

**Second Summit of the International
Conference on the Great Lakes Region**

Unon-Nairobi, December 14 -15, 2006

On behalf of the Group of Friends
of the Great Lakes Region

STATEMENT
Mr. DEEPAK OBHRAI, M.P.
PARLIAMENTARY SECRETARY TO THE
MINISTER FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS OF
CANADA

December 14, 2006

_ Your Excellency Mwai Kibaki, President of the Republic of Kenya and Chair of the International Conference of the Great Lakes Region,

_ Your Excellency Jakaya Mrisho Kikewate, President of the United Republic of Tanzania and past Chair of the International Conference of the Great Lakes Region,

_ Your Excellency Denis Sassou-Nguesso, President of the Republic of Congo and Chairperson of the African Union,

_ Excellencies, heads of state and government
of the countries of the Great Lakes Region,

_ Your Excellency, Omar Konaré, President of
the Commission of the African Union,

_ Your Excellency Joseph Legwala,
Representative of the Secretary General of
the United Nations,

_ Ministers,

_ Distinguished Representatives,

_ Ladies and Gentlemen,

_ On behalf of the Group of Friends of the Great Lakes Region, and representing the Canadian Minister for Foreign Affairs, I am pleased to add my own congratulations to our host, the Government of Kenya, for its warm welcome, and to the United Nations for its generous offer to hold the Summit on its grounds in Nairobi.

_ As we reach the climax of two years of intense preparations, I also wish to commend the Joint UN-African Union Secretariat and its team of experts led by Professor Ibrahima Fall, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for the Great Lakes Region, for their unflagging commitment and contribution to the Conference.

_ That we are gathered here today is a tribute to the successful conclusion of the political transition process of the Democratic

Republic of the Congo. The maturity of the Congolese people, the supportive influence of the DRC's neighbours and regional partners, and the involvement of the international community, notably the UN and the European Union, all contributed to a successful outcome of the presidential and parliamentary elections.

_ The International Conference on the Great Lakes Region was years in the making. The UN Security Council Presidential Statement of April 24, 1997, called for "the holding at an appropriate time of an international

conference on peace, security, democracy and development in the Great Lakes region of Africa, with the participation of all Governments of the region of the Great Lakes and Central Africa and all others concerned.”

— When propitious conditions finally prevailed, the international community answered the call. The Group of Friends was created at the request of the United Nations after the first meeting of national coordinators held in Nairobi in June 2003. They foresaw correctly that partners who had played a key role in

accompanying the inter-Congolese dialogue and the transition talks on Burundi should support the regional forum that would buttress these national processes.

_ Canada, who had been closely involved in these and similar initiatives in the region, was approached to bring together these partners and took on the challenge with the help of the Netherlands.

_ It is a measure of the commitment of the international community to support peace

and confidence-building in a troubled region that is emerging from genocide and several years of conflict, that every single country that we approached in the summer of 2003 to join the Group of Friends said yes.

_ In addition, all the major UN and regional institutions involved in the region also joined in.

_ Members of the Group contributed to a substantial trust fund set up to finance most of the conference process, both at the regional and at the national level. The Group

provided assistance, not only to the Joint Secretariat and the National Preparatory Committees of the eleven core countries, but also to civil society organizations to ensure their participation at all stages of the consultations.

_ Besides this financial contribution, members of the Group put at the disposal of the Conference various technical experts to assist in the drafting of the Pact and provided political and diplomatic support throughout.

Together we have achieved our objective.

Tomorrow, a significant milestone will be reached as Heads of State and government formalize their joint commitments in a Pact, thus bringing to a successful closure, the preparatory phase of the Conference.

The eleven Members States will inaugurate a new era of cooperation in which they will drive implementation of all the integral parts of the Pact. A key element of your full ownership of this unprecedented endeavour is the creation of the first coordination mechanism for the Great lakes region. As with any newborn, its initial months will be full of expectation and probably a few hiccups as well.

For this reason, the Group of Friends will extend its financial support for a six-month transition period as core countries take over Secretariat functions for the conference and

consolidate their National Coordination mechanism.

I am pleased to announce on its behalf, that Germany intends to continue to provide technical support for the implementation process. This support would extend until December 2007.

The Group of Friends will look forward, as well, to the early ratification and implementation of the Pact. It will continue its political and diplomatic support in this regard.

Mr. President,

The Group of Friends believes that this

Conference has the potential to become the regional peace-building forum for the prevention, management and peaceful settlement of conflicts. The genesis of this conference is the desire to put an end to suffering and conflict in the core of the Great Lakes. With a regional framework in place, it could also address any issue that threatens the sustainability of peace and promotes well-being throughout the eleven countries of the region. As the proposed Programme of Action of Peace and Security intends, this

will require joint and coordinated efforts of neighbouring countries and with regional institutions.

Several initiatives identified by the Conference have the support of the Group of Friends.

Speaking for Canada, we consider that projects on demobilization and reintegration of ex-combatants are crucial to the region's progress towards good governance and economic recovery. We intend to support regional peace-building projects, for example, that address the plight of returnees, stem the flow of small arms and

light weapons, promote de-mining techniques and assist countries in stemming the illegal exploitation and illicit trading of natural resources.

Mr. President,

In conclusion, allow me to recall that the Group of Friends includes all the major countries and institutions that are active as your partners throughout the region. As your partners, we remain committed in our respective ways, to playing our part as you set about transforming the Conference from a confidence building forum into a “space of

sustainable peace and security for States and peoples, political and social stability, shared growth and development, a space of cooperation based on the strategies and policies of convergence with the framework of a common destiny.....as you, Heads of States and Government, declared in Dar es Salaam, on November 20, 2004.

I thank you Mr. President.

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