



# Security Council

Seventy-fourth year

**8456<sup>th</sup>** meeting

Monday, 4 February 2019, 10 a.m.

New York

*Provisional*

*President:* Mr. Obiang Nguema Mbasogo/Mr. Esono Angue . . . . . (Equatorial Guinea)

*Members:*

Belgium . . . . .	Mr. Pecsteen de Buytswerve
China . . . . .	Mr. Ma Zhaoxu
Côte d'Ivoire . . . . .	Mr. Amon-Tanoh
Dominican Republic . . . . .	Mr. Singer Weisinger
France . . . . .	Mr. Delattre
Germany . . . . .	Mr. Heusgen
Indonesia . . . . .	Mr. Djani
Kuwait . . . . .	Mr. Alotaibi
Peru . . . . .	Mr. Meza-Cuadra
Poland . . . . .	Ms. Wronecka
Russian Federation . . . . .	Mr. Nebenzia
South Africa . . . . .	Mr. Matjila
United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland . . . . .	Mr. Allen
United States of America . . . . .	Mr. Cohen

## Agenda

### Threats to international peace and security

Mercenary activities as a source of insecurity and destabilization in Africa

Letter dated 31 January 2019 from the Permanent Representative of Equatorial Guinea to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General (S/2019/97)

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*The meeting was called to order at 10.10 a.m.*

### **Expression of thanks to the outgoing President**

**The President** (*spoke in Spanish*): I should like to take this opportunity to pay tribute, on behalf of the Council, to His Excellency Mr. José Singer Weisinger, Special Envoy to the Security Council of the Dominican Republic, for his service as President of the Council for the month of January. I am sure I speak for all members of the Council in expressing deep appreciation to Ambassador Singer Weisinger and his team for the great diplomatic skill with which they conducted the Council's business last month.

### **Adoption of the agenda**

*The agenda was adopted.*

### **Threats to international peace and security**

#### **Mercenary activities as a source of insecurity and destabilization in Africa**

#### **Letter dated 31 January 2019 from the Permanent Representative of Equatorial Guinea to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General (S/2019/97)**

**The President** (*spoke in Spanish*): I wish to warmly welcome the Ministers and other representatives present in the Chamber. Their presence today underscores the importance of the subject matter under discussion.

In accordance with rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representatives of Chad, the Central African Republic, the Congo, Djibouti, Egypt, Gabon, Rwanda and the Sudan to participate in this meeting.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite His Excellency Mr. Moussa Faki Mahamat, Chairperson of the African Union Commission, to participate in this meeting.

Mr. Mahamat is joining the meeting via video-conference from Addis Ababa.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

I wish to draw the attention of Council members to document S/2019/97, which contains the text of a letter dated 31 January 2019 from the Permanent Representative of Equatorial Guinea to the United Nations addressed

to the Secretary-General, transmitting a concept note on the item under consideration.

I wish to warmly welcome the Secretary-General, His Excellency Mr. António Guterres, and give him the floor.

**The Secretary-General** (*spoke in Spanish*): I would like to thank the presidency of Equatorial Guinea for having organized this high-level debate on the activities of mercenaries as a source of insecurity and destabilization in Africa and in particular, pursuant to the concept note before us (S/2019/97, annex), in Central Africa. I welcome the presence of the President of the Republic of Equatorial Guinea at this meeting.

*(spoke in English)*

The use of mercenaries dates back through the ages. From antiquity to the medieval era to the present day, those who fight for financial reward or other material compensation have been a near constant on the battlefield. The shadowy nature of the practice makes data hard to come by, but reports suggest a surge in the use of mercenaries and other foreign fighters.

While the numerical picture may be murky, the impacts of mercenaries today are all too clear. The presence of mercenaries and other foreign fighters worsens conflict and threatens stability. Some mercenaries go from war to war, plying their deadly trade with enormous firepower, little accountability and complete disregard for international humanitarian law. Mercenary activities undermine the rule of law and perpetuate impunity. They abet the illegal and inequitable exploitation of a country's natural resources. They provoke large-scale displacement and intercommunal tension. Even Machiavelli, famously tolerant of questionable behaviour, wrote in *The Prince* that mercenaries are "disunited, undisciplined, ambitious and faithless".

The nature of mercenary activities has evolved over the years. Today, they are exploiting and feeding off other ills, such as transnational organized crime, terrorism and violent extremism. In Africa, the focus of today's discussion, mercenary activities remain a serious concern. We have seen illicit activities and trafficking by terrorist and mercenary groups operating in the Sahel, as well as the alleged involvement of mercenaries in post-election violence in Côte d'Ivoire in 2010.

Mercenaries and other foreign fighters have committed innumerable violations of human rights and humanitarian law against civilians in the Central African Republic. They have also suppressed movements of herders along traditional routes, such as the border with Cameroon. In retaliation for repeated attacks, pastoralists have hired other armed groups or rebels to protect themselves and their livestock, thereby fuelling the cycle of violence. Equatorial Guinea itself has reported serious attempts against, its own Government. Indeed, last year, Ambassador Anatolio Ndong Mba of Equatorial Guinea underscored to the Council the need for “vigilance and control of groups that sow insecurity and instability” (*S/PV.8156, p. 10*). Meeting these challenges requires action on many fronts.

First, we must bolster the legal regimes, globally and nationally. Only 35 States are parties to the International Convention against the Recruitment, Use, Financing and Training of Mercenaries, adopted by the General Assembly in 1989 (resolution 44/34). Equatorial Guinea recently acceded to the Convention and will become the 36th party later this month. Only three current members of the Security Council have done so. I call on those States that remain outside the Convention to accede to or ratify it without delay.

The legal framework also includes important African instruments, including the Organization of African Unity Convention for the Elimination of Mercenarism in Africa and the Central African Convention for the Control of Small Arms and Light Weapons, their Ammunition and All Parts and Components That Can Be Used for Their Manufacture, Repair and Assembly. The United Nations Regional Office for Central Africa and the United Nations Regional Centre for Peace and Disarmament in Africa will continue to support implementation of these standards, which will help advance the African Union’s Silencing the Guns by 2020 agenda.

Strengthening the legal regime also means bringing more precision to it. The international legal definition of a mercenary is very narrow, and therefore poses a challenge to effective investigations and prosecutions.

Secondly, we need to increase bilateral, regional and international cooperation. Cooperation on border management will be crucial to stemming the largely unhindered flow of weapons and foreign armed actors throughout Central Africa. Such steps could include mixed border commissions, joint

border security monitoring mechanisms and regular intelligence-sharing between national defence forces.

Cooperation will also be essential for building the capacity of national institutions responsible for justice, security and human rights to carry out these vital functions and to implement the relevant legal instruments. A State must be able to exercise a monopoly on the use of force within its territory, with armed forces and police capable of protecting people while upholding the rule of law. The strategic partnership between the United Nations and the African Union, the Economic Community of Central African States and countries of the region is vital. I thank African Union Commission Chairperson Moussa Faki Mahamat for his excellent cooperation. The United Nations Standing Advisory Committee on Security Questions in Central Africa is a further part of the picture, and Interpol is among the other organizations with an important role to play.

Thirdly, we need to examine the political, economic, social and psychological factors that give rise to mercenary activities. The United Nations Working Group on the Use of Mercenaries has recommended a wide range of steps, including combatting exclusion, improving civic engagement, ensuring good governance, delivering equitable public services, and ensuring protection for minorities and other vulnerable groups.

Enhanced efforts to create opportunities for young people will be critical to reducing the lure of mercenaries and the threat of radicalization. We must also do more to empower women and to address the gender dimensions of mercenary activities. Our work to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals can help us in all of these areas — yet another reason to accelerate those efforts.

The United Nations stands ready to continue to support Governments in tackling mercenary activities, including by deepening our dialogue with the relevant regional organizations and national institutions. I urge all countries to cooperate with the United Nations Working Group, including those that the Group wishes to visit. Together, let us strengthen our work across the spectrum of this challenge, from prevention to prosecution, and from mitigating the impacts of mercenary activities to addressing the root causes that give rise to them.

**The President** (*spoke in Spanish*): I thank the Secretary-General for his briefing.

I now give the floor to Mr. Faki Mahamat.

**Mr. Faki Mahamat** (*spoke in French*): I am pleased to address the Security Council for the second time in less than three months in the context of a high-level debate on issues of importance to Africa. I regret that constraints related to the preparations for the Summit of the African Union, to be held this weekend, have prevented me from being with the Security Council in person. I thank President Obiang Nguema for having invited me to this debate, which marks the beginning of the Equatorial Guinean presidency of the Security Council. I wish every success to this presidency, which is representative of Africa as a whole.

At a time when our continent is stepping up efforts to promote peace and security, it is necessary that we consider all sources of insecurity and instability. Mercenarism clearly constitutes one such challenge that must be addressed. The choice of this topic therefore represents a concrete contribution to realizing the goal of the Silencing the Guns by 2020 initiative. The African Union looks forward to the outcome of this debate.

Unfortunately, the history of our continent is replete with examples of mercenary involvement in destabilization activities, including coups d'état, interventions in armed conflicts and attempts to take control of the natural resources of the countries concerned. As early as the 1960s, when our countries were working to consolidate their independence, some were faced by this phenomenon. The consequences have been devastating in terms of violence, human rights violations and additional threats to the security and stability of the countries in question. That situation clearly poses a serious threat to the independence, sovereignty, territorial integrity and harmonious development of African States. In the light of that situation and the serious concerns to which it has given rise, the Organization of African Unity adopted its Convention for the Elimination of Mercenarism in Africa in 1977. The Convention entered into force in April 1985. It enabled the establishment of continental norms concerning mercenary activities, while at the same time encouraged a number of cooperation initiatives at the continental level.

Despite those efforts, the scourge of mercenarism continues to persist. In that regard, it is worth noting

the continued destabilization activities involving mercenaries. The most recent example, in fact, concerns Equatorial Guinea, where an attempted coup d'état involving a number of foreign mercenaries was foiled a few months ago. I take this opportunity to reiterate the African Union's solidarity with Equatorial Guinea on the heels of that destabilization attempt. Similarly, the sometimes porous nature of African borders and the transnational nature of the security challenges facing the continent have encouraged the mobilization of foreign fighters to serve as mercenaries in conflicts tearing apart some countries.

Another such development is the emergence of private security companies. Clearly, this is often a matter of legal entities that transact with Governments, but their existence and proliferation nevertheless pose challenges that warrant special attention. In that regard, the second Africa Forum on Security Sector Reform, held in October 2018 by the African Union Commission, recommended the revision of the 1977 Convention for the Elimination of Mercenarism in Africa, with a view to adapting it to developments since its adoption and providing it with an implementation and monitoring mechanism. More specifically concerning private security companies, the Forum recommended the development of a continental regulatory and supervisory framework. The African Union Commission is currently working on the follow-up to those recommendations and, to that end, will consult various international partners, including the United Nations.

Today's debate provides us with an opportunity to identify practical measures that can help end the scourge of mercenarism once and for all. It is clear that we must strengthen the international instruments related to this phenomenon. The aim here is to expedite the signature and ratification of existing instruments, as well as to ensure their effective implementation. I note with concern that the International Convention against the Recruitment, Use, Financing and Training of Mercenaries has been signed and ratified by only a limited number of United Nations Member States. It is equally important to strengthen cooperation among States, including in the areas of intelligence and prosecution. Without effective coordination, our work will not be effective.

Likewise, it is crucial to provide increased assistance so that States can strengthen their capacity to confront the scourge of mercenarism more effectively. More precisely, focus must be placed on security sector

governance and, in the case of countries emerging from conflict, on disarmament, demobilization and reintegration processes. With regard to the latter, we can never sufficiently stress the risks posed by the failure to complete such processes.

Lastly, I underscore the fact that the fight against mercenarism must be part of the overall context of promoting peace and security on the continent. Experience has shown that mercenaries often operate in conflict areas. The African Union is actively engaged on that front in the framework of its Silencing the Guns by 2020 campaign. I welcome the United Nations support for those efforts, in particular the commitment of Secretary-General António Guterres.

The African Union is determined to play its full role in the fight against the scourge of mercenarism and to mobilize its member States to that end, but this struggle against a phenomenon that is transnational in nature cannot succeed without the full cooperation of other international actors. I therefore renew my call for increased international cooperation and support.

**The President** (*spoke in Spanish*): I thank Mr. Faki Mahamat for his briefing.

I now call on the Minister for Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation of Rwanda.

**Mr. Sezibera** (Rwanda): I address the Security Council today on behalf of His Excellency President Paul Kagame, who was invited in his capacity as Chairperson of the African Union to contribute to this important discussion, which will help us highlight the threat posed by mercenary activities to peace and stability in our region. I bring the Council his greetings and good wishes for the success of this meeting.

I also take this opportunity, on behalf of President Kagame, to congratulate His Excellency President Obiang Nguema Mbasogo and the Government of Equatorial Guinea as they steer the work of the Security Council for the month of February. You, Sir, can count on the active support of the African Union and Rwanda during your presidency. You represent our common goal to achieve substantial progress in promoting peace and prosperity in Africa and all over the world.

