



Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women

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Summary record of the 2120th meeting*

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva, on Tuesday, 4 February 2025, at 10 a.m.

Chair: Ms. Haidar

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* No summary record was issued for the 2119th meeting.

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The meeting was called to order at 10 a.m.

Consideration of reports submitted by States parties under article 18 of the Convention

Report of the Democratic Republic of the Congo submitted under the exceptional reporting procedure ([CEDAW/C/COD/EP/1](#); [CEDAW/C/COD/QPR/EP/1](#))

1. *At the invitation of the Chair, the delegation of the Democratic Republic of the Congo joined the meeting.*

2. **A representative of the Democratic Republic of the Congo**, introducing her country's exceptional report ([CEDAW/C/COD/EP/1](#)) on sexual violence against women in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, particularly in the provinces of North Kivu, South Kivu and Ituri, said that indiscriminate violence against the civilian population was being perpetrated by the Rwandan army and the Mouvement du 23 mars (M23) armed group. The Government of Rwanda had provided military and logistical support and strategic intelligence to M23 and was therefore directly responsible for its crimes. In the course of the conflict, thousands of women and girls had been victims of rape, mutilation and other forms of violence perpetrated in camps for internally displaced persons and in homes, schools and prisons. The Rwandan army and its M23 supporters had recently captured the city of Goma and the surrounding areas and were threatening to seize cities in South Kivu. Without urgent action from the international community, the cycle of violence would continue, with tragic consequences for women and girls.

3. The Government was committed to preventing and punishing conflict-related sexual violence. It had accepted 20 of the 29 recommendations concerning women's rights made during its most recent universal periodic review in November 2024 and had noted the remainder. In the period since the submission of the most recent periodic report of the Democratic Republic of the Congo ([CEDAW/C/COD/8](#)), 940 police officers – including specialists in combating sexual violence – had been deployed to protect the civilian population in areas where the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) no longer maintained a presence. In addition, the police and judiciary had been provided with training in preventing sexual violence and, in November 2024, a national action plan for the implementation of Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) had been adopted.

4. To combat impunity, military and civil courts had stepped up efforts to prosecute perpetrators of sexual violence. More than 1,030 cases of sexual violence had been investigated by the South Kivu police in 2024. There were 227 cases of sexual violence involving 646 victims throughout the country in 2024. In the period June to September 2024 alone, 131 cases of sexual violence involving 418 victims had been committed by armed groups in the provinces of North Kivu, Ituri and Tanganyika. Some 502 of the 1,476 cases of sexual violence referred to the military courts in 2024 had been processed and more than 70 convictions had been secured, with compensation awarded to victims or their dependents. In September 2024, the President of the High Judicial Council had issued a circular with a service instruction on implementation of article 14 of the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa concerning health and reproductive rights to complement and update a previous instruction on the establishment of special units for the prevention of sexual violence. The Ministry of Human Rights was currently finalizing the legal instruments required to establish transitional justice in the country.

5. All ministries were working to combat conflict-related sexual violence, with the support of the national reparations fund for victims of conflict-related sexual violence and other crimes against the peace and security of humankind and international partners. The fund had been strengthened to expand access to psychological, socioeconomic and medical support for survivors. Accommodation had been provided to victims of sexual violence in conflict areas, in particular near Goma, and to women who had fled occupied areas in fear of sexual violence. Police frequently patrolled areas near camps for internally displaced persons.

6. Efforts to protect victims of sexual violence and support women were being hindered by the increase in military attacks by M23 and the Rwandan army. In the two weeks since

the assault on Goma, more than 3,000 prisoners, many of whom had been convicted of sexual violence against women, had escaped from the city's central prison, the proliferation of light weapons had been observed, insecurity had spread, court buildings had been ransacked and 163 female prisoners had been raped and burned alive. Judicial and law enforcement officials responsible for protecting women had fled Goma, as had many human right defenders. Camps for internally displaced persons, including victims of sexual violence and women affected by HIV/AIDS, had been bombed and dismantled. Access to care among victims had been disrupted and a maternity hospital had been bombed, killing women and infants.

