

**Liberata Mulamula:**

**(Transcription from webcast)**

This dialogue comes at the right time following the independence of South Sudan. As you rightly mentioned, I will present here on the International Conference of the Great Lakes Region. And some people frequently ask me, “Madam Ambassador, when is this conference going to take place?” But, it is not a conference as such; it is an institution - a regional/sub-regional organization that brings together 11 countries. Countries, some of them, that have emerged from long years of conflict, countries that have been working very hard to bring peace and security in the Great Lakes Region. The draft report of the UN Secretary-General’s submitted before this meeting we think constitutes a very good basis for the interactive dialogue in recognition of the roles played by the sub-regional and regional organizations in the Responsibility to Protect and structural prevention. Which is, as stated in the report, is less understood and less appreciated. So we are here to share with the member states our story from the Great Lakes Region.

I would like to start by putting in context the important subject matter of RtoP. And as you rightly mentioned, Mr. President, the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region was born out of the ashes of the tragic genocide in Rwanda and the conflicts that embroiled the region, of the DRC Civil War of 1998-2003, that drew in a dozen other neighboring countries, which was described as the third world war. At one time the countries of the Great Lakes region produced more refugees and internally displaced persons than any other region in the world. Therefore, the context of RtoP and the pillars, as explained in the report of the Secretary-General, were well manifested in the Great Lakes region much earlier given the realities of the region.

The context was actually well articulated by the former President of the United Republic of Tanzania, his excellence Benjamin Mkapa, when he told his fellow leaders in Dar es Salaam at the first ground breaking summit of the International Conference of the Great Lakes Region in his opening statement, allow me to quote here, he said, “In the aftermath of the genocide in Rwanda, and in light of the massive influx of refugees in the Great Lakes Region, it is inevitable to conclude that the principle of non-intervention in the ...internal affairs of the states can no longer find a codified absolute legitimacy. The possibility for intervention must be placed on the table as part of the regional strategy for durable peace and security. The states must firmly be placed on notice that the humanity we all share bounds that we should collectively have an interest in human rights, in its promotion as well as in protection.

Governments must first be held responsible for the life and welfare of their people [and this is the first pillar]. But there must also be commonly agreed rules and benchmarks that would

trigger collective action through our regional organizations and the UN against governments that commit unacceptable human rights abuses or threaten regional peace and security.” Mr. President, the spirit of that statement was embodied in the Dar es Salaam declaration that was adopted following that Summit and the regional pact on security, stability and development for the Great Lakes Region that was adopted by the heads of state and government in 2006 in Nairobi with the collective vision to transform the region from a conflict region to a haven of peace and prosperity for the people.

So, Mr. President, therefore by the time the concept and the norm of RtoP was developed at the World Summit in 2005 the subject was both desirable and acceptable in the Great Lakes Region. The International Conference Of the Great Lakes region pact, therefore, contains most of the ingredients of RtoP and the regional mechanism is on course to ensure that all that causes mass violence, mass killings and general instability is never again in the Great Lakes Region, the challenges notwithstanding. What was still in dispute, of course, was the scope and concept of the intervention beyond the humanitarian requirement. Mr. President, I was privileged to be appointed in this position to put in place the institutional mechanism that would translate the vision of our leaders into reality. Four years in this job I must say, it’s not what has been achieved in the region, but how far we have come. Our headquarters is based in Burundi, and you know the sad history of Burundi, but as I am speaking today, Mr. President, I can say that Burundi is on the right track, it has undergone two democratic elections, and now I can say it is certainly stable and peaceful.

Mr. President, I want to draw your attention to the specific and relevant provisions of the pact, which has become a charter of the Great Lakes Region with regard to RtoP. First and foremost Article 20 Paragraph 1 of the International Conference pact states that the member states, I quote, “undertake to find lasting solutions to guarantee protection and assistance to populations affected by political conflicts in the Great Lakes Region” it further provides that “a member state [and I want to emphasize here] that is unable or unwilling to honor its obligations under this pact shall account for its failure before the summit, which will determine the consequences of such failure.” The pact further encompasses various programs of action and binding protocols including the protocol on the protection in their systems to internally displaced persons, the protocol on the prevention and punishment of sexual violence, the protocol for prevention and punishment of the crime of genocide, war crimes, and crimes against humanity, and all forms of discrimination, which is our subject today. As a matter of fact, I wanted to correct the record in the Secretary-General’s report, which states that the AU convention on IDPs was the first. I must say that the AU convention on the internally displaced people drew expression from this first ever regional protocol and pact.

