. Under the leadership of the Deputy Special Representative

of the Secretary-General (Resident Coordinator/Humanitarian Coordinator), MONUSCO should strengthen its collaboration with humanitarian actors and streamline coordination mechanisms with humanitarian agencies in areas in which the force is not deployed, to ensure information-sharing on protection risks for vulnerable populations. To this end, a consultation process should be established with the humanitarian community on key decisions on its posture and on their implementation. This would enable the Mission to better target its protection strategy and respond swiftly to humanitarian emergencies.

B. Implications for the Mission and United Nations partnerships with key stakeholders

1. Mission leadership

69. The MONUSCO leadership structure and working methods should enable the Mission to deliver on its core priorities more effectively. This will require greater strategic engagement with the authorities in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and closer integration between the Mission's various components and with the United Nations country team to maximize the combined impact of the full range of capabilities at the Organization's disposal. Mechanisms for intra-mission coordination should be strengthened to enable "whole of mission" efforts, in particular on priority issues such as the protection of civilians. These mechanisms should be replicated at the provincial level to ensure unity of effort across the mission area.

70. In this critical phase, the Mission's senior leadership should be present in the capital to engage strategically with the national authorities and the leadership of the national security forces, while maintaining sufficient operational capacity in the provinces. The functions of each of the Mission's pillars should reflect its key priorities in the pre-electoral phase, with the Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Protection and Operations — currently the Deputy Special Representative for Rule of Law and Operations in the East — focusing primarily on the implementation of the comprehensive approach for the protection of civilians across the country. The Deputy Special Representative (Resident Coordinator/Humanitarian Coordinator) would continue to ensure effective coordination with the United Nations country team, maintain appropriate linkages with the wider humanitarian community and oversee the United Nations integrated electoral support team. The Force Commander should be permanently based in Kinshasa to enable engagement with the highest echelons of FARDC, to facilitate coordination on the ground and address protection concerns linked to the behaviour of its members.

2. Evolution of the force

71. As noted above, with violence spreading across the country, the MONUSCO force will need to adapt its posture and rely increasingly on protection through projection, as opposed to protection through presence. The reconfiguration of the force would be carried out in phases, each of which would be preceded by a thorough risk assessment analysing the impact of the adjustments on the security situation. These adjustments would allow MONUSCO to withdraw from areas in which security conditions have improved, while enhancing its readiness to project force in order to address emerging protection threats, as and when required. In its new configuration, the force would rely on flexible and agile rapidly deployable battalions operating in standing combat deployments, as opposed to company operating bases and temporary operating bases, which are static structures. This

approach is currently being implemented in the Kasai region and will be replicated in North Kivu Province, where the Mission has recently closed a number of company operating bases and temporary operating bases.

72. As part of this process, two or three additional rapidly deployable battalions would be created by July 2018 through the rerolling of framework battalions. An enhanced number of rapidly deployable battalions would enable the Mission to intervene in an increased number of priority locations and thereby reduce its footprint. As a consequence, depending on the degree of progress made towards establishing the additional battalions and barring a further deterioration of the security situation, up to two or three framework battalions could be repatriated by the end of 2018. A framework should be developed to determine where the battalions are deployed and for how long to pre-empt, prevent and respond to threats to civilians. These measures will come in addition to the reductions arising from the troop ceiling authorized in resolution [2348 \(2017\)](#) and the budget cuts imposed by the Fifth Committee of the General Assembly for the 2017/18 fiscal year — amounting to a reduction of 8.5 per cent from the Secretary-General’s proposal — as a result of which one full battalion has already been repatriated and a further four companies are planned to be repatriated in October 2017.

73. By the end of 2018, the Intervention Brigade of the force would be reconfigured to a volume of two battalions and integrated into the force’s overall command and operational structure. Intervention Brigade units would be further “unlocked” from their static infrastructure and would be deployed to the areas in which the force operates, where they would be projected with other units to address protection threats, including through operations to neutralize priority armed groups. The headquarters of the Intervention Brigade would be co-located with the force headquarters and placed under the direct command of the Force Commander to streamline overall command and control. The remainder of the Intervention Brigade troops and brigade headquarters elements would be repatriated. In the meantime, countries contributing troops to the Intervention Brigade have been requested to deploy troops with specific capacities and training, including in jungle warfare capability, to enhance the impact of operations against armed groups. This is expected to be completed by February 2018 in the context of the regular rotations of Intervention Brigade battalions.