The issue of mercenaries has a long history in Africa and has presented a grave threat to the independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity of Member States. In reaction to that threat, the Organization of African Unity (OAU) established the Convention for the

Elimination of Mercenarism in Africa, as adopted by the Heads of State and Government of OAU member States in 1977. The term “mercenaries” at that time was used to refer to persons recruited locally or abroad to fight for financial or material gain. However, that definition, including the mercenary activities covered in the 1977 Convention, may no longer be adequate to describe mercenary activities in Africa today.

It is important to make a distinction between the role played by providers of military and security services that are operating within a clear national legal framework and mercenary groups that are operating clandestinely to provide military support to groups determined to destabilize constitutional order and authority.

Mercenaries are part of a worrisome increase in the incidence of transboundary criminal networks, some of which are well financed and have sophisticated communication and military equipment, and many of which are connected to global terrorist networks. The Council is aware that Rwanda is among the countries of the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region that have been victims of such cross-border terrorist networks, as reported to the Council in document S/2018/1133. It is for that reason that the Council can count on our full support for the objectives you, Sir, have outlined for this meeting.

Mercenaries today are not only involved in active combat; we now see an increase in cyberattacks and industrial espionage carried out by mercenary groups from the comfort of their homes. They continue to evolve and innovate. We cannot, and should not, be static in our response. Therefore, the existing policy frameworks of the African Union and of the International Convention against the Recruitment, Use, Financing and Training of Mercenaries of 1989 need to be updated in order for them to cope with emerging realities. For its part, the African Union will review the 1977 Convention with a view to further strengthening its provisions.

In conclusion, to address and neutralize the threat of mercenary activities in Africa, we must take robust measures to deal with this persistent source of instability on our continent. Only a collective and well-coordinated approach at the regional and international levels will allow us to end the phenomenon of mercenary activity by disrupting its financial networks and cross-border recruitment, thereby defeating its operations.

I thank the President again for his decision to raise awareness of this critical matter.

**The President** (*spoke in Spanish*): I shall now make a statement in my capacity as the President of Equatorial Guinea.

It is an honour and source of great satisfaction to welcome the representatives of Heads of State and Government, dignitaries and guests and to thank the Secretary-General for joining us in this special meeting of the Security Council devoted to the issue of peace and security in Africa and, more specifically, the question of mercenary activities as a source of insecurity and destabilization in Africa.

We consider the election of the Republic of Equatorial Guinea as a non-permanent member of the Council and our assumption of the presidency of the Council, which we are initiating today, as a sign of the confidence of the international community in our country and our policies. I would like to take this opportunity to thank the Member States that have placed their trust in us. Since we began our term as a member of this high-level decision-making body, we have endeavoured to be proactive, objective and constructive in addressing the urgent issues on the Council's agenda, while remaining true to the principles of the Charter of the United Nations.

Today's meeting is especially significant for the presidency of Equatorial Guinea because it is devoted to a subject that is one of the key concerns and challenges that affect peace, security and stability on the African continent. Armed conflicts have been a feature of humankind since the beginning of history and have varied greatly in terms of their motives, implications, contexts and actors. Yet there is one curious phenomenon that is common to all civilizations and all wars in every historical period but has somehow escaped the regulation of the modern world, namely, the phenomenon of mercenary activity.

The African continent finds itself in a very difficult situation in the face of the threat of mercenary activity and other phenomena, such as terrorism, trafficking and trade in illicit arms, piracy, poverty, the spread of endemic diseases and natural disasters caused by climate change, which are interacting to create chaos and insecurity and seriously delay the development of African countries.

Most African countries have never experienced peace or socioeconomic development since gaining their independence more than 50 years ago, despite their great economic potential in natural resources. Africa remains the least developed continent. The mercenary phenomenon is one of the potential causes of that lagging behind. The hidden interests of mercenaries have been striving to prevent Africans from enjoying the enormous benefits of having control over our own destinies. That is why to date stamping out that phenomenon has also been an integral part of the struggle for our sovereignty. That evil phenomenon has gradually set new goals, such as controlling our natural resources and technology for development, to be part of the global geostrategic struggle.

We note that almost all the conflicts in Africa are, or have been, punctuated by the presence and activities of those veritable soldiers of fortune. Mercenary threats are latent in all their forms in our subregion of Central Africa, as well as throughout the whole African continent. The persistent existence of mercenaries on the continent poses significant challenges, such as violations of human rights, obstacles to the self-determination of peoples, violations of international humanitarian law, misery, plundering of the wealth that belongs to the people, assassinations of political leaders, overthrows of legitimate Governments and other obvious criminal activities. In the case of Central Africa, its features are particularly attractive because its natural wealth and strategic location have made it a propitious target for those unscrupulous criminal networks.

Mercenary activities in Africa have been devastating and constantly lead us to face major challenges, such as obstacles to the self-determination of our peoples. The negative consequences of that phenomenon are indicative of the danger and threat that mercenary activities pose to peace and security on the continent.

My country, Equatorial Guinea — a peaceful country — began to be attractive to the interests of mercenaries since the discovery of oil in the 1990s. It is thanks to the peace we enjoy that we have been able to reach unprecedented levels of overall development. We are aware that mercenary activities would lead only to a reversal of such development and cause bloodshed among our brothers. The Government of the Republic of Equatorial Guinea therefore strongly condemns the existence of mercenary activities on the African continent.

Equatorial Guinea could have suffered the same horrors and calamities as the mercenary wars if the five attempts to invade the country through the use of that diabolical system of foreign intervention had been successful. We would like to point out that, over the last 24 years, we have been victim of five attempts at mercenary incursions, the ultimate objective of which was to overthrow the legitimate Government of Equatorial Guinea, with the sole intention of seizing the country's resources and depriving the people of them, to support their own hidden interests.

Those elements carried out activities that were as diverse as they were violent, in the form of robbing banks, attacks on the residence of the Head of State and even an assassination attempt on me, together with my entire family, in December 2017, among others. We are grateful to the Governments of Angola, Zimbabwe and Cameroon for their cooperation in defeating those attempts to invade.

We are aware that, as long as our countries still have their natural resources, they will remain attractive bait for those groups. That is why, once again, Equatorial Guinea wants to alert this high-level organ that mercenary groups still continue to act with absolute impunity in Africa, thereby endangering the security and stability of our countries. We urge the United Nations, especially the Security Council, as well as the partners and friends of Africa, to confront mercenarism, just as they do terrorism and piracy, because they are all the same.

In the statement I delivered during the general debate of the General Assembly at its sixtieth session on 17 September 2005 (see A/60/PV.10), I called for greater attention to be paid to the phenomenon of mercenarism by convening a special session of the General Assembly. We believe that such a step could have generated global awareness of the issue and, possibly, led the interests behind the phenomenon to consequently reconsider their activities. It also could have served as a preventive measure that could have spared the international community and this organ from subsequently having had to deploy some peacekeeping operations in our region. I would like to reiterate that same appeal today, as well to point out the urgent need to update legislation on mercenaries so as to cover all the permutations that have evolved.

It is important to analyse the root and causes of this phenomenon and seek lasting solutions that can

reinforce the stability and development of our countries. That includes finding out who are intellectually and materially responsible for this phenomenon, its executors and origins; in other words, it involves getting to the bottom of the matter. The international community must be involved in this issue, just as it is involved in counter-terrorism.

In spite of what I have said, the absence of prosecution of this phenomenon under international law is strange, as is the fact that the perpetrators are not held criminally responsible. That creates a vacuum in international law and impunity for these groups. I would like to take advantage of the opportunity afforded by this debate to recall the international instruments that deal with mercenaries, which reflect the concern of the United Nations and the African Union, both of which agree that mercenary activity is such an important factor in global violence and destabilization that it is imperative to eradicate that activity. I would like to underscore the following documents: the International Convention against the Recruitment, Use, Financing and Training of Mercenaries, of 4 December 1989; the Organization of African Unity Convention for the Elimination of Mercenarism in Africa, of 1977; and all the relevant General Assembly resolutions. The substance and spirit of existing international legislation on mercenaries is in line with the concerns of the Government of the Republic of Equatorial Guinea and, I dare say, of all of Africa in general. However, there is still a long way to go, and we must do it together and in a spirit of solidarity. Only in that way will we be able to optimize our achievements in this essential area.

Finally, we understand that the contractual relationships that might be established in accordance with international law between legitimate Governments and private security and defence companies that have been legally established in their respective countries have a legal status and cannot be equated with the activities of banned unscrupulous groups.

I now resume my functions as the President of the Council.

I give the floor to the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Côte d'Ivoire.

**Mr. Amon-Tanoh** (Côte d'Ivoire) (*spoke in French*): Allow me, first of all, to express the regrets of His Excellency Mr. Alassane Ouattara, President of the Republic of Côte d'Ivoire, who, owing to scheduling constraints, could not attend this high-level debate to

which you, Mr. President, kindly invited him. I would therefore like to extend to you, Mr. President, his warm congratulations on your country's assumption of the presidency of the Security Council for the month of February, and to assure you, Sir, of Côte d'Ivoire's full support in carrying out your tasks. I am also pleased to express my appreciation for the timely initiative of this debate on the impact of the phenomenon of mercenarism on international peace and security, particularly in Africa. Finally, I would like to congratulate Mr. António Guterres, Secretary-General of the United Nations, and Mr. Moussa Faki Mahamat, Chairperson of the African Union Commission, for the quality of their briefings and the appropriateness of their recommendations.

Unfortunately, mercenarism is an old and widespread practice. It is characterized by the formation of armed groups, comprising large and extremely well-armed combat forces who are ready to fight on behalf of the highest bidder, and thereby pose a lasting threat to the peace and stability of States and regions. This practice is inadmissible and cannot be allowed to continue.

Several African countries have been continuously victimized by the destabilizing activities of mercenaries, as defined by the Organization of African Unity Convention for the Elimination of Mercenarism in Africa of 1977 and the International Convention against the Recruitment, Use, Financing and Training of Mercenaries of 1989, which aim to criminalize such activities. To this day, these activities are a source of major concern on the continent, particularly in Central Africa.

It is undeniable that the appetite for natural resources, political and social divisions within countries and cross-border conflicts contribute greatly to the growth of mercenarism. It is even more true that illicit mining and trade in natural resources, fuelled by weakened State authority resulting from the political instability of some Central African countries, encourages the continuation of mercenary activities in that region.

Indeed, in an environment of instability, the armed groups that thrive in areas not controlled by the State are involved in various illicit trafficking activities, including the recruitment of foreign mercenaries to increase their numbers. That dialectic is well described by the various reports of United Nations groups of experts on the Democratic Republic of Congo and the

Central African Republic, which reveal that armed groups and mercenaries that generally occupy areas rich in natural resources become involved in the illicit exploitation and trade of those resources.

In a report on the situation in the Central African Republic contained in document A/HRC/36/47/Add.1, the Working Group on the use of mercenaries as a means of violating human rights and impeding the exercise of the rights of peoples to self-determination, which was established by the Human Rights Council, found that mercenaries had taken advantage of the fragile security situation in the Central African Republic to carry out criminal activities, including murder, looting and the destruction of private property, as well as the imposition of illegal taxes on local populations. Such organized criminal activities weaken States, hamper their development, fuel armed conflict and undermine the international community's peacekeeping and peacebuilding efforts. Faced with the threats posed by mercenary activities, particularly in Central Africa, our response must be collective and include the three international, regional and national dimensions.

My country welcomes the efforts of the international community, including the United Nations, to put an end to mercenarism and punish those who engage in it. The international community, in particular the United Nations, has repeatedly condemned the use of mercenaries, which threatens global peace and security. A further step was taken when, on 4 December 1989, the General Assembly adopted the International Convention against the Recruitment, Use, Financing and Training of Mercenaries. That was followed by the establishment, in 2005, by the Commission on Human Rights, now the Human Rights Council, of the Working Group on the use of mercenaries as a means of violating human rights and impeding the exercise of the right of peoples to self-determination.

However, Côte d'Ivoire remains concerned about the low level of interest in that Convention, which remains the main legally binding instrument at the international level. Moreover, my delegation would like to encourage all Member States that have not yet signed it to conclude the formalities, with a view to extending the scope of the Convention once it is ratified by those States.

The only specific and binding instrument at the regional level is the Convention for the Elimination of Mercenarism in Africa, adopted in 1977 by the



Organization of African Unity, now the African Union. Also at that level, only 30 African countries have ratified the Convention, while the African continent continues to be the region most threatened by mercenary activity. My country therefore calls on all African States to ratify that document in order to increase the means of combating mercenarism on our continent.

In addition, it is vital to strengthen cooperation with a view to finding coordinated solutions to the issue of securing common borders and repatriating mercenaries as part of the disarmament, demobilization and reinsertion or repatriation processes implemented in some countries in Central Africa, in particular the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Central African Republic.