Mr. President, let me briefly touch on the three pillars. First and foremost, the pillar on the decisive response, in the context of Great Lakes Region as a component of RtoP, does not necessarily entail military or coercive measures per se by the region. But where need be the region can intervene. For example, in 2008 the heads of state at the Extraordinary Summit in Nairobi, following the crisis in the Eastern DRC, warned in their joint statement that the Great Lakes Region would not stand by to witness incessant and destructive acts of violence by any armed groups against any innocent people in the Democratic Republic of Congo. If and when necessary, the Great Lakes Region will send peacemaking forces into the Kivu province of the DRC. This fortunately did not happen as the situation was brought under control through a negotiated settlement facilitated by the former President Olusegun Obasanjo of Nigeria who was the Special Envoy of the UN Secretary-General and the President Benjamin Mkapa of Tanzania who was the envoy of the Great Lakes Region. Mr. President, RtoP can be placed in the context of the implementation of the Great Lakes Region protocol on the prevention and punishment of the crime of genocide referring to the institutional and capacity building of the region to confront these serious crimes.

The International Conference of the Great Lakes Region is immensely grateful to the support and cooperation received by the office of the special advisors to the Secretary-General on the prevention of genocide and the Responsibility to Protect. The Office of the Special Advisor on Prevention of Genocide with the Office of the High Commissioner on Human Rights supported training and the meeting that established the regional committee on the prevention and punishment of genocide and other crimes. This was launched last year in September 2010 to implement the protocol in each member state. So by establishing this committee the onus now was put on the member states and together to come up with a common strategy to ensure never again, and to come up with policies that would draw from interactive engagement of the grass roots and the communities. So this committee brings together the countries of Angola, Burundi, Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Rwanda, the Republic of Congo, Uganda, Kenya, Sudan, Republic of Tanzania and Zambia, which make up the members of the International Conference of the Great Lakes Region. This committee was officially launched at the summit of the heads of state last year in Zambia, and it is headed by the member states, including Burundi as the chair, Kenya as the vice chair and Central African Republic as the Rapporteur and the Secretariat is providing the Secretariat for services.

So, this regional committee was a ground breaking in starting the implementation of the commitments that were made by the heads of state. The functions of the committee, in brief, first of all were to regularly review the situations in each member state for the purpose of preventing genocide, war crimes, and crimes against humanity, and to correct the analyses information related to these war crimes, and to allot the summit of the conference in good time in order to take relevant measures to prevent potential crimes.

So what imbued and embodied in this work of this committee on early warning is the prevention and early response. The international support in this regard has been quite positive as demonstrated, as I said, by our partners that range from the civil society, from the academia, from the group of friends of Great Lakes Region to transform the historical discourse and practice of war and violence to that of prevention and punishment in the region. In this regard we have signed a memorandum of understanding with CSOs to strengthen cooperation. The article establishing this committee recognizes that this effort as actors, including the African Commission on Human and People's rights, civil society organizations, agencies of the UN system and any other body that is well placed to furnish it with information is welcome to assist with the mandate. In this regard, we have signed a number of agreements and memorandum of understandings with these institutions so as to strengthen the cooperation and punishment that is vision in the Secretary-General's report.

So Mr. President, I want to emphasize here that the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region is built on the very same pillars that the Secretary-General has advanced in its report and I hope through the interactive dialogue we will be able to engage all member states and be able to address challenges that with the good intentions and political will demonstrated by our leaders – we still have a long way to go.

First of all, we have a challenge of the implementation gap, or a so-called deficit in meeting the expectations and obligations committed by the member countries and the leaders. The interpretation of RtoP is of a military intervention as we've seen with the case of Libya. And the challenge of linking regional initiatives to national initiatives – my colleagues who are from the organization with me are aware that there is always enthusiasm at the regional level, but which is not replicated at the national level. We also are undergoing electoral processes and you know of our countries history with elections it is sometimes make it or break it and this is where the challenge of RtoP comes into play.

Also I would like to address the role of the media. For the history of our region, the media has not played a good role, especially with the situation in Rwanda. And of course more importantly, the issue of poverty and unemployment. So, Mr. President, I don't want to leave here painting a grim picture or an idealistically optimistic picture, but I must say that we've come a long way. There is a committed leadership in the region to fight these crimes, the lessons of Rwanda as it joined the region and international commitment to ensure never again. And for the Great Lakes Region secretariat we are ready to work with you and to work with all of our partners to ensure that never again.