74. The Mission would achieve further efficiencies by streamlining headquarters command and control structures and improving coordination between the force and the police component in priority areas. Given their strategic importance in liaising with communities, MONUSCO should retain women in and add women to the force as it is streamlined.

75. By the end of 2018, the force would be reorganized into four geographic sectors, for the northern, southern, central and western Democratic Republic of the Congo, each with one or two rapidly deployable battalions, a limited number of framework battalions and one contingency-based company of the Intervention Brigade deployed in various sectors to conduct operations against armed groups. The force will also have at its disposal a force reserve and enablers, complemented by enhanced situational awareness and airlift assets for mobility.

76. Effective protection through projection would require robust logistical support, enhanced availability of air and ground transportation assets, the right contingent-owned equipment and flexible administrative arrangements to enable civilian staff to accompany military deployments as part of the Mission’s comprehensive approach to the protection of civilians. The force’s successful evolution will also depend on the timely deployment of key enablers, such as the advanced unmanned aircraft systems and a Geolocation and Technical Analysis Unit, specialized

companies trained in jungle warfare and adequate resources for generating the human intelligence required to effectively neutralize priority armed groups.

77. Improving the performance of the force will be critical to achieving the shift described above. To this end, the Mission has recently launched a mechanism for monitoring and reporting on the performance of units, based on a set of measurable indicators, which will assist in determining which contingents to retain or repatriate. This will be complemented by external sources, including academic surveys, to evaluate the impact of the Mission's operations, particularly with regard to the protection of civilians.

3. Police component

78. In order to contribute effectively to the achievement of the Mission's priority objectives in the pre-electoral period, the police component will need to narrow the focus of its activities and become more flexible and agile. Two formed police units are being relocated from the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo to Kananga and Kinshasa in the pre-electoral phase. However, additional engagement with police-contributing countries will be required to remove constraints on the Mission's ability to move formed police units to where they are most needed. A review of the Statement of Unit Requirements should be undertaken to enable the temporary detachment of subunits of the formed police units for limited periods of time to cover larger geographical areas on the basis of risk assessments. An increased number of armoured personnel carriers for each formed police unit, the assignment of a compatible number of field defence stores and enhanced self-sustainment equipment would also facilitate mobility.

79. The contribution of the police component to the Mission's situational awareness and early warning through information collection and analysis will remain essential, as will its participation in joint protection missions, joint investigation teams and joint monitoring teams. The Mission's integrated operational strategy for the fight against insecurity, which aims to pre-empt and respond to protection concerns through engagement with local communities, local authorities and the national police, should be expanded.

80. The Mission's interaction with the national police command will be critical to reduce the risk of human rights abuses and underscore the primary responsibility of the Congolese authorities with regard to the protection of civilians, as well as ensuring that the national police adheres to international human rights standards. Constant, senior-level engagement with the leadership of the national police will be critical in this regard. The police component, working closely with the United Nations Joint Human Rights Office, should strengthen its support for the Congolese authorities in the area of human rights training and mentoring in non-lethal crowd control. In this regard, the police component will have an important role to play in monitoring the training of the 10,000 new recruits recently admitted to the national police, with the aim of securing the elections and contributing to the protection of civilians.

4. Streamlining of civilian tasks

81. Activities that are not directly related to the achievement of the Mission's core strategic objectives in the pre-electoral phase should be discontinued in a prudent manner in order to preserve the gains achieved to date. To the extent possible, the distribution of thematic leads between the Mission and members of the United Nations country team should be revised on the basis of a joint priority-setting exercise. The Mission should support the efforts of the country team to mobilize funding for programmes in priority areas under its purview as it prepares the new

United Nations Development Assistance Framework. To this end, consideration should also be given to the creation of innovative funding mechanisms, such as a joint trust fund for priority sectors, and other initiatives to mobilize funding in the months ahead.

82. The Mission's Justice and Corrections Section should begin to gradually pull back from long-term, stabilization-oriented activities. On the justice side, this would require adjusting the scope of its engagement to activities directly tied to the protection of civilians and combating impunity. Prison support would concentrate progressively on a smaller number of prisons holding members of armed groups and other high-profile detainees. At the same time, ongoing joint programming in the area of the rule of law, through the Global Focal Point for Police, Justice and Corrections Areas in the Rule of Law in Post-Conflict and Other Crisis Situations arrangement, would be scaled up to ensure a smooth reconfiguration of the United Nations presence and facilitate the transition to increased responsibilities for the United Nations country team. This model of collaboration with the country team could be replicated in other areas.