Côte d'Ivoire welcomes the significant progress made in the fight against mercenarism, particularly the adoption and entry into force of the International Convention against the Recruitment, Use, Financing and Training of Mercenaries. By making participation in mercenary activities an offence subject to mandatory universal jurisdiction, that document is an important tool in fighting the impunity enjoyed by that scourge. The perpetrator of an offence can now be tried by any State party to the Convention on whose territory he is arrested. My delegation remains convinced that the effective implementation of existing instruments of international law will be a decisive step in the process of combating mercenarism.

In conclusion, I would like to reiterate that it is by pooling our resources that such progress can be made in order to free Africa from the harmful consequences of mercenarism, thereby enabling the affected regions to find again the right path to peace, stability and prosperity.

On that note of hope, I would like to reiterate my congratulations to you, Mr. President, on the wise choice of this topic, as well as my sincere wishes for success in your conduct of the presidency of the Security Council throughout the month of February.

**Mr. Cohen** (United States of America): I would like to thank you, Mr. President, for convening today's meeting, which is focused on African countries but is relevant throughout the world. I would also like to thank the Secretary-General and Chairperson Faki Mahamat for their remarks today and to welcome the ministers who are joining us in the Security Council. The United States congratulates Equatorial Guinea on

its presidency of the Security Council. We look forward to working closely with your delegation, Mr. President, on pressing matters of peace and security this month and throughout the remainder of its term on the Security Council. We also congratulate the Dominican Republic on its excellent work during its presidency of the Council in the month of January.

We share your concern, Mr. President, that stability in Central Africa is undermined by the activities of mercenaries and terrorist organizations that foment both internal and international conflicts. Private military companies or mercenary groups that act without a mandate, oversight or accountability have played a destabilizing role throughout history and, in the most extreme cases, have sought to take power from sovereign Governments. In conflict areas around the world, there are instances of private military actors conducting operations that are detrimental to peace and security. By way of two examples, in Syria, we have seen private military actors conduct defensive combat operations to attempt to seize territory in the middle Euphrates river valley and in the Central African Republic, private military actors are operating in mining areas to exploit that country's natural resources. I would like to make three points that place today's debate in the broader context of the peace and security challenges facing the Council.

First, we must remain focused on the worrying trend of terrorist and violent extremist activity on the African continent, where in recent years the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant, Al-Qaida and other terrorist organizations have increased the lethality of their attacks and expanded their area of operations. The deplorable attack on civilians at a business and hotel complex in Nairobi on 15 January was a stark reminder of the threat posed by such terrorist groups.

Secondly, State fragility leaves many countries more vulnerable to terrorism, violent extremism and armed conflict. When we encourage accountable, transparent governance, promote the rule of law and support fiscal transparency, we are doing the essential security-promoting work of strengthening State capacity and fostering self-reliance.

Thirdly, given the growing youth population of many African countries, it is essential to foster economic opportunities that offer young people the chance to thrive and prosper. We know that armed groups, rebel leaders and terrorist organizations recruit young men

who have few alternatives. We must encourage the adoption of policies that improve the business climate, develop Africa's middle class and provide a path forward for sustainable and inclusive economic growth. Finally, the United States would like to draw a sharp contrast between illegal destabilizing mercenary activities and the legal legitimate role that private military and security companies can play in many places, including in Central Africa. Private security actors train national militaries, provide logistics support to United Nations and African Union (AU) peace operations and protect facilities. Actors operating in such roles in accordance with all applicable laws and the consent of host Governments contribute positively to the maintenance of peace and security across the continent. For example, the United States Global Peace Operations Initiative has invested nearly \$1.2 billion since 2005, frequently operating with private security contractors to build the capacity and readiness of forces to take part in United Nations and AU peace operations.

We again thank you, Mr. President, for convening this important meeting. We look forward to continuing to work together on this topic, which is central to the future of international peace and security.

**Mr. Nebenzia** (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): I welcome you, Mr. President, to New York. We are happy to see you presiding over the Security Council. This is the first meeting of the Council under the presidency of Equatorial Guinea in the month of February. We are grateful to you, Sir, for having honoured us with your presence on this important occasion and for setting the tone of the presidency of Equatorial Guinea for the month of February. We will fully support our friends from Equatorial Guinea. We would like to thank the Secretary-General and the Chairperson of the African Union Commission for their briefings. We also thank the Ministers for Foreign Affairs of the African States for attending this meeting. We are grateful to Equatorial Guinea for organizing and conducting today's discussion. It is no secret that the activities of soldiers of fortune, despite being a criminal offence in many countries, including Russia, are still an unwelcome reality of contemporary armed conflicts. In that regard, mercenarism in Africa, the topic of today's debate, is more relevant than ever.

We would like to draw attention to the fact that the use of mercenaries is often directly linked to interference in the internal affairs of sovereign States. The Declaration on the Inadmissibility of Intervention

and Interference in the Internal Affairs of States, adopted by the General Assembly in 1981, stipulates a ban on the training, financing and recruitment of mercenaries and their deployment on the territory of another State. It also refers to the obligation of States not to carry out any activities aimed at violating the integrity or at undermining or overthrowing the political system of other States. We live in a time when that appeal is more relevant than ever. An unconstitutional change of Government and the violent overthrow of a State regime with external support are therefore inadmissible. However, mercenaries are often recruited and financed for precisely such tasks.

Foreign mercenary companies have played a particularly nefarious role on the African continent. The use of mercenaries to fight national liberation movements in Africa and to prevent peoples under colonial oppression from exercising their right to self-determination remains a stain on the conscience of a number of Western States.

Even after their independence, young African States faced attempts by the colonial Powers to carry out coups d'état using mercenaries, who were often involved in atrocities and the torture and executions of civilians. Guided by self-interested economic goals or the desire to prevent the establishment of independent Governments with differing ideological views, those former colonial masters wilfully carried out violations of the principles of international law condemning colonialism, racism and foreign hegemony.

The issue of the nefarious activities of mercenaries in various African States has been repeatedly considered by the Security Council, which has consistently pointed to the inadmissibility of the use of foreign fighters to destabilize States and violate their territorial integrity and sovereignty. Their malign activities are also used in the fight to control Africa's rich natural resources, which is one of the key sources of the problems facing Africa: the fight to control Africa's rich natural resources.

We are aware of the fact that Equatorial Guinea recently had to confront such challenges and managed to confront them. We share its concerns in this regard and strongly condemn any form of interference in the internal affairs of a sovereign State.

Many conflicts in Africa, including those externally provoked, are often breeding grounds for the activities of criminals of all stripes. The clearest example in this context is the crisis that followed the regime-change

operation in Libya, which dealt a devastating blow to the entire system of regional security and led to a large-scale influx of weapons and criminal elements into the countries of the Sahel. We call on those devising similar plans to carefully consider what that short-sighted policy in Libya led to. Similar policies should not be applied to other regions.

The problems in Central and West Africa are compounded by the activities in a number of countries of illegal armed groups, as well as terrorist and extremist organizations, whose members are fighting not only for their distorted political or ideological goals, but also for money.

Of particular concern is the situation in Mali, the Lake Chad basin and the Great Lakes region. In order to successfully combat these challenges, what is required is not only decisive action by national and regional armed forces, but also the suppression of external financial flows that fuel mercenary and extremist activity. We are convinced that in order to eradicate these phenomena, it is vital to achieve a lasting resolution of conflict; strengthen State institutions, first and foremost in the security sector; and implement measures promoting socioeconomic development.

In many cases, the support of the international community is needed, and such assistance should be provided only at the request of the countries concerned. Colonial approaches should become a thing of the past, and certain practices that have become State policy, from blackmail, threats and provocations to the use of force against sovereign States, should also be consigned to history.

We would note that the challenges and threats facing the Central African region, including mercenary activities, are interlinked and interconnected, and that the States themselves are highly interdependent. Destabilizing the situation in one country could send shockwaves through the entire subregion, undermining the security of neighbouring countries. It is therefore extremely important to monitor the situation very closely.

We support the quest for African solutions to the problems facing the continent, including the problem of mercenary activity. A relevant impetus could be provided by updating the 1977 Organization of African Unity—predecessor of the African Union—Convention for the Elimination of Mercenarism in Africa. We believe that that document laid important groundwork

for collective efforts to prosecute and eradicate such illegal activities on the continent.

**Mr. Djani** (Indonesia): Mr. President, it is an honour to have Your Excellency here with us today, setting the tone of Equatorial Guinea's presidency for this month of February. Let me also congratulate you and your delegation for having convened this very open debate on an important theme. Rest assured that Indonesia will fully support your presidency.

We would like also to thank the Secretary-General, António Guterres, and Mr. Moussa Faki Mahamat, Chairperson of the African Union Commission, for their respective statements.

Mercenaries, whether local entities, foreign fighters or private military or security companies involved in illegitimate operations, have exacerbated numerous conflicts in many parts of the world, including in Africa. These guns for hire, driven not only by monetary gains but at times also by various ideologies and other *raison d'être*, have been used by some States, non-State actors and businesses.

As also reported by the Working Group on the use of mercenaries as a means of violating human rights and impeding the exercise of the right of peoples to self-determination, mercenaries run a wide gamut, from the criminality of human, arms and drugs trafficking to the theft of precious natural resources, targeted killings, kidnappings and other savagery at the behest of parties desiring a particular conflict outcome. Mercenaries create a vicious circle of crime and human rights abuses. They have many faces, ranging from commercial criminals to foreign terrorist fighters and radical extremists.

Indonesia is deeply concerned at the danger that the activities of mercenaries represent for international peace and security. We call for full respect of the sovereignty, constitutional order and territorial integrity of countries and non-interference therein. In that light, we concur with the need to better regulate the mercenary phenomenon.

To ensure that mercenary activities do not cause insecurity and destabilization, Indonesia additionally underlines the following four points: first, capacity-building; secondly, regional and subregional contributions; thirdly, the responsibility of States; and, fourthly, respect for international law and humanitarian law.

First, State capacity-building and the consequent writ of a State over all of its territory are crucial. Examples abound of situations in which conflict and weak institutions have led to lands being exploited by terrorists and mercenaries for their nefarious purposes.

The strengthening of capacity must also entail rule-of-law, judiciary and other law-enforcement machinery. Effective State prosecution of mercenary activities provides credible deterrence. While the State must be accountable to citizens for their protection, it is also vital that civil society, media, youth and women all play positive and cohesive nation-building roles. Economic development and assistance to countries is also important in order to achieve economic resilience, which would deter civilians from becoming mercenaries or helping mercenary causes.

Secondly, we emphasize the contribution of regional and subregional organizations.

In that context, Indonesia fully supports the African Union (AU) Agenda 2063, with its key pillar of a conflict-free Africa, as well as the five thematic priorities of the African Union Master Roadmap of Practical Steps to Silence the Guns in Africa by 2020. The AU initiative "Silencing of the Guns: Prerequisites for realizing a conflict-free Africa by the year 2020" — is an essential plank for curbing mercenary activity and very laudable. A successful outcome of that mechanism, including the AU-United Nations Framework for the Implementation of Agenda 2063 and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development will significantly elevate peace, security and development on the continent. Africa knows what is best for Africa. However, those mechanisms need the full support of the United Nations and other partners. We need to engage other international and regional organizations, including those in the field of transnational crime, as well as other organizations.

For its part, Indonesia, through its bilateral assistance programmes to Africa in multiple fields, as well as its contributions to eight United Nations peacekeeping operations, has been relentless in that regard. We have approximately 1,757 Indonesian troops and police deployed in United Nations peacekeeping missions in Africa. We remain determined to stand shoulder to shoulder with our African brothers and sisters. In that regard, we also urge the Council to examine how mercenary activity has created greater threats to United Nations peacekeepers in the

fulfilment of their mandates and to their personnel safety and security.

Thirdly, we reiterate that all countries need to exercise high vigilance against the menace posed by mercenaries, including by ensuring that any territories under their control are not used for and their nationals do not take part in any negative activities involving mercenaries. These include financial, material and political support to them for the purposes of destabilizing the legitimate Government of any State. No business organization should be left unaccountable for the unlawful use of mercenaries to promote its commercial interests. Furthermore, private military and security company personnel worldwide must also be held fully accountable for any illegal actions. Indonesia fully supports General Assembly resolution 73/159, on the subject of mercenaries, and we urge everyone to abide by it.

Fourthly, recognizing that regulation is inconsistent and that many gaps exist, it is very important that everyone fully respect international law, international humanitarian law and related norms regulating mercenary activities, particularly in conflict and near-conflict situations, where they are most lethal. Businesses must be held accountable and abide by international law and resolutions pertaining to mercenaries.

In conclusion, mercenaries survive due to the simple principle of supply and demand. It is high time that we take action to suppress the demand for mercenaries in the global market. At the same time, we must halt mercenary exports and supplies. Only then will we have success in our joint endeavours. Let us all strip the soldiers of fortune of their fortune.

**Mr. Ma Zhaoxu (China)** (*spoke in Chinese*): Today is the eve of the Chinese new year. First of all, I would like to convey my best new year greetings to you, Sir. At the same time, I wish peace and tranquillity to the people of the world.

I am speaking in my capacity as Special Representative of His Excellency President Xi Jinping of China. At the outset, I thank Your Excellency President Obiang Nguema Mbasogo for attending and presiding over today's high-level meeting.

