

Statement for IWD 2024

“Invest in women: Accelerate Progress.”

Today, we celebrate the International Women’s Day under the theme: **“Invest in women: Accelerate Progress.”**

Sadly, the Great Lakes Region is presently confronted with a worrying surge in tension and violence affecting the lives of women and girls particularly in the Eastern DRC where they have been facing multiple challenges. This has led to the loss of dignity, health issues including long-term emotional trauma, as well as diminished access to education, employment, and social opportunities. It is likely that this situation will result in prolonged cycles of poverty and a stagnant socioeconomic growth if it is not addressed. As such, we shall invest and give great attention to rights issues.

The Women Peace and Security (WPS) agenda is a cornerstone of the United Nations Strategy for Peace Consolidation, Conflict Prevention and Resolution in the Great Lakes Region, and reinforces the need to achieve, among others, Goals 5 & 16 of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and the principle of leaving no one behind.

Despite progress with the development of national action plans (NAPs), a significant gap continues to exist in the implementation of regional instruments and in the achievement of the women, peace, and security agenda in the region.

Women's rights organizations have been monitoring progress and continue to advocate for the implementation of a variety of regional and national instruments, including the Regional Action Plan (RAP) on Resolution 1325 (2000), the Kampala Declaration on Sexual and Gender-based Violence (2011), the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework for the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and the region (2013) as well as the Pact on Security, Stability and Development in the Great Lakes Region (2006).

To bolster peace, strengthen prevention efforts and build more diverse and balanced societies, it is imperative that we prioritize the efforts of delivering against the national and regional WPS instruments notably in compliance with quotas in support of women’s political participation and economic empowerment.

As we mark International Women's Day and prepare for the sixty-eighth session of the Commission on the Status of Women, I commend the courage, the resilience and determination of all the women and girls including those with disabilities, of the Great Lakes Region, who continue to stand up and defy daily, multiple challenges to hold families and communities together. I wish on this important day, to reiterate the commitment of my office to:

- Strengthen partnership to promote inclusion and women’s participation in the revitalization process of the PSC Framework, support prevention and protection initiatives and, safeguard the rights of women and girls in the ongoing conflict in the region.
- Invest further for the strengthening of the role of women; particularly, in dialogue processes as well as local peace consolidation initiatives and, promote capacity-building to empower them economically, including in the management of natural resources. It is essential that their valuable contributions are prioritized and amplified as the world seeks lasting solutions to sustainable peace and development, in accordance with the vision of the UN Secretary General’s on Our Common Agenda and the UN75 Declaration to speed up the implementation of commitments relating to the sustainable development goals and ensure full respect for Human rights.

To make a difference, let us work together to dismantle gender biases and barriers, shift attitudes, and chart a path forward that places women and girls' rights and interests, at the center of our collective action. Then and only then, we will be able to transform the world into one that is more inclusive and safer.

Happy International Women’s Day to all!
Huang Xia
UN Special Envoy for the Great Lakes Region