

COUNTRIES IN THE REGION STEP UP CROSS-BORDER JUDICIAL COOPERATION



DRC Prime Minister, Jean-Michel Sama Lukonde, addresses the ministerial meeting in Kinshasa, 16 June 2022.

On 13 and 14 June 2022, the members of the Great Lakes Judicial Cooperation Network (Network) of the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region (ICGLR) met in Kinshasa, DRC. The Network is the main vehicle in the region that supports the work of Central Authorities in regional criminal justice matters. The Network has been supported by the Office of the Special Envoy since its creation in 2016. This seventh meeting of the Network also included external judicial experts, civil society members, the ICGLR, and other United Nations entities.

Attorney General Pierre Shindano, the senior representative of the DRC, became the new Chair of the Network, taking over from Angola. When asked why he decided to accept this regional mandate, he answered that “not only [has] the economy been globalized, but so [have] crimes. To combat them, we must join our efforts. No single State, as powerful as it may be, can successfully counter the level of international organized crime by itself.” He further added: “We, State agents in charge of rendering justice, can no longer tolerate criminals having taken the lead from us in their regionalization and globalization efforts. Today we need to create the conditions for us to catch up and overtake them to contribute to peace and security in the Great Lakes region.”



Three days later, on 16 June, Attorney General Shindano presented the outcome of the Network meeting to the ICGLR Ministers of Justice. The Ministers adopted the *Kinshasa Declaration on Enhancing Judicial Cooperation*, which proposes measures to harmonize Mutual Legal Assistance and Extradition on criminal matters in the region, including a template of procedural guidelines. The harmonization of standards related to Mutual Legal Assistance is expected to reduce obstacles to the cross-border exchange of intelligence and/or evidence among ICGLR Member States and, in turn, enhance the effectiveness of criminal investigations and prosecutions in the region.

On the sidelines of the ministerial meeting, the Office of the Special Envoy also coordinated a meeting of UN entities aimed at ensuring concerted support for the requests and recommendations made by the Ministers. As part of the Action Plan for the implementation of the UN Strategy for Peace Consolidation, Conflict Prevention, and Conflict Resolution in the Great Lakes region (Regional Strategy), conclusions from the Kinshasa meetings are set to lead to a comprehensive initiative in support of the Network's efforts in fighting impunity for the years to come.

In follow-up to the ministerial meeting, the Office of the Special Envoy, together with the UN peacekeeping mission in the DRC, MONUSCO, the New York-based UN Office for Rule of Law and Security Institutions and Attorney General Shindano, engaged stakeholders in the DRC from 24 November to 2 December 2022 with the aim of identifying ways to strengthen the fight against impunity for grave crimes in the region. Their efforts focused on crimes related to the illicit exploitation and trade of natural resources. Furthermore, on 13 December, the Office of the Special Envoy and the ICGLR supported the inaugural meeting of the regional Review Committee, which is charged with overseeing and supporting the implementation of the Kinshasa Declaration. It comprises the Network's Member States and is currently chaired by Attorney General Shindano.