China congratulates Equatorial Guinea on its assumption of the presidency of the Security Council for the month of February and will fully support its

work. I also congratulate the Dominican Republic on its exemplary work as President of the Council in January.

I thank Secretary-General Guterres; Mr. Faki Mahamat, Chairperson of the African Union Commission, and Mr. Sezibera, Minister for Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation of Rwanda and current Chair of the African Union, for their briefings. I also wish to thank Côte d'Ivoire and Gabon for sending their Foreign Ministers to today's meeting.

China supports Equatorial Guinea's initiative to convene today's meeting and appreciates the country's efforts in fighting mercenaries. We are confident that today's meeting will serve to galvanize international consensus on jointly addressing the threats and challenges posed by mercenaries. Mercenary activities threaten international peace and security and jeopardize peace and stability in developing countries, especially those on the African continent. Such activities exact a heavy toll on human life and on property and seriously affect the social stability and economic development of African countries. This is therefore an issue to which the international community must pay rapt attention.

Mercenary activities violate the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations, interfere in the internal affairs of developing countries, including in Africa, and encroach on their sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity. Such activities lead to tensions and armed conflict among countries. Recruiting, using, financing and training mercenaries are clear violations of international law. China is firmly opposed to such activities. In that respect, I would like to address the following three points.

First, it is imperative to abide by the purposes and principles of the United Nations Charter and the basic norms governing international relations, implement General Assembly resolutions on countering mercenary activities and adhere to the principle of sovereign equality and non-interference in the internal affairs of other countries. We must support African countries in their efforts to maintain their sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity, fully respect the leadership of African countries in regional affairs and support the approach of African solutions to African problems.

Secondly, we should strengthen international and regional cooperation. The international community should coordinate its efforts to assist African countries in properly responding to and, ultimately, eliminating the threats posed by mercenary activities. We should

continue to improve cooperation and partnership between the United Nations and regional and subregional organizations, such as the African Union, and scale up efforts in conflict prevention, crisis management and post-conflict reconstruction. Through bilateral and multilateral cooperation and based on the willingness of countries, the international community should assist African countries in enhancing their security capacity-building in training, equipment and resources. Countries of the region can cooperate in the areas of border control, information-sharing and countering the illicit trafficking of weapons, in particular small arms and light weapons.

Thirdly, integrated policies should be in place. As a phenomenon that is closely linked to terrorism, human trafficking and resource plundering, mercenary activity has become an important factor that threatens peace and stability in Central Africa. Therefore, resources in various fields should be pooled in order to strengthen coordination and law enforcement so as to generate strong synergies in combating terrorist activities. The international community should support African countries in accelerating development, reducing poverty, eliminating the root causes of conflict and turmoil and stepping up socioeconomic development.

China supports African countries and peoples in their pursuit of peace, tranquillity, prosperity and development. We successfully convened the Beijing Summit of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation in September. It was agreed that China and Africa should strengthen peace and security cooperation. Cooperation in the field of nuclear security was identified as one of the eight priority areas for cooperation between China and Africa.

In addition, China supports Africa's implementation of the African Union's Agenda 2063 and its Silencing the Guns by 2020 initiative. China has also decided to establish a China-Africa peace and security cooperation fund with a view to supporting peace, security, stability and peacekeeping cooperation between China and Africa. Finally, I wish to emphasize that China will continue to support Africa in achieving peace, stability and development, and will work with Africa to build a stronger Sino-African community with a shared future.

**Ms. Wronecka** (Poland): As this is the first official meeting under your presidency, Mr. President, I would like to congratulate Equatorial Guinea on its assumption of the presidency of Security Council for

the month of February and to wish you success in your work. Likewise, I would like to commend the delegation of the Dominican Republic for its very good leadership in guiding the work of the Security Council during the month of January.

Allow me to thank Secretary-General António Guterres, Mr. Moussa Faki Mahamat, Chairperson of the African Union Commission, and Mr. Richard Sezibera, Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation of Rwanda, for their very informative statements. I also welcome the Ministers for Foreign Affairs who are present with us today in the Chamber.

Mercenary groups pose a serious threat to the independence, security, stability and peaceful development of many nations in Africa. We therefore welcome the initiative of the Government of Equatorial Guinea to hold this high-level presidential debate in the Security Council. The topic of the debate covers a broad and impressive array of issues. As such, we would like to comment on a few that are of particular importance to Poland.

First, weak legal systems, a lack of good governance and the rule of law, as well as poverty and unemployment, create an environment conducive to mercenary-related activities. Therefore, the promotion of the rule of law, which is at the core of the activities of the United Nations system and is also a priority of Poland's membership in the Council, has to be more streamlined and focused in the context of the current discussion. We also encourage regional organizations, particularly the African Union, to continue to promote the rule of law and the principles of security, territorial integrity and peaceful cooperation, as well as the institutional development of States, as the most effective remedies to mercenary activities.

Secondly, law always lags behind the dynamic development of real-life situations on the ground. Introducing new legal instruments in a rapidly changing world is not always sufficient. We believe that existing law is relevant but that, as always, their universal applicability and effectiveness is problematic. That is where we should focus our attention. We therefore consider this debate as an opportunity for the United Nations, its Member States, regional and subregional organizations and United Nations entities such as the Working Group on the use of mercenaries to build broader consensus on this issue, similar to that which exists on the fight against terrorism. Poland was one of

the original ratifying States of the Montreux Document. Our strong support for that document is based on our conviction that any international activity that involves the use of force must not contravene international humanitarian law or human rights law. We therefore remain deeply concerned about the illegal use of private military companies that do not follow basic principles of international law and constitute a destructive factor, which can be seen within and outside of Africa.

Thirdly, decades of internal and international tensions and the rise of fundamentalism and religious extremism have fuelled the proliferation of mercenary groups around the region. A few ways to prevent or limit the spread of such conditions is to promote confidence-building measures, foster dialogue between interested parties and avoid tensions that may spin out of control.

In conclusion, I would like to underline that our recent discussions on the subject of women and peace and security provide us with examples of measures that decrease the risk of the escalation of conflict, which in turn diminishes the risk of mercenary practices, among other dangers.

**Mr. Singer Weisinger** (Dominican Republic) (*spoke in Spanish*): At the outset, I extend our heartfelt congratulations on your assumption of the presidency of the Security Council for the month of February, Mr. President, and commend you for the dynamic and very relevant programme of work you have drawn up — proof of which is the convening of today's important debate.

I also welcome Secretary-General António Guterres and Mr. Moussa Faki Mahamat, Chairperson of the African Union Commission, and Mr. Richard Sezibera, Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation of Rwanda, and thank them for their informative briefings.

The problem of the use of mercenaries and the activities they carry out is complex. It arises from multiple factors, as we have seen, such as weak institutions, limitations in the international legal frameworks that criminalize them and perverse incentives to illicit monetary gain without the slightest consideration for human life and dignity.

The use of mercenaries, activities related to mercenaries and military and private security companies, many of which are vehemently criticized

for dubious methods in the conduct of contractual services, undermine human rights, particularly the self-determination of peoples and, as a result, peace and security worldwide.

According to relevant reports, the list of human rights and humanitarian law violations perpetrated by mercenaries include executions, sexual slavery, rape and other forms of sexual and gender-based violence, torture, mutilation, forced displacement, forced disappearance, arbitrary destruction of cultural goods and forced enlistment and recruitment of children.

We are also alarmed by the link between drug trafficking and other forms of organized crime involving mercenaries, the violence that is generated from this connection and the erosion of the constitutional order of States. More perplexing are the acts of barbarism represented by violations of the human rights committed against innocent child victims of kidnappings, torture, detention, sexual slavery and the forced recruitment as child soldiers.

In the face of such atrocities, we commend the work of international institutions and agencies that shed light on the causes of this global issue and make recommendations to combat and avoid them. We therefore recognize the work carried out through the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights by the Working Group on the use of mercenaries as a means of violating human rights and impeding the exercise of the right of peoples to self-determination.

The most recent report of the Working Group (see A/73/303) introduces several important aspects that we believe should be the focus of our attention to and consequently addressed through our respective axes of action. These include the improvement of the international legal framework for the prevention and punishment of the recruitment, use, financing and training of mercenaries and foreign fighters; the strengthening of national institutions and regulations, including levels of respondent liability, and the establishment of an international legally binding instrument for private military and security companies; increased international cooperation among States for the prevention, prosecution and punishment of these crimes; addressing the root causes of conflicts, which may be diverse in scope — historical, social, political and economic — including their history of armed conflict or instability, poverty, high unemployment,

the exploitation of natural resources and institutional weaknesses; and responses to the recruitment and use of children in armed conflicts, with a focus on the rehabilitation and reintegration of children and the implementation of preventive measures.

Preventing violence, combating terrorism and crime and respecting human rights, especially those of our children, are key elements to safeguard world peace and security.

**Mr. Allen** (United Kingdom): I offer Equatorial Guinea a warm welcome to the Security Council and congratulate it on assuming the presidency for the month of February. I also thank and congratulate the Dominican Republic for its excellent stewardship of the Council in January.

I would also like to thank the Secretary-General, His Excellency Chairperson Moussa Faki Mahamat, and His Excellency Mr. Richard Sezibera for their briefings today. Let me also wish a very happy new year to our Chinese colleagues.

The United Kingdom welcomes this debate and the focus on stability, conflict prevention and peacebuilding during Equatorial Guinea's presidency of the Council. The United Kingdom recognizes the deeply negative effect that contemporary forms of mercenary activity can have. That includes the link between their activities and barriers to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 16 on peace, justice and strong institutions. We are committed to supporting our African partners in achieving their vision of a more peaceful and prosperous continent. We are working jointly to tackle a range of shared security challenges, and we are working on the provision of capacity-building for African security and justice institutions and training for African peacekeepers.

We are also committed to aligning our development support with initiatives that will foster Africa's long-term stability. It is clear that there is a mutually reinforcing link between stability and security and prosperity and growth. That is why we are stimulating high-quality investment into Africa to create wealth, build infrastructure and create jobs. It is why we are supporting Africa's youth in accessing life-changing education and skills. And it is why we support so strongly the empowerment of women and girls, so that African development can be truly inclusive and therefore truly sustainable.

The holistic approach we take to supporting Africa's security and stability must also be applied to the modern mercenary phenomenon. We must recognize that it is not just a source of conflict, but a symptom of underlying causes of instability. Mercenary groups thrive where there are fragile State institutions, a culture of impunity, weak rule of law and extreme poverty. Some have links to serious and organized crime threats, including the trafficking of small arms and light weapons and the illegal exploitation of resources. Their activities can undercut the rules-based international system which the Council was designed to uphold. Where this occurs, we should bring the full range of mechanisms at the Council's disposal to bear, including sanctions regimes.

As you pointed out, Sir, it is important to draw a distinction between mercenaries — a term clearly defined in international humanitarian law — and properly regulated and responsible private security companies. The legitimate global private security industry provides an essential service, supporting diplomatic, commercial and humanitarian activity in complex environments around the world.

The United Kingdom remains committed to raising standards in the private security industry. In this regard, we welcome the important work of the Montreux Document Forum and the International Code of Conduct Association (ICoCA). We urge all States, companies and non-governmental organizations that employ private security companies to recognise ICoCA membership and certification to relevant standards in their contracting process and to abide by the International Code of Conduct for Private Security Providers.

In this context, the United Kingdom is troubled by reports of the involvement of some private military companies in destabilizing activities in a range of countries. This is particularly troubling when those countries — such as the Central African Republic, Syria, Ukraine or Venezuela — are on the Security Council's agenda. We urge all such private sector organizations to ensure that their actions do not cross the line between legitimate security service provision and irresponsible or destabilizing activities. There may be a role for the relevant Security Council sub-committees to consider whether there is evidence that any such actors have perpetuated or exacerbated conflict or instability.

In closing, I would like to pay tribute to the ongoing efforts of the African Union and African subregional

organizations to prevent unconstitutional changes of Government. This includes preventing the use of mercenaries to destabilize or replace democratically elected Governments. The United Kingdom urges the African Union to continue to strengthen its capacities in this regard by making effective use of information gathered through the Continental Early Warning System, and greater use of preventive diplomacy and mediation practices.

**Mr. Delattre** (France) (*spoke in French*): I should like at the outset, on behalf of my authorities, to warmly thank you, Sir, for having organized this debate and for your presence among us. I also offer you our best wishes for your success in Equatorial Guinea's presidency of the Security Council this month.

I thank the Secretary-General, the Chairperson of the African Union Commission and the Minister for Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation of Rwanda for their very enlightening briefings. I also welcome the presence among us of the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Côte d'Ivoire and the Minister for Foreign Affairs, International Cooperation and Regional Integration of Gabon.

I further wish a happy new year to our Chinese colleagues.