7. The Committee must act without delay. Survivors of sexual violence in areas occupied by the Rwandan army, M23 and other armed groups must immediately be afforded access to medical care, appropriate psychosocial, humanitarian and legal assistance and safe shelter. She urged the Committee to condemn the occupation by the Rwandan army and M23 and to call on those parties to immediately cease their offensive and liberate the occupied territory. The Committee should actively campaign for the adoption and application of sanctions against Rwanda in the light of its military aggression and serious violations of international humanitarian law and international human rights law concerning women. She encouraged the Committee to support the creation of an international criminal tribunal concerning the Democratic Republic of the Congo and to assist her Government in establishing mechanisms to prosecute those responsible for sexual violence. The international community must unite to ensure respect for the Charter of the United Nations and end the war.

8. **A representative of the National Human Rights Commission, Democratic Republic of the Congo**, said that, while the Commission welcomed the political and operational decisions taken by the Government to protect civilians from sexual violence and other human rights violations committed by the parties to the ongoing conflict in the east of the country, it remained concerned about their effectiveness, particularly as the Rwandan army and other armed groups did not believe that they were affected by those decisions. The Commission was also concerned about the persistence and escalation of the conflict, which had caused mass population displacement and was hindering the Government's efforts to prevent sexual violence and other related human rights violations, especially in regions controlled by armed groups and the Rwandan army.

9. Ensuring security and providing humanitarian assistance to civilians in areas controlled by armed groups and in camps for internally displaced persons presented a major challenge for the Government. The recent invasion of Goma had led to systematic and widespread violations of human rights and international humanitarian law, primarily affecting women and children. Hundreds of people had died and thousands had been internally displaced, with many subsequently forced to flee bombs targeting the camps where they had been staying. Sexual violence was rife, and healthcare facilities were overwhelmed by the influx of victims. It was difficult for victims of sexual violence to gain access to justice in the current circumstances. Additionally, with Goma no longer under government control, the country's sovereignty was being undermined by M23 and the Rwandan army.

10. The Government should make every effort to restore peace in the east of the Democratic Republic of the Congo by prioritizing dialogue and a peaceful resolution to the conflict. The International Criminal Court should initiate criminal proceedings against the leaders of M23 and the Rwandan army in response to the war crimes and crimes against humanity committed in and around Goma. Lastly, the Security Council should impose targeted sanctions on Rwanda and take all steps necessary to bring peace to the east of the country.

11. **Ms. Akia** said that, amid the ongoing armed conflict in the east of the country, she wished to extend her condolences to the people of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and to strongly condemn the ongoing advances of M23. She would appreciate specific information on the different forms of conflict-related sexual violence being committed against women and girls, including persons with disabilities, internally displaced persons and refugees.

12. It would be helpful to hear about any avenues and strategies being pursued by the State party to secure sustainable peace in the east of the country in order to prevent further acts of conflict-related sexual violence and to ensure the effective protection of women and

girls under international, humanitarian and human rights law. She would appreciate information on the ongoing illicit exploitation of minerals in the east of the country and on any strategies to end such practices, which gave rise to conflicts that disproportionately affected women and girls.

13. Further information on the challenges faced by the State party in implementing its comprehensive legal and policy framework to address conflict-related sexual violence would be welcome. It would be useful to learn about any financial, logistical and administrative strategies that would enable the State party to accelerate the implementation of that framework.

14. **A representative of the Democratic Republic of the Congo** said that the illicit exploitation of minerals had triggered the current crisis. The Government had taken steps to address the issue, including through various processes such as certification of mining operations and improved traceability of minerals. However, its efforts to implement such measures were being hampered by the ongoing conflict, as some mines were in areas controlled by armed groups and foreign States. The Government had recently filed a complaint against certain multinational companies for their use of conflict minerals in their supply chains.

15. Financial considerations posed a major challenge to the implementation of the legal and policy framework to address conflict-related sexual violence. For example, the establishment of transitional justice would require the creation of internal mechanisms to address the crisis, punish perpetrators and combat impunity, all of which would come at a cost. The international dimension of the crisis also posed a challenge: the Government's call for support for the establishment of an international criminal tribunal was based on the fact that the situation had, to some extent, become a transnational conflict given the involvement of foreign States. It was difficult to invoke domestic law to prosecute criminals who could seek refuge in neighbouring countries; establishing an international tribunal, however, would help to bring international actors to justice.

16. While the Government was taking steps to improve the situation for women and girls in conflict zones, it was difficult to implement effective measures during an ongoing conflict and its efforts were often directly undermined. Despite its best efforts, the Government had not been able to implement a stable framework capable of generating the desired results.

