

**Statement by ASG Andrew Gilmour during the opening ceremony of the
technical-level consultation organised within the framework of the
*“High-level regional conference on justice and good governance: Combating
impunity and upholding human rights as key contributions to peace and
security”***

Nairobi, 13 May 2019

Excellencies,

I would like to endorse all the words expressed by my fellow colleague, SRSR Xia. I am thrilled to be associated with this event and have just arrived from New York to be here for it. The High Commissioner for Human Rights and I feel that we need to take stock of actions taken to combat impunity and strengthen human rights in the Great Lakes region, and, even more importantly, to address remaining challenges.

Terrible violations continue in parts of the region. Justice is a vital prerequisite for the development of peaceful societies based on the rule of law. So long as perpetrators feel they can brutalise with impunity, without accountability, we will see no real peace, no justice, no sustainable development, and no human rights.

Accountability is required so that families and survivors can learn what happened to their loved ones in order to heal and rebuild their lives, and to be

able to feel at least an element of consolation when serious violators are convicted.

We need to understand and develop synergies between accountability and prevention. These synergies are mirrored as well in the Agenda 2063 and in the SDGs, including Goal 16 on peaceful, just and inclusive societies. Our Office is fully engaged in supporting the implementation of this critical Goal.

Addressing conflict requires us to look at its root causes, often based on systemic inequalities, discrimination and exclusion. Impunity fuels these drivers. Societies that strive to uphold human rights and the rule of law for all individuals and all communities create safeguards that prevent them from descending into violence, extremism and instability.

The Great Lakes region has a solid regional architecture to achieve accountability and end impunity, including the ICGLR Pact and Protocols. However, agreeing on protocols is one thing and not always the hardest part. Implementing them presents altogether different challenges. If there is one thing we in the UN really know about, it is the unfortunate gap and disparity **not so often** between principled words and practical actions.

The fact that violations continue, in some places on a massive scale, within the region; that many perpetrators, both state and non-state, continue to enjoy impunity; and that victims continue to be denied an effective remedy all fuels further grievances and instability.

This is especially so as some perpetrators have taken advantage of porous borders and limited state authority in parts of the region to escape prosecution by crossing over into neighboring states, where they continue their destabilization.

We are encouraged that some countries have started transitional justice processes, including in the areas of truth-seeking, criminal justice and institutional reform.

But, it's vital that the countries of the region get together to coordinate their actions and to encourage one another to make further progress. This High-Level Conference is a key step in this regard.

What we would really like to see as the outcome of this High-Level Conference is a Nairobi Declaration and also a Roadmap, including actionable recommendations to advance the fight against impunity and the promotion of human rights and justice, with clear timelines and specific benchmarks that include elements to promote gender equality and inclusive societies.

We strongly encourage Member States to put in place a mechanism to ensure the implementation of recommendations contained in the (Nairobi) Declaration and to measure progress made against the timelines and benchmarks that will be included in the Roadmap. Only if that happens will we have a chance of bridging the gap between words and deeds.

To conclude, I would just like to underline that the participation of civil society representatives in this conference is very welcome, and our office underscores our commitment to stand with civil society representatives in the region and indeed across the globe. We are aware and concerned about the threatening environment in which they operate, confronting daily efforts including violence to discourage them from mobilizing and speaking out for justice and against human rights violations and inequality. We certainly can't claim that governments and UN agencies have any monopoly of wisdom or virtue. And the inputs of Civil Society Organisations in deciding on efforts to promote development, peace and justice are more crucial than ever.

So thank you all for coming to this meeting. We are delighted to be working with so many distinguished and committed partners in this essential project to fight impunity in the Great Lakes region.