83. In the current political environment, the Mission's activities in the area of security sector reform should be reoriented towards providing analytical support to the MONUSCO senior leadership. The integration of the Mission's existing Security Sector Reform Unit into the Political Affairs Division could enhance the effectiveness of the Mission's efforts in this critical area.

84. Support for the National Oversight Mechanism and other national institutions on the implementation of the national commitments of the Democratic Republic of the Congo under the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework for the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Region, including capacity-building in the area of monitoring and evaluation, could be transferred to the United Nations country team by the beginning of 2018. The Mission's Political Affairs Division should follow up on the regional commitments undertaken by the signatories of the Framework. This would be accompanied by efforts to reinforce information-sharing and coordination with the Office of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for the Great Lakes Region on the political dimensions of this aspect of the Framework. Logistical support for the programmatic activities of the Office of the Special Envoy in the Democratic Republic of the Congo would be coordinated with UNDP and the Office of the Deputy Special Representative (Resident Coordinator/Humanitarian Coordinator).

85. The Child Protection Section would continue tasks relating to the six grave violations against children, including engagement with parties to the conflict on action plans and the separation of children from armed groups and militias, and maintain the capacity to report grave violations against children. Activities relating to monitoring and reporting should be streamlined within the framework of the country task force on children and armed conflict. The Mission should also continue to engage with senior-level authorities in the Democratic Republic of the Congo with regard to children and armed conflict and human rights violations against children. Some activities carried out by the Section to provide direct support to victims of violations and build the capacity of Congolese actors to comply with their responsibilities could be transferred to the United Nations Children's Fund, in consultation with the Fund, within the limits of available resources.

86. The majority of the tasks carried out by the Mission's HIV/AIDS Unit should be absorbed by country team partners. This would, of course, require the strengthening of their capacities in that regard.

87. Given the significant cost of supporting the camps at Kamina and Kitona and the reluctance of members of armed groups to join the programme, the Mission's

Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration Section should redirect its support to the third phase of the national programme of disarmament, demobilization and reintegration away from the camps and towards more mobile, flexible structures located in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo, where its community violence reduction projects are targeted both at ex-combatants and youth at risk. Kamina and Kitona continue to host some 1,100 ex-combatants waiting to return to their communities, while some 3,777 ex-combatants have already returned back to the east for long-term community-based reintegration. The potential of community violence reduction as a tool to address new “hotspots” in Tanganyika Province and the Kasai region, as well as anticipated community-based electoral violence, should also be explored.

88. The Mission currently funds three camps, located at Kanyobagonga (North Kivu), Walungu (South Kivu) and Kisangani (Tshopo) and hosting 1,350 FDLR combatants and their dependants, as part of the FDLR voluntary disarmament process, initiated in June 2014. Aside from a few individual repatriations over the past two years, the group has continued to make its return to Rwanda contingent on an inter-Rwandan dialogue, which the Government of Rwanda has made clear it will not accept. In the meantime, efforts should be focused on finding technical solutions within the context of the Regional Oversight Mechanism of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework, while also prompting the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo to assume greater responsibility for the management of the camps that the Mission is currently supporting at a significant cost.

89. MONUSCO is also responsible for sustaining 557 members of the Sudan People’s Liberation Movement/Army in Opposition (SPLM/A in Opposition), who are accommodated in the main MONUSCO disarmament, demobilization, repatriation, resettlement and reintegration camp in Munigi, near Goma. To date, MONUSCO has managed to relocate 89 SPLM/A in Opposition elements holding visas to enter third countries through bilateral efforts. MONUSCO, in collaboration with the Special Envoy for the Great Lakes Region, should continue to engage countries of the region to find a solution to both the voluntary disarmament process for FDLR and the issue of the SPLM/A in Opposition combatants.

90. Significant gains in the area of long-term stabilization are highly unlikely in the current political climate. It is essential, therefore, that the resources made available for stabilization programmes support the achievement of the Mission’s key priorities with regard to the protection of civilians. Linking protection-related aspects of the Mission’s stabilization work, such as community-level engagement, women’s inclusion and local conflict mediation, to its political engagement at the national and provincial levels will be key in this regard.

91. At the same time, the Mission’s Stabilization Support Unit should begin transitioning to a structure jointly managed by MONUSCO and UNDP in anticipation of a full transfer to the United Nations country team in the post-electoral period. The planning of this transition should take account of the ongoing contributions of the country team to stabilization efforts in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

5. Mission support

92. The shift towards a more agile and flexible mission posture will be a test for the Mission’s support component. Mission support efforts must be complemented with contingent-owned equipment that is fit for purpose and fully operational in theatre. Effective protection through projection will also depend on the availability of a range of transport capabilities, including ground transportation and airlift

capabilities, as well as accommodation that can support timely logistical support and resupply efforts.