17. **Ms. Akia** said that it would be helpful to have a first-hand account of the forms of conflict-related sexual violence that were being perpetrated in the country.

18. **A representative of the Democratic Republic of the Congo** said that sexual violence in conflict areas most often took the form of military sexual slavery, which sometimes resulted in forced pregnancy and exposed women to sexually transmitted infections. Women detained by armed groups usually lacked access to healthcare.

19. **A representative of the Democratic Republic of the Congo** said that the specialist department reporting to the Head of State on youth and combating violence against women and trafficking in persons, which she headed, had identified the following forms of sexual violence in her country: sexual violence committed by one aggressor; sexual violence committed by two or more aggressors; abduction resulting in sexual slavery; sexual mutilation; public sexual violence, including cases where sons had been forced to rape their mothers in public; sexual violence against men and boys, including cases where tribal chiefs had been raped by M23 rebels as a form of humiliation; sexual violence that resulted in forced pregnancy and/or sexually transmitted infection; sexual violence against children; and sexual violence as a tactic of war. It had also been observed that female victims of sexual violence suffered an additional form of victimization as they were often stigmatized and rejected by their communities and families.

20. **Ms. de Silva de Alwis** said that she would like to know what steps were being taken to ensure that outside actors who effectively fuelled the conflict in the State party through their acquisition of minerals from armed groups did not escape accountability. She would be particularly interested to know whether the Government took any action to ensure that companies and private actors were brought to justice under the relevant legislation that had

been passed in other jurisdictions, such as the Conflict Minerals Regulation in the European Union and section 1502 of the Dodd-Frank Act in the United States of America.

21. **A representative of the Democratic Republic of the Congo** said that his Government participated in and adhered to various international initiatives designed to ensure the sustainable management and traceability of natural resources. They included the Kimberley Process Certification Scheme for Rough Diamonds, the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative, the Forest Law Enforcement, Governance and Trade regulation of the European Union and the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora. The Democratic Republic of the Congo had also ratified the Paris Agreement. Furthermore, various pieces of national legislation had been passed to govern access to and exploitation of natural resources, including the Mining Code, the Forestry Code and the law on hydrocarbons of 2015.

22. However, the State could effectively apply the law only in areas where it exercised control. It was particularly difficult to enforce those pieces of legislation because the majority of its natural resources were found in territory that was currently under the occupation of the Rwandan army or rebel movements.

23. **Ms. Rana** said that she would be interested to know to what extent women's organizations and victims had participated in the development and implementation of the third national action plan for the implementation of Security Council resolution 1325 (2000). It would be useful to know when implementation of the action plan had begun and how it was funded. She wondered what measures were envisaged under the action plan to combat impunity for sexual and gender-based violence, particularly in cases involving militia fighters and military personnel who had committed acts of conflict-related sexual violence. At a more general level, she wished to know what specific measures were being taken to ensure and increase the participation of women's organizations and victims of conflict-related sexual violence in the development, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of laws and policies related to women and peace and security.

24. The Committee would welcome further information on the operations carried out by the national reparations fund for victims of conflict-related sexual violence and other crimes against the peace and security of humankind. She would like to know whether a dedicated budget had been allocated for the fund and how many victims had benefited from it so far. It would be interesting to learn what specific steps were being taken to ensure the availability of sufficient financial and administrative resources and the development of the necessary technical expertise to implement a holistic, victim-centred and inclusive transitional justice mechanism. She also wished to know what measures the Government planned to take to fill the void created by the withdrawal of MONUSCO, particularly when it came to addressing the security concerns of women and girls and, more broadly, promoting the women and peace and security agenda.

25. **A representative of the Democratic Republic of the Congo** said that steps were taken to ensure that victims actively participated in the planning, implementation and monitoring of the reparations processes carried out by the national reparations fund for victims of conflict-related sexual violence and other crimes against the peace and security of humankind. By law, the national reparations fund must allocate 3 per cent of its funds to women's organizations, victims' organizations and victim support organizations. The national reparations fund attached great importance to integrating Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) into the national peace and reconciliation strategy, and it had made plans to work with women at the local level to ensure that they played a full part in conflict resolution and prevention.