The phenomenon of the use of mercenaries constitutes a real threat to the peace and security of the African continent and of all the other regions of the world where it is developing. Mercenary activity is a multiplier of instability, upon which it feeds and which it then increases. As foreign nationals and non-members of regular armed forces who are recruited in return for financial or material remuneration to participate directly in armed conflicts, mercenaries are not constrained by borders and thrive on the instability and fragility of States. We have seen that phenomenon in the past, particularly in Sierra Leone, Liberia and Côte d'Ivoire in the early 2000s. We continue to see it today in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, in the Central African Republic and in the Sudan. The impact of mercenaries' activities is well known. What first comes to mind is their destabilization of States and undermining of constitutional order. We must also consider their involvement in the illicit trafficking of arms and natural resources. Finally, and above all, we must address their multiple violations of human rights and international humanitarian law, in such forms as sexual and gender-based violence, torture, forced



displacement and the recruitment of child soldiers. Those violations were documented in the latest report of the Working Group on the use of mercenaries as a means of violating human rights and impeding the exercise of the right of peoples to self-determination (see A/73/303).

I would also like to raise the issue of private security and military companies. The latter must of course be distinguished from the phenomenon of mercenarism, since their activities are subject to international regulation, as embodied, for example, in the International Code of Conduct for Private Security Service Providers and the Montreux Document. We must, however, remain vigilant to ensure that those private companies do not carry out destabilizing activities in the countries in which they are deployed.

Given that observation, the question arises as to how to curb the phenomenon of mercenarism. The first line of response is prevention. While mercenaries fuel conflicts, they are also a symptom of the root causes of the instability and fragility of certain States. In that regard, strengthening the rule of law — in particular improving governance and combating corruption — investing in educating young people, combating climate change and developing cross-border cooperation are all factors that, by their very nature, can address those root causes of conflict. Accordingly, we welcome the efforts of the African Union (AU), African subregional organizations and the States members of the AU through the implementation of the Silencing the Guns by 2020 initiative, which we fully support. We also commend all the work undertaken to implement the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the African Union's Agenda 2063, the launch of the African Continental Free Trade Area and the measures taken to combat the proliferation of, and illicit trade in, small arms and light weapons, such as the 2010 adoption of the Kinshasa Convention at the level of the Economic Community of Central African States.

The second part of the solution lies in dealing with the phenomenon of mercenarism in and of itself. The first step involves providing a security response, such as through the robust action of certain peacekeeping operations, including the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic and the Intervention Brigade of the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Such a security response is also predicated upon the

action of African peace support operations — whose development and predictable and sustainable financing we fully support — and the activation or reactivation of joint bilateral commissions of a number of States.

The security response is clearly only a first step to addressing the phenomenon of mercenarism. The response must also be political. In countries in which mercenary groups are active, political processes must consider foreign combatants as an integral part of any strategy to dismantle armed groups. In that regard, the implementation of demobilization, disarmament, reintegration and repatriation programmes for former members of armed groups who are engaged in a peace process is often a necessary condition for the return to peace and national reconciliation. Moreover, with regard to demobilization, disarmament, reintegration and repatriation programmes, the issue of the fate of child soldiers is key to ensuring their demobilization and possible repatriation to their countries of origin, as well as to preventing their re-recruitment. Lastly, the issue of submitting foreign combatants to the judicial system should also be a part of the equation, whether through ordinary or special tribunals or the International Criminal Court.

Given the threat posed by mercenary activities, only close international cooperation among States, regional organizations and the United Nations will enable us to act effectively. Rest assured of France's commitment to this struggle.

**Mr. Heusgen** (Germany): I congratulate you, Mr. President, on assuming the presidency of the Security Council. I wish you and your team good luck in the coming months. Let me also commend you, Sir, on the initial statement that you delivered and the very concrete example of your own country and how mercenaries have threatened its security.

I would also like to thank the Dominican Republic for its accomplishments as the previous President of the Security Council in January and to commend the representative of the Dominican Republic for the statement on mercenaries that he just delivered, which included an impressive list of the behaviour of mercenaries, in particular towards women and children, which he aptly described as "barbaric".

Mr. Moussa Faki Mahamat, Chairperson of the African Union Commission, referred to the "scourge of mercenaries" in describing and summarizing their activities. I believe that that is absolutely the right

description and, as we have heard in the discussion around the table so far, there is strong unity among Member States. Everyone recognizes that not only do mercenary activities pose a threat to regional stability and security in Central Africa but they also represent a symptom of broader trends in conflict situations — they are exacerbated by, and are closely linked with, trends related to terrorism, violent extremism and national organized crime, including trafficking in weapons.

In looking at the root causes, we see that one of the main reasons for joining a mercenary group is the lack of economic alternatives and opportunities, especially for young people. In addition, the lines between mercenary groups, organized crime and terrorist groups are blurred. I believe that we have to be honest and admit that any solution to this challenge will not be found overnight. There are no easy solutions to the problem of mercenaries in Africa. That is why we need to take a more nuanced and long-term approach. From Germany's perspective, there are six potential strategies for addressing the problem.

The first involves enabling State actors and security forces. In his statement, the Secretary-General made a very strong point of reminding us that the monopoly over the use of force should reside with national Governments, and not with mercenaries. We should enable State actors and security forces to effectively provide security for the population throughout the entire territory, while of course respecting human rights and the dignity of individuals. We need strong, capable security institutions that follow the rule of law. We need to strengthen the security sector arrangements through various initiatives, particularly under Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 16, which was also highlighted by my United Kingdom colleague, United Nations regional envoys and, more broadly, regional and subregional cooperation. Security sector reform, capacity-building and training are, in our view, key instruments for progress.

Secondly, with regard to non-proliferation and disarmament, weapons and ammunition are the hard fuel of conflicts, and their illicit flow is certainly an important source for mercenaries. Non-proliferation and disarmament are therefore important elements in the strategy to stop mercenary activities. Under the leadership of the African Union (AU) and in close cooperation with Africa's subregional organizations — such as the Southern African Development Community, the Economic Community

of West African States and the Regional Centre on Small Arms and Light Weapons in the Great Lakes Region, the Horn of Africa and Bordering States — a continental plan of action for the control of small arms and light weapons was developed. That plan is also part of the AU's Silencing the Guns by 2020 initiative, which we applaud. Germany strongly supports all activities in that context. We are working with the African Union to cut the flow of arms into areas of conflict, improve control over arms and ammunition in fragile States and train a new generation of experts to take the lead in arms control. We therefore very much look forward to the discussion to be held at the end of your presidency, Mr. President, on the subject of silencing the guns. We also look forward to supporting you, Sir, and lending our support to your activities with a view to adopting a draft resolution on the issue.

Thirdly, I would like to underline the role of sanctions and expert monitoring as a concrete response to mercenary activity. With respect to sanctions specifically, designation criteria exist within the United Nations that can serve as the basis for the listing of individuals involved in mercenary activities, including, for example, criteria related to human rights violations.

Fourthly, on accountability, we must ensure that human rights violations and abuses committed by mercenaries are duly investigated and that those ultimately responsible are held accountable. I am very encouraged that, for instance, the Foreign Minister of Côte d'Ivoire, who I would like to welcome here, also underscored the importance of punishment. Our Russian colleague also mentioned the importance of prosecution. We need to enhance the capacity and responsiveness of national and international criminal justice systems and national and regional human rights mechanisms. That must explicitly include instances where mercenaries act at the direction of a State.

Fifthly, on private military and security companies, they must be distinguished from mercenary activities. Many of those companies follow legitimate objectives. But I would like to return to what Chairperson Moussa Faki Mahamat clearly said earlier, that private military and security companies pose many challenges. A number of colleagues around the table also mentioned concrete cases, including the representatives of France, Poland and the United Kingdom. We have to make sure that private military and security companies follow legitimate objectives. We also must prevent abuse, strengthen compliance with international

humanitarian law and human rights law, as well as promote transparency, the principle of the rule of law and effective regulation of the commercial military and security providers.

In that context, I would also like to highlight the international code of conduct and the Montreux Document, the adoption of which was actively supported by Germany, and we encourage all States and stakeholders to align themselves with those documents.

Sixthly, we must provide a secure space in which young people can work peacefully towards their own future, thereby reducing the appeal of mercenary groups as an employer for disillusioned youth. We can build on efforts that have already been undertaken, such as the SDGs, as I already mentioned. I also want to mention last year's General Assembly resolution on the causes of conflict and the promotion of durable peace and sustainable development in Africa, which now serves as a good point of reference and stresses

“the importance of addressing the socioeconomic dimension of youth unemployment, as well as facilitating the enhanced participation of youth in decision-making processes” (*General Assembly resolution 72/311, para. 32*).

Lastly, in line with our strategic focus on prevention, the importance of which the President of Equatorial Guinea mentioned, we must address the conditions that are conducive to mercenarism in the Central African region and beyond. They include challenging humanitarian situations, high numbers of displaced people, the surge in terrorist activities and the devastating effects of climate change on the livelihoods of millions, only to name a few of the root causes.

In conclusion, the topic of mercenaries serves as a very good example of the urgent need for the Security Council to move towards a more thematic, preventive and cross-cutting discussion on threats to international peace and security. The root causes of violence and conflict deserve the focused attention of the Council, and we remain committed to their presence on the agenda.

**Mr. Meza-Cuadra** (Peru) (*spoke in Spanish*): Peru welcomes the presence of His Excellency President Teodoro Obiang Nguema Mbasogo and the other high-level officials among us, including the Foreign Minister of Côte d'Ivoire. We wish success to the presidency of Equatorial Guinea in guiding our work this month, and

we once again commend the Dominican Republic for its excellent work last month. We appreciate the convening of this debate and the important briefings delivered by the Secretary-General, the Minister for Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation of Rwanda and the Chairperson of the African Union Commission.

We wish to underscore the relevance of the topic that brings us together today, given the tangible impact of the criminal activities of mercenaries and foreign combatants on international peace and security. We believe that the instability caused by those actors, as well as their serious violations of human rights and international humanitarian law, deserve the effective attention of the Security Council.

As was pointed out this morning, the repercussions of this issue are particularly intense on the African continent and affect countries such as Somalia, the Central African Republic, the Union of the Comoros, Equatorial Guinea and Côte d'Ivoire, among others. The porousness of borders, the scarce presence of the State and the occurrence of political crises contribute to the expansion of the phenomenon. Under those circumstances, we believe that efforts to fight that scourge and contribute to the achievement of sustainable peace should focus on the following areas of action: conflict prevention, addressing root causes and strengthening regional cooperation.

First, with regard to conflict prevention, situations of conflict or dispute are skilfully used by mercenaries and foreign fighters for the development of their illicit activities, so it is essential to prevent them. This prevention work requires strengthened local and national capacities, specifically when it comes to the peaceful settlement of disputes, the promotion of dialogue and the promotion of social cohesion. The support of the international community in these efforts, especially that of the United Nations regional offices, is necessary. Through their monitoring and early warning functions, the latter contribute to the timely detection of factors that trigger new episodes of tension and crisis, which provides an opportunity to counteract them.

Secondly, with regard to addressing the root causes, weak institutions, tensions generated by regimes that restrict freedoms, the deterioration of economic indicators, injustice and marginalization are fertile ground for agents who promote violence or are instruments of violence, such as mercenaries. It is therefore critical to address these causes through

a multidimensional approach aimed at building and strengthening capacities and institutions that promote human rights, the rule of law and sustainable development, in line with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. We stress that, if institutions are to be created in order to be effective and enjoy legitimacy, they must be representative of their respective societies. For that reason, their inclusiveness must be ensured. Special emphasis must be placed on protecting young people and children in order to prevent their recruitment and provide them with opportunities through quality education.

Thirdly, with regard to regional and neighbourhood cooperation, since mercenary activities have cross-border implications, which can be rapidly adapted to the different geographic contexts in which mercenaries operate, this phenomenon must be addressed from a regional perspective. That is why we welcome the African Union's Silencing the Guns by 2020 initiative, which promotes peace, stability and prosperity on the African continent. We believe that, given its relevance, the initiative should enjoy the strong and unanimous support of the international community, and in particular that of the Council.

We also underscore the importance of strengthening intelligence work and border control, which are fundamental elements in addressing the usual sources of financing for mercenaries, such as illicit trafficking in arms, people and natural resources. The establishment of joint commissions is vital for these purposes.

In conclusion, I stress the need to promote new accessions to and strict compliance with the International Convention against the Recruitment, Use, Financing and Training of Mercenaries, which includes, among other aspects, the adoption of the national legislation necessary to effectively address this phenomenon.

**Mr. Matjila** (South Africa): At the outset, South Africa wishes to congratulate Your Excellency President Teodoro Obiang Nguema Mbasogo, and the Republic of Equatorial Guinea on assuming the presidency of the Security Council for the month of February. You may be assured of South Africa's full support and cooperation during your presidency of the Council.

We also want to thank the Dominican Republic for its excellent presidency of the Council in January.

We thank the Secretary-General, Mr. António Guterres, and the Chairperson of the African Union

Commission, Mr. Moussa Faki Mahamat, for their insightful briefings. We further thank His Excellency Mr. Richard Sezibera, Minister for Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation of the Republic of Rwanda, for his remarks on behalf of President Paul Kagame, in his capacity as the President of the African Union. We also welcome His Excellency Mr. Marcel Amon-Tanoh, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Côte d'Ivoire, and His Excellency Mr. Abdu Kambogo, Minister for Foreign Affairs, International Cooperation and Regional Integration of Gabon.

