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JOINT INGO LETTER TO THE UNITED NATIONS SECURITY COUNCIL RENEWAL OF MONUSCO MANDATE

The anticipated renewal of MONUSCO's mandate is a critical moment for the Security Council to review the mission's progress over the last year. This review should address immediate protection concerns as well as striving to achieve the conditions that will ensure MONUSCO's withdrawal in the future. The above-named humanitarian and development organizations wrote to the Security Council and MONUSCO leadership last year, where we called for a broad, comprehensive approach to addressing conflict in eastern DRC. Here we reiterate that call. The humanitarian situation for communities in eastern DRC remains precarious, with wide-spread displacement and many unable to access basic services. Civilians face persistent high levels of violence from armed groups, human rights abuses and violations of international humanitarian law.

We call on the UN Security Council to ensure that MONUSCO is:

1) Ensuring better protection of civilians during military operations

Upcoming military operations carry with them high risks for the civilian population of DRC. Armed groups such as the FDLR present specific challenges to military operations, with particular concerns about the distinction between combatants and non-combatants.

- *Comprehensive contingency planning must be carried out before all military operations, in coordination with MONUSCO civilian sections. MONUSCO should not participate in joint operations with the FARDC which do not involve such planning. A framework of 'red lines' based on actual or potential harm to civilians, past which operations are suspended, must be developed with the government of DRC.*

In Resolution 2098, the Security Council took the decision to shift to a more robust mandate authorizing the creation of an Intervention Brigade to "neutralize" armed groups. The Intervention Brigade may have had success as a deterrent over some armed groups, and its support to the FARDC was a key factor in the military defeat of the M23. However, dozens of armed groups remain active in eastern DRC and Protection of Civilians remains a critical issue. The continued operations of the Intervention Brigade should not distract MONUSCO from its

protection role – its commitment to identifying, with the government of DRC, threats to civilians and implementing response plans.

- *MONUSCO should more **proactively mobilize non-military sections to interact with communities**. This should include increasing resources to existing structures such as Joint Protection Teams and Community Liaison Assistants in order to understand the threats that communities face. MONUSCO must develop a better internal analysis to understand how its deployments, movements and engagement with the FARDC may have an impact on civilian populations (both as a direct and an indirect result of operations). Such an analysis would also prevent the mission from undermining community-level protection mechanisms.*

As per paragraph 15 (d) of Resolution 2098, one of MONUSCO's benchmarks for success has been the implementation of a government program for Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration, which has now been presented as PNDDR III. The lack of progress on this DDR program presents specific protection threats to civilians. Ex-combatants have disarmed and are gathering in centers with little structure or support, whilst the government appears to have made little effort to ensure the protection of civilians living nearby.

- *MONUSCO should provide **technical support to the DRC government to move forward on the PNDDR III**. Such support could allow the government of DRC to produce a plan which provides realistic alternatives to those combatants willing to disarm. Putting in place **adequately managed infrastructure to receive ex-combatants** could mitigate the immediate threats posed to civilians. It would also allow for more effective processing of ex-combatants, including vetting those involved in criminal activities. **Joint operations should be not be implemented in the absence of mechanisms which give a viable alternative for armed actors to disarm.***

2) Ensuring that conditions are conducive for MONUSCO's withdrawal, with foundations in place for legitimate, accountable and effective civilian governance

The conditions for MONUSCO's withdrawal from DRC will need to include the reestablishment of a civilian state presence in the east, a presence which will protect all citizens. Whilst ultimate responsibility for this role lies with the government of DRC, MONUSCO should support the government to re-establish its civilian state presence in the east. MONUSCO has a role to play in ensuring that this governance includes free and fair local, provincial and national elections as well as reform of the police and judiciary. The commitment of the revised ISSSS to working in a more inclusive way with communities and local civil society to target area-specific drivers of conflict is a positive step forward to meet this objective. The revised ISSSS strategy recognizes that the presence of infrastructure does not necessarily amount to genuine civilian state governance and services. However, the proposed "Islands of Stability" approach introduces incoherency to MONUSCO's stabilization approach by adding a different, military definition of stability according to FARDC/MONUSCO military operations. These operations are frequently short-lived and may be fragile. As a result, these "Islands" may be neither sustainable in terms of stability unless they are part of a broader strategy to foster better governance.

- *Any allocation of additional resources to support stabilization processes must be considered within the existing strategies in place, avoiding parallel and contradictory approaches. Accordingly, the “Islands of Stability” concept should either be abandoned or responsibility for it handed over to the Stabilization Support Unit. All MONUSCO stabilization initiatives must reflect a broader idea of how stability in eastern DRC should function, beyond perceived military victories. MONUSCO must use its leverage to ensure that the government fulfils its commitments to reforming civilian state institutions, and follows through on promises to undertake transparent, free and fair elections in the east.*

3) Supporting long-term peace for the Great Lakes region

Paragraph 11 of resolution 2098 states that future reconfigurations of MONUSCO and its mandate should be determined in the context of progress made around the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework. To date, the PSC Framework has only been partially implemented and national benchmarks still have not been produced. MONUSCO must use its leverage in order to ensure that key reforms essential to lasting peace are made, as per the PSC Framework. In particular, the government of DRC needs to address objectives around reducing threats to civilians and stabilization through the reestablishment of state authority. MONUSCO should provide technical support to the government to make advances on SSR and reform of the police and judiciary.

- *The mission must be more explicit about how it measures progress on the PSC Framework. This includes specifying the actions to be taken should the government of DRC fail to make sufficient progress. Accordingly, the SESG and other actors working on the PSCF should hold regular consultations with MONUSCO on how to support progress of the framework. MONUSCO’s involvement in the PSCF should reflect the mission’s current expertise, for instance in security sector reform. Milestones for how the mission should specifically advance on the PSCF should be clearly defined and quantifiable, allowing the UNSG to better measure success in his reports.*