26. The national reparations fund had so far identified 220,058 displaced persons who were victims of conflict-related sexual violence and other crimes. Those people were in need of urgent assistance. The fund had therefore put in place emergency support measures for them, including medical and psychosocial care, assistance with social and economic reintegration, and legal support. Mobile clinics had been set up in November 2024 to provide that support at three camps in Goma and, to date, more than 10,000 displaced victims had received medical and psychosocial care. Around 58 per cent of those victims were women, and 20 per cent of them presented signs that they had been raped. Out of the 5,391 victims

identified in North Kivu who were suspected of being victims of sexual violence, 3,886 were women.

27. Since the Democratic Republic of the Congo was still beset by armed conflict, the national reparations fund frequently had to adapt its strategies. For example, it had been forced to abandon the efforts that it had made to support victims in Goma since that city had been occupied by armed groups.

28. The fund was an independent mechanism with various sources of funding. It received 11 per cent of all fees collected by the State from mining licence holders. At least 90 per cent of its financing was channelled directly into reparation programmes. The fund held consultations with victims' groups every three months, and no programme was implemented unless it received the support of victims on the ground.

29. **A representative of the Democratic Republic of the Congo** said that, on 19 November 2024, her country had become the third in Africa to adopt a third national action plan for the implementation of Security Council resolution 1325 (2000). The action plan provided for measures to strengthen women's participation in decision-making positions and in peace and security processes, to raise awareness of women's issues and to protect women and girls against gender-based violence. It also addressed emerging conflicts, conflicts over natural resources, trafficking in persons and urban crime. The concept of positive masculinity, which was strongly championed by the President, had also been included for the first time.

30. The third national action plan had a budget of \$26 million, to be financed by the Government and its domestic and international partners. Norway had already provided funds to support the dissemination of the document.

31. **Ms. Rana** said that the Committee would welcome statistical information on the participation of women in the peacebuilding process and negotiations. She would also welcome further information concerning the impact that the withdrawal of MONUSCO was having on the State party and any plans that had been put in place to address women and peace and security concerns following the cessation of its operations.

32. **A representative of the Democratic Republic of the Congo** said that MONUSCO had so far withdrawn from the provinces of Kasai Central, Tanganyika and South Kivu. Following a request made by the President, the Government had received financial assistance under the Peacebuilding Fund to support its efforts to ensure ongoing stability and peace during the transition period. Those funds had been used to support a number of programmes in Kasai Central and Tanganyika, addressing issues such as social cohesion, local governance and the implementation of durable solutions for displaced persons. Under those programmes, civil society organizations and women's associations were actively involved in efforts to set up local peace and security committees to bring formerly opposing parties to the conflict together.

33. A community policing approach was also being implemented to ensure the safety of all communities. Specific measures had been put in place to support the rehabilitation and reintegration of certain population groups, including income-generating activities for women and training for young people.

34. The Democratic Republic of the Congo had been declared eligible to receive support under the Peacebuilding Fund from 2020 to 2024. It had also received the support of bilateral cooperation agencies working in the justice and security sectors. The outcomes achieved over that period had been evaluated and a new request for eligibility covering new areas of the national territory had been submitted. The withdrawal of MONUSCO had not, therefore, left the country without resources or help. Rather, it had enabled the Government to work with its international partners on new strategies that were designed to protect civilians and ensure that women actively participated in all peace processes.

35. **A representative of the Democratic Republic of the Congo** said that the principle of equality between men and women was enshrined in the Constitution and, in recent years, the Government had adopted a number of laws and policies to promote gender equality. As a result, the number of women in decision-making roles had significantly increased since 2019. On the President's initiative, a law had been passed providing that only political parties

with a certain number of women members could participate in the elections of 2023. That measure had resulted in an increase in women's political participation and the number of female presidents of political parties. Women currently occupied over 32 per cent of government posts, including, for the first time ever, the office of Prime Minister. The number of women in leadership positions at the public administration and local government levels had also increased.

36. **Ms. Akia** said that the Committee would like to receive, in writing, a comprehensive overview of the national legal and policy framework that had been put in place to prevent and combat conflict-related sexual violence and promote the women and peace and security agenda.

37. **Ms. Mikko** said that it would be interesting to learn what changes had been made to decision-making processes since the State party had ratified the Convention in 1986 and how those changes had benefited women. She would also like to know what steps would be taken within political parties to increase the number of women taking seats in the legislative body, what measures were in place to eliminate electoral violence against women involved in politics, what the Government had done to protect women wishing to stand as candidates and whether the State party could indicate when it expected to reach parity within Parliament.