93. The operationalization of the Mission's comprehensive approach to the protection of civilians will require adjustments to the Mission's administrative procedures and the development of new ones to promote greater mobility and flexibility of staff deployments. The outsourcing of non-core support functions could also enable the Mission to adapt to rapid shifts in demand for certain services.

94. The funding sought and approved for the current budget year does not cover technical and logistical support for the forthcoming elections, as mandated by the Security Council. The delineation of roles and responsibilities, including funding, between MONUSCO, the Independent National Electoral Commission, UNDP and other partners will determine any subsequent adjustments to the Mission's resourcing and/or funding. Member States should be encouraged to fund the multi-partner fund for the *Projet d'appui au cycle électoral au Congo*, an electoral support project.

95. The dual headquarters structure of recent years, which oversees a multilayered network of major field offices, operating bases and antenna offices, along with a rear logistics base in Entebbe, Uganda, has been a major determinant of the Mission's resource requirements. The Mission's large physical footprint places a considerable strain on its management and support systems. Building on the work of the civilian staffing review of 2016, and as MONUSCO streamlines its work around a limited set of priorities and reduces its deployment levels, the Mission's civilian footprint, as well as the staffing of its support structures, will also need to be reviewed and reconfigured.

96. The Mission's supply chain management functions are currently concentrated in Goma, a location that is prone to risks, both natural and conflict-related, constitutes a costly operating environment and does not fully capitalize on the investment already made in the Entebbe Support Base. Business continuity in the face of deteriorating security should also be a key element of the Mission's ongoing planning and should be taken into consideration in the placement of critical capacities and other resources. In this regard, Entebbe provides a base for non-location-dependent coordination, planning and oversight of support operations that is closer to the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo than Kinshasa. Opportunities should also be explored to further reduce air transport costs by taking advantage of the improving road infrastructure between Entebbe and the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo. Security conditions permitting and subject to the approval of the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, riverways may also provide alternative supply routes to Kinshasa.

97. The Mission should also undertake a review of enabling military units, especially military engineering and aviation-related units. Presently, six military engineering companies are employed in MONUSCO as an integral part of the Mission's overall engineering capacity. In addition, the enhanced focus on rapidly deployable battalions to project the force in an expeditionary manner to priority locations demands a comprehensive review of aviation assets that takes account of the full range of aircraft available through both commercial and military sources and ensures a flexible mix of assets that can be redeployed for multiple purposes, as required.

98. Key work processes and systems, such as recruitment, procurement and asset tracking, should be reviewed to enhance responsiveness and accountability. Operational elements essential for rapid deployment and agility should be subject to management by the Mission, including the engagement of aviation capacities. There is also a need to enhance the authority of the Special Representative of the

Secretary-General to ensure the accountability of the Mission's staff, which should be accompanied by stronger investigation capabilities for serious misconduct, sexual exploitation and abuse, fraud and corruption cases. The establishment of a performance management framework is expected to significantly reform the management of the Mission's resources and align it with programmatic priorities. It will also create opportunities for the Mission to identify further efficiencies in support of mandated priorities.

6. Cooperation with the region

99. As noted above, collaboration between the United Nations and key regional partners remains essential to overcome the current political impasse. In this regard, more should be done to ensure that countries with a direct stake in preserving the stability of the Democratic Republic of the Congo play a role in enhancing the engagement of the international community with the Government and other key Congolese stakeholders. Regular and sustained consultations between the United Nations, the African Union, SADC, the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region, ECCAS, the European Union and other key regional actors should be held to ensure that the region and the wider international community speak with one voice in supporting the implementation of the 31 December agreement. The Special Representative of the Secretary-General for the Great Lakes Region, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General to the African Union and the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Central Africa could play a critical role in reinforcing the good offices of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for the Democratic Republic of the Congo by mobilizing key regional leaders and other influential actors to put their full weight behind the successful conclusion of the transition in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Appropriate coordination arrangements should be put in place in this regard.

