

**Speech by Agnes van Ardenne–van der Hoeven,
Minister for Development Cooperation of the Kingdom of the Netherlands and
co-chair of the Group of Friends of the Great Lakes Region,
at the second summit of the
International Conference on the Great Lakes Region,
Nairobi, 14 and 15 December 2006**

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

As the Dutch co-chair of the Group of Friends, I find it an honour and a pleasure to address this second summit of the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region.

When we started this process, the Great Lakes Region was in flames. The Democratic Republic of Congo was the scene of one of the most terrible wars in African history. At that time, it was hard to imagine that only a few years later the warring parties would be sitting together to address their problems peacefully.

We have come a long way. The elections in the Democratic Republic of Congo, the elections and the ongoing reconciliation process in Burundi, and the peace talks between the government of Uganda and the LRA are all encouraging signs. Over the past years you have shown that dialogue not only was possible but could also be successful and that, by working together, one could find solutions to the most intractable problems.

The International Conference on the Great Lakes Region has facilitated this dialogue. It has contributed to restoring confidence in the region and has provided the Conference's core countries with the tools to address regional conflicts in a peaceful manner. The rise in confidence and the will to work together in times of both peace and conflict is one of the Conference's major achievements. On behalf of the Group of Friends I wish to congratulate you on this.

The first phase of the Conference resulted in the Declaration of Dar es Salaam. This Declaration, adopted and solemnly signed at the first Summit by all Heads of State of the region, presents a common vision and includes principles and actions that reflect African ownership as well as African solidarity and partnership. During the second phase of the Conference, following directly on from the first Summit, you faced the challenge of finding ways to implement this Declaration. The Pact on Security, Stability and Development before us today is the tangible result. By signing this historic document, you have committed yourselves to the protocols

and plans of action that form the Pact. It is a strong signal of your commitment to advancing the agenda for peace in the region. It is the seal on the success of this Conference. It is a victory over hatred, a victory over violence, a victory for the people of the Great Lakes region.

As the Dutch co-chair of the Group of Friends, I want to commend you on this victory. The combination of mutual confidence and political commitment to eradicating violence, injustice, poverty and humanitarian suffering from the region will lay the basis for a peaceful future for your peoples, your countries and your continent.

The way ahead

The Summit not only celebrates the success of the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region, it also marks the start of a new phase in which you, the core countries, will take full ownership of the process: politically, technically and financially. Your decision to set up your own conference secretariat to take over the important tasks currently carried out by the UN/AU Conference Secretariat is a good illustration. Let me, on behalf of the Group of Friends, congratulate you on deciding on a seat in Bujumbura and appointing an executive secretary. May I wish the latter all the best with the important task ahead of her. As the Canadian co-chair of the Group of Friends said yesterday, the Group stands ready to support you in setting up the new conference secretariat. I am looking forward to working with you in the future.

Another sign of your ownership of the follow-up process is of course the Special Fund for Reconstruction and Development that you are planning to set up. This will be the first Fund in which the countries of the Great Lakes Region pool their resources to jointly address the region's most urgent needs. Your decision to contribute to this Fund clearly shows your political commitment to following through on the pledges made in both the Declaration of Dar es Salaam and the Pact for Security, Stability and Development.

You will need all hands on deck in the coming months and years even to implement the Pact successfully. In the past few years, the Conference has brought together politicians, civil servants, representatives of women's and young people's organisations, NGOs and civil society from the Great Lakes region. This partnership has ensured a broad support basis for the preparation of this second Summit and the Pact on Security, Stability and Development that you have just adopted and signed. It should continue to play an important role after this second Summit. Because this partnership between governments and their peoples will bear a very great responsibility: to safeguard the Pact, to push for national ratification, and to ensure that all parties follow through on the commitments they have made.

The partnership should not however be limited to the national level. Implementation of the Pact also requires partnership between the countries of the Great Lakes region, and between the region and the international community.

The international community has supported the region for many years. That has not been limited to the support given in the framework of the Group of Friends. Much has been given bilaterally and through multilateral institutions. As I said before, with this Summit, the Conference is entering into a new phase in which the region takes full ownership of the process. The Group of Friends may no longer play such a prominent role, but international support for the Great Lakes region through both bilateral relationships and multilateral institutions will remain.

As the Dutch Minister for Development Cooperation, I am committed to support you in your endeavours to consolidate peace and stability and to eradicate poverty in the region. I am convinced that your efforts to enhance political stability, economic cooperation and integration in the region and to attract investments in critical social and economic infrastructure will be key in the years to come.

Therefore, –and I am now speaking specifically as a representative of the Dutch government and not as co-chair of the Group of Friends- the Netherlands will provide its political and financial support for regional security and stability, good

governance, sustainable development and economic integration in the crucial transborder regions

Also, the Netherlands is prepared to increase its assistance to the Regional Centre on Small Arms in Nairobi to cover regional activities identified by the Great Lakes Conference in the fight against the proliferation of small arms.

Finally, the Netherlands is willing to offer an annual Course on International Relations and Diplomatic Practice tailored to the needs of diplomats from the core countries. I have asked the Netherlands Institute for International Relations Clingendael to set it up.

Mr Chairman,

Over the past few years, you have built this vessel we call the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region. With this Summit you are setting sail towards enduring peace, stability and democracy for your people. The compass is in your hands. I wish you a prosperous voyage.

Thank you.