South Africa welcomes the convening of this timely debate and the selection of the important theme on the role of mercenary activities as a source of insecurity and destabilization in Africa. It is an important, undisputed fact that over the years, Africa has been at the receiving end of mercenary activities, which have contributed to undermining peace, security and stability on the continent. Several African countries have been targets of ongoing attempts by mercenary groups to overthrow legitimate and democratically elected Governments. Their transnational activities also threaten regional stability, especially in cases where the security of neighbouring countries is intertwined. South Africa condemns such activities, as they pose serious challenges to our collective efforts to promote and ensure peace and stability in our respective countries. Equally concerning, the activities of mercenaries pose a serious threat to the peace and stability of several regions on the continent, which is already fragile owing to ongoing conflicts.

Since the advent of democracy in 1994, South Africa has been part of the collective efforts to promote peace and stability throughout our beloved continent. We support the objectives of the African Union aimed at achieving greater unity and solidarity among African countries and the people of Africa, while also defending the sovereignty, territorial integrity and independence of its member States. These objectives and principles are clearly articulated in the Constitutive Act of the African Union. Key among these principles is the condemnation and rejection of unconstitutional changes of Government, as well as non-interference by any member State in the internal affairs of another.

As a responsible member of the African Union and the United Nations, South Africa condemns all mercenary activities in any African or non-African country. We believe that these activities are in clear contravention of continental and international

conventions and legal instruments. As eloquently captured in the concept note for this meeting (S/2019/97, annex), the recruitment, use, financing and training of mercenaries violate the principles of the Charter of the United Nations and those of the Constitutive Act of the African Union.

South Africa reaffirms the need for the unequivocal implementation of all international and continental legislation and instruments against mercenaries, in particular the 1989 International Convention against the Recruitment, Use, Financing and Training of Mercenaries and the 1977 Organization of African Unity Convention for the Elimination of Mercenarism in Africa.

For our part, South Africa has an uncompromising and strict policy against its nationals who partake in any mercenary activities. The Constitution of our country provides that the resolve to live in peace and harmony precludes any South African citizen from participating in armed conflict, nationally or internationally, except as provided for in the Constitution or national legislation.

In pursuance of this objective, in 1998 the Parliament of South Africa passed legislation entitled the "Regulation of Foreign Military Assistance Act". The objective of the Act is to regulate the rendering of foreign military assistance by our nationals, persons permanently residing within our borders and foreign citizens rendering such assistance from within our borders. Through these actions, South Africa has consistently taken strict measures against its nationals found to be involved in mercenary activities or violating the Regulation of Foreign Military Assistance Act. We have previously cooperated and collaborated with fellow African countries in instances where our nationals were implicated in mercenary activities.

My delegation stresses that it is the obligation of all States to take all necessary measures to eradicate mercenary activities wherever they may occur. In that regard, the Security Council should encourage all Member States to commit to preventing their nationals and foreigners in their respective territories from engaging in mercenary activities.

Representatives will recall that, during its sixty-second session, the General Assembly adopted resolution 62/145 on the use of mercenaries as a means of violating human rights and impeding the exercise of the right of peoples to self-determination. South Africa is concerned about the new forms of mercenary acts in

the form of private security companies. Over the years, there has been a clear nexus between the activities of mercenaries and private military companies and the negative consequences of such companies on some of the continent's protracted conflicts. We call on the international community to put in place a regulatory and legally binding framework on the work of those companies. The Montreux Document on the self-regulation of private military companies could be used as required once that instrument has been universally agreed. My delegation is convinced that we should address the perception around the privatization and corporatization of security services, as such a role should be the sole responsibility of sovereign Governments.

In conclusion, I wish to stress that South Africa is firmly committed to working with fellow African States and members of the Security Council to address the challenge of mercenary activities and their negative impact on peace and stability both regionally and internationally. That is in line with the aspirations of the African continent as envisaged in Agenda 2063: The Africa We Want, in particular the desire for a peaceful and secure Africa, and through the flagship project Silencing the Guns by 2020.

We wish our Chinese friends a happy new year.

**Mr. Alotaibi** (Kuwait) (*spoke in Arabic*): Mr. President, at the outset I would like to welcome your Excellency and to congratulate your friendly country on assuming the presidency of the Security Council for this month. We thank you for convening this important meeting to discuss an important and vital topic in all its dimensions. I would also like to thank Secretary-General António Guterres and the Chairperson of the African Union Commission, Mr. Mousa Faki Mahamat, for their valuable briefings on this phenomenon, which is threatening the sovereignty, security and territorial integrity of countries and the right of peoples to self-determination. I would also like to welcome the Ministers for Foreign Affairs of Côte d'Ivoire and Rwanda at this meeting.

There is no doubt that the phenomenon of using mercenaries in conflict is a threat not only to the security and safety of States but also to regional and international peace and security. It also constitutes a gross violation of the purposes and principles enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations. This phenomenon becomes more complicated when it is linked with other serious issues, some of which are on the agenda of the

Security Council, such as terrorism, foreign fighters, illegal migration and transnational organized crime.

The activities carried out by mercenaries in various conflicts violate international law and lack ethical, human and legal foundations. Mercenaries are clearly completely indifferent to international treaties and conventions in time of war. That is manifested through the intentional targeting of civilians, prisoners and civilian facilities, as well as by committing war crimes. It is deplorable that some Governments and non-State actors continue to use mercenaries with a view to spreading chaos, conducting military coups and waging wars.

Reports issued by non-governmental organizations involved in this issue indicate that the high level of poverty and unemployment as well as the fragility of State institutions are all factors for joining the ranks of mercenaries, particularly since, according to those reports, payments given to mercenaries range from \$500 to \$1,000 or sometimes \$2,000 per day. The number of such mercenaries is almost 20 million, which is very ominous, as their numbers are nearly equivalent to uniformed armies. While historically it is not a new issue, spending on this phenomenon has reached almost \$100 billion, and it is expected to double by the year 2020.

There are Central and West African countries that have unfortunately become fertile ground for mercenary activities, since they have rich natural resources. That has disrupted the political and development processes in those countries, while their Governments incurred large sums of money in order to reduce and eliminate such activities. There is also a close link between mercenaries and natural resources. The number of mercenaries increases in areas rich in natural resources with a view to controlling those resources in order to fund their illegitimate activities. There are many examples, including your friendly country, Sir, and the attempted coup that you suffered a few weeks before joining the Security Council.

The questions contained in the concept note (S/2019/97, annex) should draw our attention because our responses would lead us to realistic visions in order to address this phenomenon and reach common ground on an international instrument that incriminates and addresses this phenomenon. If we consider the existing legal instruments, the international commitment to abide by them and the international efforts to eliminate

that scourge, we will see that they are not commensurate with the threat to the international community posed by the phenomenon.

Many are aware of the reluctance of the international community to address that very dangerous and significant threat and to implement legal instruments to deter international networks that rely on the recruitment of mercenaries and their deployment in conflict areas despite the fact that the phenomenon has long existed. It is clearly defined by international humanitarian law and in article 47 of the 1977 Protocol additional to the Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949, and relating to the protection of victims of non-international armed conflicts, as well as the International Convention against the Recruitment, Use, Financing and Training of Mercenaries.

The recommendations issued during the current session of the General Assembly by the Working Group on the use of mercenaries as a means of violating human rights and impeding the exercise of the right of peoples to self-determination are important, including with regard to Sustainable Development Goal 16 of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which promotes peaceful and inclusive societies, while focusing on the importance of “strengthen[ing] democracy and good governance, economic, social and cultural rights and development” (A/73/303, para. 79 (a)).

In conclusion, given the serious consequences of this phenomenon for international peace and security, the Security Council should focus more on addressing it. It is not enough to discuss this serious issue only in the General Assembly or the Human Rights Council. We also support the role of the Working Group on the use of mercenaries as a means of violating human rights and impeding the exercise of the right of peoples to self-determination and the implementation of its recommendations. We urge States to adopt strict measures against the perpetrators of such atrocities and crimes, which violate human rights and international humanitarian law. Such perpetrators should be held accountable without exception or impunity. We reaffirm that respect for human rights, development, peace, equal opportunities and the rule of law act as safeguards against young people becoming mercenaries.

**Mr. Pecsteen de Buytsverve** (Belgium) (*spoke in French*): Allow me at the outset, Mr. President, to congratulate you on Equatorial Guinea’s assumption of the presidency of the Council. I should like also to

congratulate the delegation of the Dominican Republic on the outstanding work it did during its presidency of the Council last month.

I wish to thank you, Mr. President, for having organized this debate, and the Secretary-General and the Chairman of the African Union Commission, as well as the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Rwanda, for their interesting statements.

This debate is very timely given that mercenary activities are a destabilizing factor that have had a significant impact on a number of countries on the Security Council's agenda. Several of those countries are in Africa, but the continent is certainly not the only one concerned by this problem. Mercenary activity not only complicates and compounds conflicts that are already under way, but can also contribute to the germination of latent conflict. We must therefore remain attentive in the context of an approach aimed at conflict prevention.

As indicated in the concept note for this debate (S/2019/97, annex), tackling these kinds of activities is a complex task, as they most often take place in a context with an overlapping array of various interests and motives that encompass organized crime, violent extremism and attempts to achieve political goals through non-democratic means. Mercenary activities can also be a source of financing for armed groups created for other purposes, while other such groups are merely seeking to enrich themselves.

While there are various definitions of mercenary activities, a debate such as today's is useful in terms of broadening our understanding of the issue. In its work, the Council is currently dealing with several cases of mercenary activity. For example, in Libya combatants from Darfur sell their services to the various factions. In doing so they remain operational and pose a threat to the Sudan or, eventually, other countries of the region. In Yemen, we are concerned at the use of children by mercenary groups. And let us not forget either that maritime piracy can also represent a form of mercenary activity, but here I do not wish to infringe on tomorrow's debate on this topic.

To contain the phenomenon of mercenary activity, which usually has an international dimension, States should take full advantage of existing international instruments, in particular the 1989 International Convention against the Recruitment, Use, Financing and Training of Mercenaries. Allow me on this point,

Mr. President, to congratulate your country on having ratified that Convention. Given that today only 36 Member States, including Belgium, are signatories thereto, we call on all Member States to ratify it without further delay.

That being said, the legal standards and instruments to which we are signatories will have an impact only if States enforce them at the national level. Here we refer to international humanitarian law; international texts on human rights; and texts emanating from regional organizations. In this area, as in others, we advocate for a strengthening of cooperation among States.

The Security Council already has at its disposal mechanisms aimed at affecting the interests of the sponsors and organizers of mercenary activities, in particular targeted sanctions aimed at those individuals who act against efforts towards peace and at their means of financing. Here I would cite the illicit trafficking of weapons, illicit financial transfers and the illegal exploitation of natural resources.

In conclusion, all States can be faced, one way or another, with the issue of mercenary activities, to which they must respond. Belgium, for its part, will always opt for transparency and international cooperation.

**The President** (*spoke in Spanish*): I now call on Mr. Abdu Razzaq Guy Kambogo, Minister for Foreign Affairs, International Cooperation and Regional Integration of Gabon.

**Mr. Kambogo** (Gabon) (*spoke in French*): It is a pleasure and an honour for Gabon to have been invited by Equatorial Guinea to take part in this very important meeting.

I should like to begin by thanking the Secretary-General of the United Nations and the Chairperson of the African Union Commission. I also thank the Dominican Republic and congratulate it on its term in January, and I welcome and congratulate the Ministers for Foreign Affairs of Côte d'Ivoire and Rwanda. Nor can I fail to thank all previous speakers for their excellent contributions to our discussion today.

I am pleased to convey to the President of Equatorial Guinea, Teodoro Obiang Nguema Mbasogo, the brotherly greetings and congratulations of Mr. Ali Bongo Ondimba, President and Head of State of the Gabonese Republic, for having brought before this important forum the issue of mercenaries, which

represents a real source of insecurity and destabilization in Africa in general and in Central Africa in particular.

The recent events in Equatorial Guinea remind us of the sad fact that Africa continues to fall victim to upheavals as a result of a phenomenon that we had believed to be a thing of the past and which, unfortunately, constitutes a genuine threat to peace and security in our countries.

This high-level debate provides us with the opportunity to take an objective look at security issues in the subregion, which are a source of deep concern and are exacerbated by the presence of an increasing number of hostile, well-equipped armed groups. The terms of reference for this debate as given to us by the President of the Security Council stress the impact of this heinous phenomenon of mercenaries not only on political stability, but also on the economic development of African States.

That is why Gabon strictly respects all international legal instruments relating to the combat against mercenarism, and that is why we stress the importance of respecting the national sovereignty of each country.

In that vein, we encourage all States of Central Africa to continue to strengthen their fraternal ties, friendship, good-neighbourly relations and cooperation while providing holistic, coordinated responses to the challenges posed by transnational threats such as mercenaries, terrorism and violent extremism.