100. The Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework remains a vital mechanism to achieve durable peace and stability in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the region. At this critical juncture, the United Nations should deepen its cooperation with the core signatory countries and the guarantor institutions of the Framework, namely, the African Union, the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region and SADC, to ensure that major regional political and security challenges are addressed in a spirit of cooperation. These challenges include the need to find durable solutions to the issue of foreign and local armed groups still operating in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the repatriation or relocation of ex-combatants (from FDLR, SPLM/A in Opposition and the former Mouvement du 23 mars). In that regard, the review team was informed of ongoing efforts by representatives of signatory countries to the Framework, through its Technical Support Committee, co-chaired by the United Nations and the African Union, to assess progress and challenges to the neutralization of armed groups, disarmament, demobilization, repatriation, resettlement and reintegration, and the voluntary disarmament process for FDLR and SPLM/A in Opposition and make recommendations to the Regional Oversight Mechanism.

IV. Adjustments following the successful implementation of the 31 December agreement and sustainable progress towards reducing the threat posed by armed groups

A. Mission priorities

101. The ultimate aim of MONUSCO is to ensure that security conditions in the Democratic Republic of the Congo no longer pose a tangible threat to international peace and security and remain that way even after the Mission's departure. The following broad conditions would be key to achieving the Mission's desired end state: (a) the holding of credible elections leading to a peaceful transfer of power; (b) the reduction of the threat posed by the remaining foreign armed groups to a level that can be managed by the country's security forces; (c) the reduction of intercommunal tensions and conflicts in North Kivu and South Kivu Provinces to a level that can be managed by the Congolese authorities with support from the United Nations country team and other partners; and (d) progress in the fight against impunity, so that the security forces are no longer perceived as a threat to civilians.

102. Elections are by no means a panacea for the deep-rooted problems that have prevented the Democratic Republic of the Congo from achieving lasting stability and development. Moreover, the country's history has demonstrated that electoral periods can be particularly fragile. In that regard, the Mission would need to continue to develop contingency plans for a possible deterioration of the situation, both in the provinces and in the capital, in the run-up to the elections, during the elections and in the immediate post-electoral period.

103. Nevertheless, credible elections resulting in the peaceful transfer of power remain essential to stem the spread of violence across the country and defuse emerging conflicts in the Kasai region, Tanganyika Province and other emerging hotspots. The presence of a legitimately elected government at the national and provincial levels, combined with the establishment of robust reconciliation mechanisms, would be key to addressing long-standing issues of identity, land ownership, access to pasture lands, displacement and resettlement that will continue to fuel conflict in the country.

104. The sustainable reduction of the threat posed by foreign armed groups along the borders with Burundi, Rwanda, Uganda and South Sudan would significantly reduce the perception of the Democratic Republic of the Congo as a threat to international peace and security. The engagement of key bilateral partners would be critical to steadily build the capacity of Congolese security actors to progressively assume responsibility for maintaining security and public order across their country.

105. It would also be important to build on the progress made within the context of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework to foster cooperation between countries in the region in addressing their common security and economic challenges. Continued efforts to find durable political solutions to the remaining presence of foreign armed groups in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, as well as its neighbours, and contain the cross-border spillover of conflicts in the region will remain a priority in order to prepare the ground for the departure of the Mission. Efforts to ensure that individuals accused of gross human rights violations and international crimes who are circulating freely in the region are brought to justice would also be key to promoting lasting peace and reconciliation in the region.

B. Adjustment of Mission components

1. Civilian tasks

106. Should credible elections resulting in a peaceful transfer of power take place, MONUSCO would be able to enter a phase of consolidation of operations. During this phase, the Mission would focus primarily on supporting a peaceful transition at all levels of government, continuing to implement a comprehensive approach to the protection of civilians, and strengthening regional cooperation, in particular on the issue of foreign armed groups.

107. The Mission's good offices would be required to support a peaceful transition and foster a broad national consensus around key governance and security reforms, the resolution of residual electoral disputes and the tackling of the root causes of conflict in priority areas to reduce the level of political support for armed groups. The Mission would provide strategic advice to the national authorities on how to take forward key reforms and work with relevant stakeholders, including civil society, to promote inclusion in the political process. MONUSCO would also mobilize regional and international support for key governance and security sector reforms.

108. Within the framework of its comprehensive approach to the protection of civilians, MONUSCO would continue to pursue its tailored strategies for each priority armed group, while strengthening the capacity of civil society actors to undertake conflict monitoring, early warning and mediation. Efforts to develop a more responsive, agile and mobile force that is capable of carrying out protection through projection would also continue. As the situation improves, the force would increasingly orient its activities towards engagement with FARDC on residual protection concerns and the handover of responsibilities.

