

STATEMENT ON COUNTERING TERRORISM AND UNCONSTITUTIONAL CHANGE OF GOVERNMENT

Dr Vincent Biruta, Minister of Foreign Affairs - Rwanda

Malabo, 28 May 2022

Thank you, Chairperson for giving Rwanda the floor.

Allow me to first take this opportunity to express our appreciation to the Government of Equatorial Guinea for the warm hospitality, and for the excellent arrangements laid out, for this important Extraordinary Summit on Countering Terrorism and Unconstitutional Change of Government in Africa.

Terrorism and violent extremism are threats that have been continuously expanding across the continent. In addition, there is a link between terrorism and international organized crimes that often facilitate unconstitutional changes of government.

This calls for our collective efforts and consolidated counter-measures to ensure that we can tackle together this growing threat that is affecting our continent.

Rwanda expresses full support, particularly to regionally-based mechanisms and strategies, geared towards addressing these inter-connected and complex threats.

We therefore welcome the recommendation for the review of the Africa Standby Force concept, to consider the current security contexts and trajectories.

In particular, Rwanda wishes to underscore the urgent need to address underlying conditions that drive resentment towards government, and feed into extreme violence and unconstitutional changes of government.

Good governance practices should be intentional, and form part citizen-centered, inclusive service delivery. Additionally, credible electoral processes should be part of preventative approaches.

We call upon Member States that haven't done so, to ratify the African Union Convention on Cross Border Cooperation, which provides for exchange of intelligence information and effective counter-terrorism measures.

Rwanda will continue to engage at multilateral, regional, and bilateral levels, to provide peace support operations, on the continent and beyond.

It is essential for the African Union, in collaboration with partners, to provide necessary financial and technical support, for African-owned and African-led counter-terrorism efforts, that fully respect human rights and rule of law.

We need to continue to secure increased funding for peace support operations, and counter-terrorism initiatives, and hereby appeal to Member States to continue contributing to the Peace Fund, to enable it to fulfil its obligations and commitments.

Last but not least, on the baseless accusations made by the Democratic Republic of Congo against Rwanda:

First, I would like to stress that, for close to 30 years now, there has been consistent collaboration between the FARDC (Congolese Armed Forces) and the Rwandan FDLR armed group based in Eastern DRC.

It is deplorable that the FDLR, which harbors a long-term sinister plan to destabilize Rwanda, has been tolerated and preserved by the DRC.

Over the years, they have sanitized this genocidal armed group, to the extent that the FDLR are currently co-located, and fighting alongside the FARDC.

Rwanda wishes to reiterate that the FDLR and its various splinter groups pose a serious security threat, not only to Rwanda, but to the entire region.

There have been several bilateral and regional initiatives, designed to address the serious threat of the FDLR, but the DRC government has persistently shown reluctance to implement these agreed plans.

It is therefore irresponsible and diversionary of the DRC to insist only on combatting M23, while conveniently ignoring the FDLR, which it has hosted for all these years.

Specifically on the issue of M23, these are Congolese nationals with grievances against their own government. We therefore wish to underscore that this is an internal Congolese issue, which should be resolved internally.

It is worth recalling that the ex-M23 combatants who fled to Rwanda in 2013 were disarmed, and continue to be cantoned far away from the DRC border, as agreed by the regional mechanism at the time.

Rwanda has facilitated various engagements between these ex-M23 combatants and the DRC Government, which culminated in a repatriation roadmap. But the DRC has shown lack of commitment or interest to implement the existing roadmap.

The recent Nairobi Summit gave clear guidelines on how the issue of armed groups in Eastern DRC can be resolved.

However, the DRC government has shown lack of political will to abide by the Nairobi Summit resolutions holistically. Instead, they have been engaging with these armed groups selectively.

It is deeply disturbing that the DRC has been quick to blame Rwanda, in order to ignore its obligations. In addition, the DRC has tried on several occasions to drag Rwanda into its domestic security issues.

Specifically, there has been a series of FARDC military provocations against Rwanda, including shelling on Rwandan territory, which cannot be tolerated as normal business.

These provocations have occurred as recently as this week when FARDC rocket shelling hit Rwandan territory injuring several civilians and damaging property.

This followed another incident of cross-border shelling on Rwandan territory which occurred on 19th March 2022. The Government of DRC was notified both times about these serious incidents.

While it would have been legitimate for Rwanda to respond, we have instead consistently requested for investigations of these provocations, by the Expanded Joint Verification Mechanism of the ICGLR.

Let me reiterate this to my Congolese brother: It is true that I indicated to him, that Rwanda has the right to respond. Our President, His Excellency Paul Kagame, pointed this out very clearly to his Congolese counterpart.

Whether now, or in the future, Rwanda, like any other country in a similar situation, would have a right to respond on such provocations.

Excellency Chairperson, I wish to emphasize again that the M23 is a Congolese internal problem, which should be resolved by the framework of the recent Nairobi Summit.

Rwanda hence appeals to the DRC to observe good neighborliness, own up to her problems, and avoid apportioning blame where it none exists.

There are several initiatives in place to address the existing problems, but without political will, we will remain in a vicious cycle of undesirable and destructive conflicts.

The Government of Rwanda has been consistently engaged, politically and diplomatically, with the Government of the DRC to jointly handle security threats and promote good relations.

We encourage the Government of the DRC to de-escalate its rhetoric and abide by agreed mechanisms, so that we can all continue collaboration to restore security and long-term stability to our region.

We conclude by reiterating Rwanda's commitment to the established regional initiatives, including the Expanded Joint Verification Mechanism of the ICGLR and the Nairobi process under the East African Community.

Excellencies, I thank you for your kind attention.