Only the mobilization earnest cooperation of our States can effectively combat such threats to peace and security. In that regard, Gabon, in its capacity as current Chair of the Economic Community of Central African States, will continue to work for the consolidation of peace and stability in the subregion. It is worth recalling that Central Africa has a remarkable institutional architecture capable of promoting the prevention and management of sources of instability and crises, in particular the Council for Peace and Security in Central Africa and the Central African Early Warning System. On behalf of the highest authorities of the Republic of Gabon, I must certainly take this opportunity to commend the work of the United Nations Regional Office for Central Africa and the ongoing support of the African Union.

Another issue that contributes to the destabilization of our States is the proliferation of small arms and light weapons, which results from the armed conflicts in

certain countries of the continent and fuels poaching and illegal wildlife trade. Such trade is one of the primary sources of funding for mercenaries, which we firmly condemn. Despite our firm commitment to combating that phenomenon, it must be recognized that without the sustained support of the international community, we will not be able to permanently contain those scourges.

In conclusion, on behalf of the President of Gabon, Ali Bongo Ondimba, I would like to again congratulate Equatorial Guinea, as President of the Security Council, on the relevance of the theme of today's debate.

**The President** (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of Egypt.

**Mr. Edrees** (Egypt) (*spoke in Arabic*): First of all, allow me to offer my sincere congratulations to you, Mr. President, and to your brotherly country on assuming the presidency of the Security Council for the month of February. We are confident that your country and your Mission here in New York will be able to successfully discharge the serious tasks of the presidency of the Council.

I would also like to convey to you, Sir, greetings from your brother President Abdel Fattah Al-Sisi, who would have liked to be present at today's meeting in response to your kind invitation. However, regrettably, he could not be here due to previous commitments.

I would like to thank the Dominican Republic for its presidency of the Security Council last month. I also thank the Secretary-General and the Chairperson of the African Union Commission for their briefings at the beginning of this meeting. I also welcome the Ministers for Foreign Affairs of Rwanda, Côte d'Ivoire and Gabon to the Council today. I also congratulate China on the Chinese new year.

I would like to commend you, Sir, for your interest in today's topic on peace and security in Africa. That is reflected in the judicious selection of themes to be considered by the Council this month.

I believe that today's theme on the impact of mercenary activities on peace and security in the region of Central Africa is an emerging trend and a threat to peace and security in various regions of our continent. It is closely linked to the growing impact of non-State actors and the negative repercussions of their criminal activities on peace and stability in our States. Egypt reiterates the importance of stepping up African and



international efforts to address the problem. We will work tirelessly during our presidency of the African Union, which is to begin in a few days, to pay greater attention to eliminating this phenomenon as part of the global strategy to maintain peace and stability on the African continent.

Egypt has always been committed to the implementation of measures outlined in sanctions resolutions adopted by the Security Council, in particular arms embargos and the transfer of assets and funds, aimed at preventing armed groups — other than regular State armies, of course — from acquiring weapons. Access to weapons can undermine the security and stability of countries and entire societies. In that regard, Egypt underscores the importance of strengthening and promoting national institutions, in particular national security forces, to enable States to exercise full control over their territory. We also call for greater regional and international cooperation through information-sharing on transnational security threats, foremost of which is terrorism and mercenary groups.

In the light of all this, Egypt is very proud of our efforts to address threats to transnational peace and security, in particular terrorism, when we were members of the Security Council in 2016 and 2017. We actively participated in the negotiations of resolution 2368 (2017) of July 2017, on combating the financing of terrorism. We also submitted a draft resolution on preventing terrorists from acquiring weapons, which was unanimously adopted by the Security Council as resolution 2370 (2017) in August 2017. In that regard, I would like to pay tribute to the efforts of Equatorial Guinea in focusing on emerging unconventional transnational security threats, which undermine the stability and security of African countries.

Today's debate on mercenaries is another important step in our regional and international cooperation that can be used to address those threats. Egypt is very interested in technical cooperation with our African brothers in order to assist them in strengthening African national capacities in the areas of security, border control and addressing negative security threats. In addition, we are ready to take part in cooperation efforts to rebuild and develop their countries and eradicate poverty in the context of our endeavour to address the root causes of mercenary activities and other security threats faced by the continent.

International and regional efforts to combat the phenomenon of mercenaries already possess the appropriate legal frameworks, in particular the 1989 International Convention against the Recruitment, Use, Financing and Training of Mercenaries, as well as the 1977 Convention for the Elimination of Mercenarism in Africa. We call on all States to accede to those treaties and commit to implement them.

In that regard, emphasis should be placed on strengthening regional cooperation among African States, and the international community as a whole, so as to ensure that mercenary groups are deprived of any support, whether weapons or funding, as part of a comprehensive strategy that includes the peacebuilding dimension and addresses the root causes of the problem through a cooperative approach among the States of the region, the African Union, other African regional organizations and international partners.

Finally, the relevance of eliminating the phenomenon of mercenary combatants is linked to the common African and international efforts to promote and achieve the goal of silencing the guns by 2020, in view of the concrete impact of this negative phenomenon on the peace and security situation on the continent. In that regard, we value the importance of the special meeting on this subject, Sir, to be held under your Council presidency. We reiterate our sincere appreciation for your initiative, Mr. President, in choosing this vital subject to be the focus of our discussion today. We are confident that it will contribute to strengthening our efforts to combat the phenomenon of mercenary combatants and strengthen the foundations of security and stability in the Central African region and on our continent as a whole.

**The President** (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of the Central African Republic.

**Ms. Kpongo** (Central African Republic) (*spoke in French*): I would like to congratulate our sister country the Republic of Equatorial Guinea on assuming the presidency of the Security Council for the month of February and wish it every success in the fulfilment of its mandate. Allow me to welcome you, Mr. President, and express the full satisfaction of the delegation of the Central African Republic in seeing you conduct this important public debate, the topic of which is highly relevant in view of the criminal activities carried out by mercenaries in the Central African subregion.

Before going to the heart of the matter, I would like to apologize on behalf of His Excellency Mr. Faustin Archange Touadera, President of the Central African Republic, who very much wanted to be here but has not been able to attend owing to the peace negotiations taking place in Khartoum, which require his constant monitoring and presence in Bangui.

Recurrent crises lead the perpetrators of such crises to recruit mercenaries to fill the ranks of their combatants. My country's case is instructive in that regard, as the many rebellions that have taken place in the Central African Republic have always included the involvement of mercenaries from various countries. The other reason for that recruitment is the fragmentation of armed groups, which further complicates any attempts to seek a solution to end the conflict.

Armed groups, supported by foreign fighters, engage in various illicit and criminal activities, such as the exploitation of mineral resources and smuggling in diamonds and gold. As demonstrated during the Security Council's debate on 16 October 2018 (see S/PV.8372), natural resources are increasingly becoming the causes of conflict and their deep-rootedness. We note that the persistence of tensions in mining areas is higher than in others. The exploitation of natural resources and competition over those resources provoke violent clashes between various groups for control of their zones of influence, thereby leading to their engagement in several activities falling under State sovereignty. The current difficulties in finding a peaceful resolution to the crisis in the Central African Republic adequately illustrate the inextricable nature of armed conflict and its being fuelled by the looting of natural resources by armed groups.

The concept note (S/2019/97, annex) provided to us covers relevant issues to which we are not able to provide the requisite responses, given the time allocated to us. We have witnessed the proliferation of mercenarism in Africa for many years, but especially in Central Africa in recent years. Given that mercenary activity is driven by profit, it would be difficult not to make the link between this growing trend and the wealth possessed by States targeted by such acts of violence and destabilization.

Furthermore, the actions carried out so far by the States of the region, together with the Security Council and the United Nations, abound in a positive way, as the issue of mercenaries is now the subject of a General

Assembly resolution that is dealt with annually by the Third Committee. However, the resources deployed and the measures taken so far appear to be insufficient and require more extensive implementation. Existing sanctions can undoubtedly be bolstered against mercenaries in order to serve as an example and a deterrent.

The proliferation of mercenaries and the circulation of small arms and light weapons are a source of serious concern. Those two scourges must be treated with rigour. To that end, only sustained cooperation between the countries of Central Africa can eradicate them, as they undermine good-neighbourly relations and create an atmosphere of suspicion among those countries.

**The President** (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of Chad.

**Mr. Moustapha** (Chad) (*spoke in French*): At the outset, I wish to convey to you, Mr. President, the sincere apologies of your brother and friend Mr. Idriss Deby Itno, President of the Republic of Chad, who would have liked to participate in this debate had the constraints of his schedule permitted. He has asked that you, Sir, accept his expression of gratitude for having convened this important debate on the impact of mercenarism in Central Africa — a topic that is highly relevant to the growing security challenges that surround the subregion and many others.

I would also like to thank the Secretary-General, whose presence at this high-level debate is evidence of his commitment to peace and security in Africa. As well, I commend the relevant and very illustrative interventions made by the Ministers for Foreign Affairs of Rwanda, Côte d'Ivoire and Gabon.

Mercenarism has always been a factor of insecurity and destabilization throughout the ages. As the preamble to the Convention for the Elimination of Mercenarism in Africa aptly points out, this phenomenon poses a serious threat to the independence, sovereignty, security, territorial integrity and harmonious development of States. It is therefore right that the international community tackle it energetically by putting in place appropriate legal instruments.

Nevertheless, the evolution of international security paradigms — with the emergence of non-State actors, including terrorist groups and traffickers of all kinds — and the increasing and harmful impact of their actions on the international scene makes the

fight against insecurity factors, such as the use of mercenaries, more complex. Similarly, the weakening or even collapse of States in certain parts of the world and the prospect of non-State groups controlling entire portions of national territory have significantly increased the threat, given the access of those groups to huge financial and natural resources and, above all, their control of large quantities of weapons and ammunition, which they undertake to circulate. That prospect is of concern to the international community and requires it to be much more vigilant.

There is therefore an urgent need to implement the existing legal instruments and tailor them to the evolving threat. In that spirit, Chad has developed a legal arsenal to prevent and punish all mercenary acts. Our new criminal code, adopted in 2017, criminalizes and cracks down on that phenomenon. It provides for a prison sentence of 20 to 30 years for any person who engages in such criminal activity. Legal persons can also be declared fully responsible for mercenary acts, and therefore heavily punished. The ratification of the Organization of African Unity Convention for the Elimination of Mercenarism in Africa is also part of that process.

The Government of Chad has always strived to combat insecurity in all its forms, in collaboration with its bilateral, subregional, regional and international partners. At the bilateral level, Chad regularly organizes, together with neighbouring and friendly countries, joint general or sectoral commissions that provide an appropriate forum for discussing issues of common interest and concern, including those related to security, with a view to providing the required solutions. Together with the Sudan, Chad has set up a joint border force that has achieved exemplary results in the border security field. In the Lake Chad basin, the Multinational Joint Task Force, while effectively reducing the operations of the Boko Haram sect, is also involved in the systematic dismantling of its networks for arms and ammunition supply and people recruitment.

Furthermore, subregional organizations serve as a platform for discussion and information exchange on the issue of security. For example, the forty-seventh meeting of the United Nations Standing Advisory Committee on Security Questions in Central Africa, held in N'Djamena from 3 and 7 December 2018, allowed for a review of the political and security issues in the Central African subregion. The issue of mercenarism was included on the agenda. Among

its conclusions, while stressing the complexity of the mercenary situation, the meeting called on

“the African Union, the Economic Community of Central African States and the United Nations to increase their cooperation with a view to strengthening their commitments to combating mercenarism, including through the implementation of existing legal instruments”.

In addition, Chad, the Sudan, the Niger and Libya signed a memorandum of understanding in N'Djamena on 31 May 2018, aimed at strengthening cooperation on security and border surveillance among the four countries in response to the security challenges arising from the situation in southern Libya, which is characterized by the proliferation of terrorist groups, traffickers of all kinds and armed groups engaged in mercenarism. That constitutes a serious threat of destabilization for neighbouring countries as well as for international peace and security more broadly. Chad has repeatedly emphasized that the volatile situation in southern Libya offers conditions that allow for the establishment of armed groups, including mercenaries being paid for their services in various conflicts.

Despite making immense efforts to consolidate peace and security for its people and contribute to peace and security in the subregion, my country, Chad, remains threatened by this scourge, as demonstrated by the criminal acts directed against our territory and citizens. We therefore call on the international community to give special attention to fragile regions and countries, particularly in the Sahel and Central Africa. Chad also remains convinced that resolving the crisis in Libya and the return of State authority throughout the territory of that sisterly country will contribute to reducing the threat throughout the Sahel.

In conclusion, Chad reiterates its commitment to continuing to work to strengthen cooperation with neighbouring States, the countries of the subregion and the international community as a whole, with a view to combating mercenarism and other threats to peace and security in the region and the rest of the world.

**The President** (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of the Congo.

**Mr. Balé** (Republic of Congo) (*spoke in French*): At the outset, upon the accession of the sisterly Republic of Equatorial Guinea to the presidency of the Security Council for the month of February, allow me to convey

to you, Mr. President, the heartfelt congratulations of your great friend and brother His Excellency Mr. Denis Sassou Nguesso, President of the Republic of the Congo, who was unable to travel to New York. He reiterates his support for your mandate, Sir, at the helm of this organ entrusted with maintaining international peace and security.