109. The police component would continue to operate in a flexible, mobile manner, with the formed police units ready to intervene in potentially volatile situations that pose a risk to civilians and United Nations personnel. The police component would prioritize advocacy with national police commanders to ensure respect for human rights and provide training, capacity-building and advice on the reform of the national police, in strict compliance with the United Nations human rights due diligence policy guidelines.

110. In the area of the rule of law, an orderly and gradual transition of tasks relating to reform and stabilization would be achieved within the framework of the draft rule of law transition plan and a revised joint programme with the United Nations country team and especially with UNDP. In the immediate post-electoral period, the Mission's Justice and Corrections Section would maintain a focus on the strengthening of administrative and judicial processes for the resolution of electoral disputes and would continue its assistance for investigation and prosecution efforts through the Prosecution Support Cells. The Mission would focus its prison security support on a selected number of facilities holding high-risk inmates and would support the reinforcement of the criminal justice chain in priority areas in preparation for a handover of tasks. The Mission would also support the implementation of the national policy on justice reform.

111. As donor confidence increases in the post-electoral period, the United Nations country team and other partners would progressively engage in stabilization and institution-building efforts. Additional donor support would be required to ensure that the country team has the resources necessary to scale up its engagement and gradually take over additional tasks from the Mission. The International Security and Stabilization Support Strategy would transition to the country team, with the

Stabilization Support Unit fully managed by UNDP. During this phase, the transfer of the Strategy to the country team could be managed through the establishment of a joint transitional arrangement between MONUSCO and the country team.

112. MONUSCO could also explore the gradual transfer of disarmament, demobilization, repatriation, resettlement and reintegration operations to the Government, with support from the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region and other international actors. The handover of specific activities to the United Nations country team could be explored within the framework of the joint task force of MONUSCO and the country team on the reintegration of ex-combatants, as part of the united joint action and transition in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

2. Force adjustments

113. In the first year following the successful holding of elections and a peaceful transfer of power, the strength and geographical footprint of the force could be further reduced by repatriating two to three additional framework battalions, subject to an assessment of security conditions and progress made towards increasing its mobility and agility, including the generation and deployment of key enablers. During this period, the force would retain the ability to project troops in response to protection threats as they arise across the country.

114. The Intervention Brigade of the force could be downsized to a battalion comprising three companies, distributed across the northern, central and southern sectors, and the remainder of the headquarters elements repatriated. An additional reduction of 30 per cent in the number of military observers could also be envisaged. At the end of this process, the Mission would maintain four sectors, with one or two rapidly deployable battalions in each sector and an Intervention Brigade company in all sectors except the west. The force would also have three special forces companies, a reserve force and enablers. The capacity of FARDC to counter residual security threats and protect civilians as the Mission reduces its footprint would need to be assessed constantly. As the situation improves, the force would increasingly orient its activities towards engagement with FARDC on remaining protection concerns and the handover of responsibilities, as it progressively builds its capacity with support from bilateral and other partners. Accelerating the pace of those efforts will be a key priority in order to enable the timely drawdown and exit of MONUSCO.

3. Police adjustments

115. The Mission's police component would also be able to progressively reduce its footprint or withdraw completely from areas in which the national police demonstrates an ability to operate independently. If security conditions allow, the police component could gradually, over a period of 12 months, reduce its current mandated strength by releasing 35 individual police officers and one formed police unit, followed by a further phased reduction. Further reductions would be subject to an evaluation of the role of the police component in paving the way to the Mission's exit strategy, during which time the police component would support the Mission with community engagement, networking and capacity-building.

C. Strategic risks

116. The prospect of a deepening of the political crisis and a further deterioration of the security, human rights and humanitarian situation cannot be ruled out. If elections are delayed indefinitely or the results are widely rejected by the

population, the resulting crisis of legitimacy could foster the proliferation of armed groups and uprisings across the Democratic Republic of the Congo, which would have profound implications for the stability of the country and the region as a whole. Political space would shrink dramatically and would be accompanied by an increase in human rights violations. The Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo would likely be unable to exercise State authority in many areas, and security and protection risks would increase significantly, particularly for women and children. Areas not previously affected by violence would likely become increasingly unstable, and intercommunal violence would intensify.

117. In such a scenario, the Mission would have to focus on maintaining its ability to operate in an increasingly volatile environment. It would continue to prioritize the protection of civilians and human rights through a comprehensive approach, although its ability to do so would be severely constrained, as more of its troops and police would be required to secure United Nations personnel and installations and facilitate the delivery of humanitarian assistance. There would be little scope for any major reconfiguration or reduction of the Mission's troop and police strength. The Mission may also be obliged to suspend the provision of all forms of direct support to the authorities and the security forces.