38. **A representative of the Democratic Republic of the Congo** said that over 30 per cent of government positions were held by women, including high-ranking positions such as the Prime Minister and the Minister of Foreign Affairs. To promote gender parity, deposit fees were waived for political parties that submitted candidacy lists comprising at least 50 per cent female candidates. Furthermore, public institutions headed by a male Director General must have a female Deputy Director General, and vice versa for public institutions with a female Director General.

39. **A representative of the Democratic Republic of the Congo** said that two of the nine judges of the Constitutional Court were women. Further efforts were needed to promote women's political participation and to encourage voters to vote for female candidates.

40. **Ms. Mikko** said that she would be grateful for further information on how the State party ensured the safety of female candidates who ran for election.

41. **A representative of the Democratic Republic of the Congo** said that there was no discrimination between male and female candidates on candidacy lists: the lists were compiled on a competitive basis and those likely to garner the most votes were put forward.

42. **A representative of the Democratic Republic of the Congo** said that, in the Kasai region, a provincial edict had been issued to discourage all practices that demeaned women and to encourage women's political participation. Furthermore, in regions such as Kasai and Tanganyika, a programme had been launched to prevent electoral violence, provide capacity-building training for women who wished to run for election and educate communities on supporting women's political participation. The programme's outcomes were being monitored.

43. **A representative of the Democratic Republic of the Congo** said that awareness-raising programmes at the local level were essential to help villagers understand the importance of voting for female candidates. Many women needed training in fundraising so that they had sufficient resources to run for election.

44. **A representative of the Democratic Republic of the Congo** said that acts of violence, discrimination and intimidation against political candidates, including female candidates, were prohibited under national electoral law. A complaint mechanism was available to candidates who were victims of harassment, and the presence of police and military units offered physical protection. The Ministry of Gender, Family and the Child organized awareness-raising campaigns to denounce gender-based political violence and encourage women to report such acts of violence. Members of non-governmental organizations and the United Nations were invited to observe national elections to monitor for instances of violence or discrimination.

45. **A representative of the Democratic Republic of the Congo** said that great efforts had been made to improve women's political participation under the current Government. To

give one example, women now made up at least 60 per cent of the Service of the Special Adviser to the Head of State on security.

46. **A representative of the Democratic Republic of the Congo** said that, as counsel for the prosecution at the Court of Appeal, and in her current position on the Supreme Judicial Council, she was proof of the success of the Government's efforts to involve women in decision-making bodies. Women now made up 25 per cent of magistrates, following the appointment of 814 new female magistrates in 2023.

47. However, the ongoing conflict was draining the efforts and resources invested in overcoming the social and cultural constraints affecting women's political participation. Women needed training to build their capacity and confidence to stand for election, and communities needed to be taught to trust female candidates. Paradoxically, men were more willing to vote for female candidates than women, as many women still held the belief that women were not sufficiently competent to hold political power.

48. **Ms. de Silva de Alwis** said that, given the link between armed conflict and the climate crisis, she would like to know whether the State party would consider expanding reparations to include climate change-induced violence against women. She wondered whether the State party's reparations fund provided compensation for the transgenerational harm affecting children born from rape.

49. She would be grateful if the State party could explain how the Criminal Code addressed the 10 categories of sexual violence and helped to shift the stigma surrounding sexual violence from the victim to the perpetrator. She wondered what measures would be implemented to protect women from sexual violence at high-risk locations, such as the installation of water distribution centres staffed by protection officers and the delivery of training sessions on violence prevention to park rangers.

50. She would welcome further information on the steps taken to address the illicit sale of small arms and light weapons in the criminal justice system and to implement Security Council resolution 2616 (2021) to that end. It would also be useful to know how the State party intended to implement Security Council resolution 2417 (2018) and to establish a humanitarian corridor to ensure access to food, water, medicine and other essential supplies.

51. **A representative of the Democratic Republic of the Congo** said that the Government was making every effort to incorporate intersectional issues into their policies on sexual violence, such as the link between sexual violence and climate change. She was keenly aware of the reality of transgenerational harm as she had been raped in the war as a child. Although she was now 28, knowing that others currently faced the same situation had prompted her to re-experience the trauma. In addition to the national reparations fund, programmes were in place to support specific groups, such as child victims of sexual violence linked to conflict, children born of war, including those born of rape, and children who had witnessed conflict. The programme ensured that children born of war had administrative documents, access to education and psychosocial care.