Your presence, Mr. President, in this Chamber dedicated to peace and security throughout the world confirms your constant commitment to peace and development in Africa, particularly in our subregion of Central Africa. My delegation is extremely grateful to Equatorial Guinea for having invited the Congo to participate in this important debate on mercenarism, with particular reference to the Central African subregion. Equatorial Guinea represents a victimized African country, not to mention one that has endured more than one attempt at destabilization by mercenaries, the most recent of which took place in December 2017. The Central African Republic and the Democratic Republic of the Congo — countries of the subregion — are further emblematic victims of predatory mercenary activities.

I would like to take this opportunity to commend the peace agreement reached on 2 February in Khartoum between the Government of the Central African Republic and armed groups, establishing high hopes for the reconstruction of that country of the subregion, at peace and reconciled with itself, which will hereafter be able to play its part in realizing the peace, security and development agenda in our Central African subregion.

The issue of mercenaries — often scrutinized in the shadow of major current affairs such as terrorism or maritime piracy — does not receive much attention from the international community. Yet it is akin to other threats to peace, stability and security. By way of illustration, in the case of Central Africa, uncontrolled movements of illegal groups between States in our subregion have a negative impact on trust. It is well known that the promotion of confidence-building measures among States at the regional and subregional levels alleviates tensions and conflicts and promotes lasting peace, stability and sustainable development. Moreover, it has been noted that it is easier for these non-State actors — the mercenaries — to incite coups d'état, destabilize legitimate institutions, carry out activities of economic and/or political intelligence-gathering, perpetrate acts of terrorism

and participate in conflicts alongside mutineers, insurgents, rebels or other armed oppositions with a view to overthrowing legitimate Governments.

It is clear that mercenary activities and related activities have, unfortunately, multiplied in conflict situations in recent years. The African continent has suffered a great deal and continues to suffer from mercenaries who dangerously hamper its development. The issue of mercenaries is, in that respect, a major security concern for our countries and one that should engage us further. That is why my delegation welcomes its inclusion on the Council's agenda and hopes that today's debate will shed more light on this phenomenon, given the developments in the situation that call for renewed consideration.

I am pleased to note that the issue of mercenarism is at the heart of the concerns of the leaders of the subregion. It was the subject of particular attention in Brazzaville at the forty-sixth meeting of the United Nations Standing Advisory Committee on Security Questions in Central Africa. In the declaration that led to the consideration of this item, a commitment was made by members of the Economic Community of Central African States to making the necessary efforts and collaborating in order to eliminate the risk of mercenary infiltration in the countries of the subregion.

The ministerial meeting of the Peace and Security Council of the African Union, as well as the Joint Summit of the Economic Community of West African States and the Economic Community of Central African States Heads of State and Government on Peace, Security, Stability and the Fight Against Terrorism and Violent Extremism, which gathered the Heads of State and Government of West and Central African States in July 2018, touched on the problem of mercenarism, which affects the countries of the two subregions, which are already prey to maritime piracy in the Gulf of Guinea; the activities of terrorist groups such as Boko Haram and the Lord's Resistance Army; as well as transnational organized crime and security threats related to pastoralism and transhumance.

Strengthening cooperation at the subregional and regional levels in the areas of conflict prevention, peacekeeping and combating cross-border crime, terrorism and the illicit circulation of weapons — areas in which mercenaries are very active — are, among others, measures that resulted from those two meetings, which, as the Council is aware, contribute to reducing the

impact of mercenary activities in conflicts. Improved demobilization and reintegration programmes have also proven to be a means of preventing former combatants from returning to service as new mercenaries.

In that context of combating this phenomenon, we must include the entry into force of the Central African Convention for the Control of Small Arms and Light Weapons, Their Ammunition and All Parts and Components That Can Be Used for Their Manufacture, Repair and Assembly. That agreement, known as the Kinshasa Convention, is a living expression of the will of our States to prevent the illicit and uncontrolled circulation of small arms and light weapons, particularly in areas of internal or border conflict. However, the issue of mercenarism is a complex and sensitive subject and combating mercenarism is no easy task — far from it — even if the issue has earned the unanimous condemnation of the international community.

We have certainly dedicated international instruments to the issue. The Convention for the Elimination of Mercenarism in Africa, signed in Libreville on 3 July 1977, entered into force on 22 April 1985. It is an important regional instrument in view of the dangers that have been posed by mercenarism to many African States since the beginning of decolonization. That text was adopted less than a month after the Additional Protocol of 1977 to the Geneva Conventions of 1949. Mercenarism is not identified by the 1977 Additional Protocol as a serious offense, whereas the African Convention criminalizes mercenaries and mercenarism. The United Nations International Convention against the Recruitment, Use, Financing and Training of Mercenaries, of 4 December 1989, considers mercenarism to be an offence. It entered into force on 20 October 2001.

Some countries have adopted related national laws and regulations that contribute to their commitment to better governance of the phenomenon. However, in order to effectively combat mercenarism in its current form, the adaptation of all instruments, taking into account the evolution of the phenomenon in its various current configurations, is a necessity requiring a more in-depth update with which national legislation must be aligned. Strengthening cooperation at the subregional, regional and international levels, based on genuine and decisive political resolve, is crucial to support the implementation of those revised instruments.

In that regard, the members of the Economic Community of Central African States have affirmed their will to develop a strategy within the framework of the United Nations Standing Advisory Committee on Security Questions in Central Africa, with the technical support of the United Nations Regional Office for Central Africa, the African Union and international partners, in order to eradicate the phenomenon of mercenarism in our subregion.

**The President** (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of Djibouti.

**Mrs. Hassan** (Djibouti): At the outset, I would like to thank you, Mr. President, for having invited my delegation to take part in this first high-level debate of the Security Council on the theme “Mercenary activities as a source of insecurity and destabilization in Africa”.

I wish to convey deep and sincere congratulations to you, Sir, from your brother, His Excellency Mr. Ismaël Omar Guelleh, President of the Republic of Djibouti and Head of Government, who wishes to thank you and your delegation for having highlighted this important subject during your presidency of the Security Council for this month. We are confident that your country will carry out its duties with distinction.

(*spoke in French*)

Equatorial Guinea brings a unique expertise and perspective to this issue, having addressed it continuously on the basis of its own experience. The clarification of the challenges outlined in the concept note (S/2019/97, annex) before us amply demonstrates the level of Equatorial Guinea’s expertise and wealth of experience. We wish to express our appreciation for the briefings made this morning by the Secretary-General, the Chairperson of the African Union Commission and the Minister for Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation of Rwanda, in his capacity as representative of the Chairperson of the African Union, His Excellency Mr. Paul Kagame.

(*spoke in English*)

Djibouti takes this opportunity to reiterate its principled position and commitment against all violations of human rights and international humanitarian law, as underlined in the report of the Working Group on the use of mercenaries as a means of violating human rights and impeding the exercise of

the right of peoples to self-determination (A/73/303). In that regard, we wish to make the four following points.

*(spoke in French)*

First, the phenomenon of mercenarism poses a threat to peace, security and international and regional stability, and is one of the causes of destabilization in Africa. In that regard, the Security Council and the United Nations must help to develop responses in order to eliminate this phenomenon, based on the recommendations made by the Working Group. Those must contribute to renewing our political will in this fight and cover all aspects, such as the recruitment, training, engagement and financing of mercenaries.

Secondly, my delegation expresses its concern at the increase in the number of terrorist groups, violent extremism and transnational organized crime, in particular human trafficking and drug trafficking in several areas of Africa that were untouched by armed conflict before such activity began.

Thirdly, additional efforts should be made, especially in preparing mandates and funding for peacekeeping operations, special political missions and peacebuilding efforts in areas emerging from conflict and conflict-affected areas. In Africa, it will be necessary to ensure greater cooperation among subregional organizations, the African Union and the United Nations with a view to improving the results of such activity on the ground.

Fourthly, we also welcome the common position adopted by the African Heads of State and Government within the framework of the Silencing the Guns by 2020 initiative, the noble aim of which is to save future generations from the scourge of war.

As a haven of peace and refuge in a subregion that is racked with conflict and armed violence, the Republic of Djibouti has always been an advocate for the culture of peace that it draws from the very foundations of its pastoral traditions, which are based on the notions of hospitality and exchange. We hope that this high-level meeting will enable us to strengthen our global response to the phenomenon of mercenarism by capitalizing on the efforts undertaken by the international community, in strict compliance with international law and international humanitarian law.

**The President** *(spoke in Spanish)*: I now give the floor to the representative of the Sudan.

**Mr. Mohamed** (Sudan) *(spoke in Arabic)*: I would like to congratulate you, Mr. President, and your friendly country on assuming the presidency of the Security Council for this month and for convening this important meeting on such an important topic, which has a great impact on security and stability in Africa.

I also congratulate the new members that joined the Security Council in January, as well as the friendly Republic of China and its people on the Chinese new year. I also welcome the participation in this important meeting of the Ministers for Foreign Affairs of Côte d'Ivoire, Gabon and Rwanda.

My delegation is grateful to Equatorial Guinea for dedicating this debate to discussing the disastrous effects of mercenary activities on peace and security in Africa. Mercenary groups continue to exploit conflicts in a number of African regions and consider those areas as havens for their criminal activities. Sometimes, such groups carry out human and arms trafficking and, in other cases, practice banditry and exploit natural resources. Mercenaries seek to perpetuate conflicts, fragile conditions and weak Governments in order to survive in environments that suit them. Accordingly, mercenaries are one of the greatest challenges and threats to maintaining peace and security.

Mercenary activities in Africa and in countries like yours, Mr. President, are among the threats posed to stability and security in Africa, as is evident in the Central African Republic and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The continuation of such activities on our continent causes great harm to humankind as a whole. We applaud the courage of Equatorial Guinea and its President in combating mercenary activities, and we strongly support the President's call on the international community to more effectively combat the three consistent evils in the history of humankind: terrorism, mercenaries and piracy. We applaud Angola, Zimbabwe and Cameroon in helping Equatorial Guinea to decisively address the issue of mercenaries. We call on the African Union to make greater efforts to combat mercenaries and integrate those efforts into current plans for Africa's contribution and funding of peacekeeping operations. We note in particular the link between child recruitment, child abuse and mercenaries. We also call for priority to be given to those issues as we celebrate the thirtieth anniversary of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.

After becoming aware of the threat posed by mercenary gangs, the Sudan worked diligently to preserve State authority in conflict areas on its territory. We did not allow mercenaries to carry out destabilizing activities on our land or to undermine the peace efforts leading to the signing of the Doha Document for Peace in Darfur in 2011. Following the defeat of armed groups in Darfur and their expulsion from our land, which made peace a reality, those armed groups were forced to carry out criminal and mercenary activities for money, such as banditry, extortion, exploitation of natural resources and human trafficking. However, mercenaries carried out attacks against the Sudan from outside its borders between 2015 and 2017.

The threat posed by the growing activities and practices of mercenary groups requires the international community to decisively combat such groups. We therefore highly appreciate the convening of this debate, and we hope that it will lead the international community to adopt a joint vision to combat the phenomenon, the impact of which extends to peaceful countries. There are many examples of that.

We would like to present some suggestions, in addition to those that have been offered by previous speakers, to fight mercenary activities.

First, we underline the importance of strengthening and activating the role of preventive diplomacy to prevent conflicts, which constitute a fertile environment for the mercenaries, as per the Secretary-General's programme.

Secondly, we must promote the capacities and work of expert groups in conducting investigations into mercenary activities in areas of conflict, as well as in developing information infrastructure that facilitates the containment and combating of those mercenary groups, in addition to preventing them from moving to new regions.

Thirdly, we must strengthen and rehabilitate border control systems in countries of conflict that constitute an environment conducive to mercenary activities. We also must provide those countries with the necessary political and technical support.

Fourthly, it is imperative that we strengthen cooperation and coordination among States in that regard, as well as increase exchange of experiences and information.

In conclusion, I would like to emphasize that the Government of the Sudan attaches great importance and priority to the issue of mercenaries, as evidenced by the regional workshop we hosted in 2017, which was organized by the Secretariat of the Committee of Intelligence and Security Services of Africa, in cooperation with the National Intelligence and Security Service of the Sudan, and held in Khartoum over the course of three days. The workshop addressed the phenomenon of mercenaries, foreign terrorist fighters and non-State actors, as well as their impact on security and stability in Africa. Twenty-seven African intelligence services participated in the workshop with a view to shining a spotlight on that phenomenon and adopting the strategies and plans necessary to fight it, while strengthening cooperation and coordination among African States.

I am honoured to share with those present that the Government of the Central African Republic and all the opposition movements, without exception, successfully brought their negotiations to a close yesterday by reaching a peaceful settlement. The initial signing of the peace agreement will take place tomorrow and the final signing will take place in Bangui next week. We are confident and optimistic that the agreement, which is sponsored by the African Union, will enable the Central African Republic, a neighbourly and friendly country, to emerge from the darkness of conflict into the expansive horizons of peace and development.

*The meeting rose at 1.35 p.m.*