V. Observations

118. The investment by the international community in peacekeeping in the Democratic Republic of the Congo over the past 17 years has helped to bring about a profound transformation in the country's security landscape. When the United Nations Organization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo first deployed in 1999, the country was emerging from a devastating war involving the direct military intervention of five African nations. Large swathes of the country were under the control of rebel movements more intent on plundering its vast natural wealth than attending to the basic needs of the population.

119. By 2006, that mission had presided over the withdrawal of the remaining foreign forces from the Democratic Republic of the Congo and helped to steer the country towards its first democratic elections in 46 years. The successful conclusion of the transition following the signing of the Final Act of the Inter-Congolese Political Negotiations marked a high point in the long history of United Nations engagement in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Yet since then, the country has struggled to build on this historic achievement. The contested elections of 2011 were a setback for the consolidation of the country's fledgling democracy. The vast majority of Congolese continue to live in abject poverty and lack access to the most basic services. The State is still absent from many parts of the country and all too often preys on the citizens it is meant to protect. Challenges linked to corruption, poor governance and the illegal exploitation of the country's natural resources have sapped the confidence of donors and investors, preventing the country from realizing its full economic potential.

120. The national political crisis triggered by the failure to hold elections on time can have consequences for the country and the surrounding region. Mr. Kabila has a historic opportunity to cement his legacy as the first ever President of the Democratic Republic of the Congo to hand over power to an elected successor. Delays in the preparations for elections are a source of deep concern, and violations of human rights have the potential to seriously undermine the achievements of the past decade and a half. However, the Congolese authorities, who bear primary responsibility, and other concerned stakeholders still have the possibility to prevent such a setback and put their country on a more positive path.

121. With so much at stake, the international community cannot afford to conduct business as usual. All efforts must be geared towards keeping the 31 December agreement alive and ensuring the protection of civilians and human rights, as part of the broader strategy to prevent the Democratic Republic of the Congo from sliding back into conflict. The completion of the voter registration process, the early publication of a credible electoral calendar and the implementation of the confidence-building measures envisaged in the agreement are essential in this regard. Without tangible progress on each of these fronts, the Democratic Republic of the Congo is likely to enter a period of extreme volatility marked by increasingly open confrontation between the opposition and the Government and greater unrest among a population facing untold hardship.

122. As concerning as the situation is, a successful conclusion to the transition is still within reach. The registration of voters is almost complete and the Independent National Electoral Commission has signalled its intention to publish an electoral calendar soon. Most, if not all, Congolese stakeholders have reaffirmed their commitment to the implementation of the 31 December agreement, which was negotiated and agreed to by the Congolese themselves. Furthermore, government officials have repeatedly stated that there are no plans to revise the Constitution and that the President remains firmly committed to ushering in a democratic transition for the first time in his country's history. Going forward, international efforts to assist the Congolese in overcoming the current impasse should build on these achievements, as limited as they may be, as well as the stated commitments of the Government and other parties.

123. The United Nations remains committed to supporting the implementation of the 31 December agreement through the good offices of my Special Representative. But these efforts alone will not be sufficient to arrest the country's descent into chaos. At this critical juncture, it is vital that the region, which stands to lose the most from a return to conflict in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, play its part in steering the political transition towards a peaceful conclusion. The country's recent history has shown, time and again, that any solution requires the full backing of its neighbours. I look forward to the leadership of and stepped-up efforts from the African Union, SADC, the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region and ECCAS, alongside the United Nations, to create the conditions for the holding of inclusive and credible elections, in accordance with the Constitution.

124. I am fully committed to strengthening the United Nations partnership with these organizations and will rely on my Special Envoy for the Great Lakes Region, my Special Representative for Central Africa and my Special Representative to the African Union to assist me in this task. I look forward to working closely with regional leaders in the critical weeks and months ahead to establish a mechanism for regular consultation and coordination on the Democratic Republic of the Congo. In the meantime, I encourage the leaders of the region to remain actively engaged in the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework, which remains a critical tool for the maintenance of regional stability.