52. Furthermore, a reparations programme was available for victims who had obtained court judgments in their favour, in addition to a full administrative reparations programme targeting administrative victims who would benefit from registration on the victims' register. It included an act of recognition, compensation, medical and psychological care, and economic support at the collective and individual level.

53. A collective reparations programme had been implemented to rebuild public utility buildings destroyed by the conflict and provide support services to affected communities. Memorial spaces would also be rebuilt as important spaces for the community to gather. To prevent the reoccurrence of similar atrocities, all individuals who had participated in the conflict were prohibited by law from holding positions of responsibility at any level.

54. There were also programmes providing urgent provisional measures to groups such as internally displaced persons, allowing them to obtain access to rehabilitation and holistic care to improve their living conditions while they waited for reparation to be made. However, the M23 rebels and the Rwandan forces had razed all the camps for internally displaced persons on the outskirts of Goma to the ground, undermining the efforts of the Government and international partners to support that population. The Government was making strenuous

diplomatic efforts to establish a humanitarian corridor, but to no avail, since it did not control the area that was under attack.

55. Efforts were also made to instil a culture of peace in communities and to raise awareness of the reparation process among victims. While the law required victims to be identified before they could access the national reparations fund, it had been necessary to establish a mechanism to provide immediate assistance to those whose lives were in danger before they were granted victim status. It was estimated that up to 11 million Congolese, almost 10 per cent of the population, were direct victims of the conflict. The atrocities committed against the people of the Democratic Republic of the Congo had forced the Government to divert resources to humanitarian efforts and to focus on victims rather than investing in much-needed education, health and development.

56. **A representative of the Democratic Republic of the Congo** said that her Government had worked with the Government of the United Kingdom, other partners in the International Alliance on Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict and the United Nations Children's Fund to establish a mechanism to identify children born of rape.

57. **A representative of the Democratic Republic of the Congo** said that, when the Government refused to negotiate with armed groups, it did so out of a desire to break a vicious cycle. On several occasions, such negotiations had led to the integration of members of armed groups into the political and military institutions of the State, with the result that victims, particularly victims of conflict-related sexual violence, saw the perpetrators of crimes against them in positions of authority. The perpetrators were then able to continue to commit crimes against the victims, who lost all hope of seeing justice done.

58. In December, the Democratic Republic of the Congo had taken part in the proceedings before the International Court of Justice in December on the obligations of States in respect of climate change, in which it had sought compensation as a form of reparation for the people of the country, particularly women. However, the ongoing war in the eastern part of the country had destroyed the environment and undermined the Government's efforts to protect it.

59. **A representative of the Democratic Republic of the Congo** said that she wished to highlight the link between Security Council resolutions 1325 (2000) and 2467 (2019). The number of children born as a result of rape was a major challenge for the Democratic Republic of the Congo, as there would come a time when those children would seek to establish paternity. Lastly, the National Action Plan on the Control of Small Arms and Light Weapons for the period 2017–2021 had been undermined by the country's porous borders with its nine neighbours.

60. **A representative of the Democratic Republic of the Congo** said that sexual violence against women was undoubtedly linked to their collecting firewood, in particular in the world heritage site Virunga National Park, among other protected areas. One consequence of climate change was the multifaceted energy crisis, which increased the need for women to collect firewood, leaving them vulnerable to armed groups. Those groups, which were supported by the Government of Rwanda, also disrupted the ecological balance by reducing biodiversity in protected areas, for example by killing large numbers of elephants for ivory, which represented a source of funding for the war. Such areas were also regularly invaded by Rwandan armed groups in search of strategic minerals. Although the Government had established forces of armed park rangers, their weapons were far less powerful and sophisticated than those of their opponents. Neither the country's forests, often presented abroad as a solution to climate change, nor its women could be protected while the State proved incapable of exercising its sovereignty over those areas.

61. **A representative of the Democratic Republic of the Congo** said that the disarmament, demobilization, community recovery and stabilization programme was designed to address the underlying trends that fuelled violence, to help the State to establish the essential conditions for rebuilding conflict-affected communities and to support the responsible reintegration of former combatants into communities. The programme had a particular focus on young people and internally displaced persons, with a view to preventing their recruitment by armed groups. Former combatants were vetted before being reintegrated into communities.

