

In Africa's Great Lakes region, peace dividend must follow peace deal

By Ban Ki-moon and Jim Yong Kim

Africa's Great Lakes region today has the chance to achieve something that has eluded its war-weary people for several decades. It can silence the guns, boost trust and trade between neighbours, educate millions of out-of-school children, empower women, and create economic opportunities that will help the countries forge a path to prosperity, good governance, and lasting stability.

In the coming days, we will travel to the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Rwanda and Uganda to meet the region's leaders and announce a range of specific commitments to accelerate development and consolidate peace. This first-of-its-kind joint trip is rooted in a momentous new agreement: the "Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework for the DRC and the region."

The pact was the fruit of a concerted effort between the United Nations, the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region, the Southern African Development Community and the African Union. It recognizes that breaking the cycle of catastrophic conflict in eastern DRC demands a new approach.

Managing crises and attending to the aftermath of fighting is not sufficient. We must tackle underlying causes. Signed by 11 countries, the agreement requires action by the region's leaders, with the support of the international community, to address common security and development challenges. And because promises made should be promises kept, the agreement includes rigorous oversight mechanisms to ensure that benchmarks are met.

We believe this comprehensive new approach gives the DRC and the Great Lakes region its best chance for peace and economic development in many years. But this "framework of hope," as it has been labelled by Mary Robinson, the UN special envoy for the Great Lakes region, will require hard work.

An astounding 70 percent of people in the DRC live on less than \$1.25 a day. More than seven million children -- one third of those who should be in school -- lack access to education. Some 2.4 million children are acutely malnourished. Malaria, cholera and measles are a major threat due to inadequate health care, water supplies and sanitation. Roads are a mess and electricity is scarce and expensive. Basic commodities have to be imported. Some 6.3 million people require food support.

Sexual violence continues at appalling levels throughout the country, and is regularly used as a weapon of war by armed groups operating in the east. A lack of jobs and opportunities creates a breeding ground for criminality. More than three million Congolese have fled their homes for safety, including 2.6 million displaced inside DRC and 450,000 refugees in neighbouring countries.

The leaders of the Great Lakes region will be the key drivers of peace, stability and economic growth. The United Nations, the World Bank Group, and the entire international community must support them. We pledge that our two organizations will work closely together in new and deeper ways so that implementation of the political and security aspects of the framework agreement goes hand-in-hand with the economic development that is essential to lasting peace and stability.

By restarting economic activity and improving livelihoods in border areas, by promoting cross-border trade, by steadily increasing economic interdependence, by rooting out corruption, and by ensuring that natural resources are managed for the benefit of all, we can steadily build confidence and improve well-being, income, and opportunity.

Rwanda and Uganda have shown that it is possible to recover from conflict and advance towards the Millennium Development Goals. We are now looking beyond the 2015 MDG deadline to a new sustainable development agenda that will end extreme poverty. Many countries in Africa are taking dynamic strides forward. The people of the DRC deserve their full chance for progress.

A peace agreement must deliver a peace dividend. We owe it to the people of the Great Lakes to help fulfil their long-held vision: an end to conflict, children in school, respect for women's rights, access to health care and sustainable energy, and income and opportunity for all. That is why we are making this visit. We see hope on the horizon for the people of the Great Lakes, and we are determined to help them every step of the way.

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