125. I am equally committed to ensuring that MONUSCO is able to protect civilians in a context of spreading local conflict and increasing human rights abuses by the national security forces and armed groups. To that end, emphasis will be placed on engaging with the country's civilian and military authorities, at the highest levels, to remind them of their fundamental obligations with regard to the protection of civilians. MONUSCO will also work with the national authorities to address the shortcomings of the national security forces, while continuing to investigate and report on human rights abuses and push for accountability, regardless of who the perpetrators may be. The provision of food, fuel and rations to FARDC and the national police will be reviewed on a case-by-case basis, in strict

compliance with the United Nations human rights due diligence policy, and adjusted, as necessary, to take account of the need for the Congolese to assume a greater share of responsibility in securing their country.

126. The multiplication of conflict hotspots and increased tensions in urban areas will require the adoption of a comprehensive approach to the protection of civilians that relies on early warning and analysis to ensure effective preventive action, and the prioritization of unit tasks for protection imperatives. Further adjustments will be made to the force to enable it to better contribute to the Mission's overall efforts to contain the threat posed by armed groups and address a variety of protection threats around the country. Having played a critical role in the defeat of the Mouvement du 23 mars, the Intervention Brigade of the force will also be reconfigured to address the current threat environment. The evolution of the force will be guided by the lessons learned from the Mission's response to the conflict in the Kasai region and will be taken forward in close consultation with humanitarian partners to ensure that any risks to the civilian population arising from the process are minimized.

127. Those efforts notwithstanding, there are obvious limits to what MONUSCO can be expected to achieve. Given the vastness of the country, the Mission will clearly not be able to ensure the physical protection of all civilians, hence the shift towards protection through early warning, prevention and, where required, the projection of military force. Considering that Kinshasa alone has a population density of 1,211 inhabitants per square kilometre, MONUSCO troops and police will be hard pressed to protect civilians in urban centres in the event of a major escalation of tensions, no matter how strong their presence. In such settings, engagement with the authorities and robust human rights investigation, monitoring and reporting are likely to be more effective in mitigating threats to civilians.

128. The streamlining of MONUSCO activities around a limited set of priorities will be key to enhancing its overall effectiveness, particularly in a resource-constrained environment. Further investment in long-term stabilization and institution-building efforts would be difficult to justify in the present political climate. Instead, the Mission will need to concentrate on areas in which it has a clear comparative advantage. At the same time, the strengthening of joint programming with the United Nations country team will be key to foster coherence and enhance the capacity of partner agencies to support activities aimed at consolidating and sustaining the gains achieved during the time of the MONUSCO presence to date. I encourage donors to be creative in finding ways to ensure that the resources necessary to ensure a smooth transition to longer-term stabilization and peacebuilding are made available.

129. Efforts by MONUSCO to evolve into a more effective and efficient Mission are, in many ways, in the direction of the broader management reforms that I have initiated. MONUSCO requires mobility and administrative flexibility to quickly deploy its military, police and civilian capacities to where they are most needed, to be able to adapt to the changing situation on the ground. I intend to use my authority, wherever possible, to enable the Mission to achieve its objectives, and I count on the support of Member States to take forward reforms that fall outside my remit and would enable missions such as MONUSCO to more effectively deliver on their mandates.

130. It is also imperative that Member States provide MONUSCO with the resources required to implement its mandate. I am confident that the changes under way in MONUSCO will yield efficiencies. Yet Member States should exercise caution in making further cuts to the Mission's budget that may compromise its ability to deliver on its core priorities.

131. The Mission's ultimate purpose is to prevent the collapse of the Democratic Republic of the Congo until it ceases to pose a threat to regional and international stability. The successful implementation of the 31 December agreement and the reduction of the threat posed by armed groups to a level at which they can be contained by the Congolese security forces would enable MONUSCO to shift its focus towards the use of its good offices to promote democratic processes, while addressing residual protection threats and continuing to monitor and report on human rights. The Mission would also be able to undertake further reductions of its military, police and civilian strength in anticipation of its gradual withdrawal and exit. Yet unless the Congolese are able to quickly overcome the current political impasse, the Mission may never reach that point.

132. In the long run, it is clear that there can be no lasting peace in the Democratic Republic of the Congo as long as the root causes of conflict remain unaddressed. The track record of MONUSCO over the past decade demonstrates that in the absence of a genuine political commitment to reform, there is little the United Nations or any other external actor can do to build sustainable peace. The country's leaders will therefore need to decide whether they are finally ready to embrace inclusive and peaceful politics, tackle security sector reform, root out corruption and mismanagement, uphold the rule of law and ensure that all Congolese are able to enjoy their basic human rights. In such an endeavour, they can count on the full support of the United Nations in preserving the gains of the past 20 years and steering the Democratic Republic of the Congo towards long-term stability and development.