62. **A representative of the Democratic Republic of the Congo** said that the Government was planning a programme for child victims that would provide for the late registration of births of children born as a result of rape. The Government had also planned a programme on access to drinking water for victims of conflict-related sexual violence, including the digging of wells in camps for internally displaced persons. However, the security situation had delayed the launch of both programmes.

63. **A representative of the Democratic Republic of the Congo** said that the numerous, interconnected challenges that her country faced were especially acute in such areas as Virunga National Park, where security had been reinforced, with community patrols ensuring the protection of women who were collecting firewood. In addition, such women had access to renewable energy sources, including biogas and solar power. Furthermore, under the reforestation programme of the Ministry of the Environment and Sustainable Development, women were able to contribute to sustainable forest management. A system had been established for monitoring and documenting incidences of violence related to fetching firewood and water.

64. The Government sought to raise women's awareness of their rights, of the risks presented by collecting firewood and of environmental issues. It also provided for women's economic empowerment, including microcredits and the promotion of income-generating activities, to obviate the need to collect firewood. Further training was provided to strengthen women's capacity for leadership and participation in community decision-making. Women were also given training on access to and management of drinking water resources.

65. To facilitate access to justice, a toll-free number was made available, enabling women to report instances of rape or violence. They received psychological support and legal aid and were referred to care centres for survivors of sexual violence.

66. **A representative of the Democratic Republic of the Congo** said that he wished to highlight the psychological support offered by the Government and its partners, in particular the United Nations Joint Human Rights Office in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, to woman victims of violence. Rape victims were often ostracized by their community because of entrenched traditional beliefs about raped women. While joint programmes with partners had helped the residents of camps for internally displaced persons to grow their own crops on plots of land, the efforts under the programmes had been suspended because of the attacks on the camps. The Government would submit a resolution to either the Security Council or the Human Rights Council calling for access to humanitarian access to areas beyond its control.

67. A wide range of laws were in place to prevent the illegal carrying of firearms. However, the country's borders were porous and non-State actors in the country had access to both small arms and heavy weapons, in violation of arms embargoes imposed by the Security Council. Sanctions had to be imposed on Rwanda because its Government not only supported M23, but actually had troops on the ground in the Democratic Republic of the Congo; such a situation constituted aggression.

68. The Government did not reject dialogue with rebel groups. However, it had decided that members of those groups could not be integrated into the Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, which was reserved for those who had undergone military training. The appropriate forum for dialogue with such groups was the Nairobi peace process led by the East African Community, to which the Government remained committed, although M23 had been encouraged by others to abandon the Nairobi process and take up arms again. The Luanda process was reserved for political negotiations between his Government and the Government of Rwanda.

69. **Ms. de Silva de Alwis** said that she would be interested to learn about the extent of women's involvement in decision-making in respect of the Nairobi process. More details of how the State party involved women and girls in conflict prevention, conflict resolution and peacebuilding, pursuant to Security Council resolution 2467 (2019), would be useful. She also wished to know how the United Nations Rules for the Treatment of Women Prisoners and Non-custodial Measures for Women Offenders (the Bangkok Rules) and the United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners (the Nelson Mandela Rules)

were applied in the State party. In addition, she wondered if the Government might reconsider its reintroduction, on 5 January 2025, of the death penalty.

70. **Ms. Akia** said that, notwithstanding the State party's efforts to end impunity for conflict-related sexual violence, the numbers of convictions and prosecutions for such offences were not commensurate with the number of cases. In the light of the high volume of cases and the limited ability of both national and international courts to deal with them all, she wished to know whether the State party was exploring other international criminal law strategies, such as universal jurisdiction and command responsibility, to ensure that military and civilian officials were held accountable.

71. She would welcome information on how the State party was investing in strengthening the rule of law and good governance to ensure access to high-quality and affordable justice, including legal aid for victims of conflict-related sexual violence and the eradication of any corruption in the justice sector. In addition, she would appreciate statistical data on the number of investigations, arrests, arrest warrants, successful convictions and sentences handed down or disciplinary measures taken against the perpetrators of conflict-related sexual violence committed against women and girls. Lastly, more information on the commission of inquiry that had been established on 9 June 2023 to investigate possible acts of violence committed by the Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo in Goma and Kwamouth would be welcome.

The meeting rose at 1 p.m.