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Deputy Prime Minister Maxime Prévot travels to Central Africa to continue Belgium's diplomatic efforts

Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs, European Affairs and Development Cooperation, Maxime Prévot, is travelling to Central Africa from 25 to 29 April to continue Belgium's diplomatic efforts to contribute to a lasting solution to the conflict in the East of the Democratic Republic of Congo. The situation remains extremely precarious, and the local population pays the price every day. There is an urgent need to act. The violence and humanitarian impact suffered by civilians, first and foremost women and children, is intolerable.

It is positive that an agreement facilitated by Qatar has been reached between the Democratic Republic of Congo and the AFC/M23 to work towards the conclusion of a truce that will allow for the establishment of a ceasefire. Belgium encourages the parties to the conflict to respect their commitments, to enter into a dialogue and to silence the guns.

During his mission, Minister Prévot will bring these messages to countries that, in various capacities, have a critical role to play in ending the conflict and building peace. He will visit Uganda, Burundi and the Democratic Republic of Congo. After the break in diplomatic relations decided by Rwanda, a visit to Kigali is no longer possible at this stage.

This mission, in which the Belgian Special Envoy for the Great Lakes will also participate, will pursue several objectives:

- Support ongoing mediation efforts and dialogue initiatives at the national and regional levels;
- Explain directly to the interlocutors the positions and the actions taken by Belgium in international forums;
- To consolidate relations between Belgium and the three countries and to listen to the perspectives of local authorities, members of civil society and the population;
- To take stock of the projects financed by Belgium in the region through direct, indirect and multilateral cooperation in order to underline Belgium's commitment;
- To show Belgium's solidarity with the populations affected by the violence, to highlight the humanitarian support provided by Belgium in the region and to stay aware of the existing needs in the context of future commitments.
- Support the development of our economic relations with the region and with initiatives related to the business climate.

In these contacts, Minister Prévot will also emphasise the need to address the root causes of the conflict in order to break the cycle of violence. For Belgium, these are mainly:

- Respect for the territorial integrity of the Democratic Republic of Congo and each country in the region, and an end to external support for armed groups;
- To promote a cross-border economy based on formal circuits and value chain development in the exploitation and trade of natural resources and in the agriculture, forestry, hydroelectric energy and

tourism sectors;

- To resolve the refugee problem and allow for a voluntary, safe and dignified return to their communities of origin when conditions permit it;
- To end the threat posed by the FDLR and stop all collaboration between the Congolese army and the FDLR, as well as with other armed groups;
- To end hate speech and acts targeting specific communities, including Tutsi communities;
- To ensure the implementation of a credible process for the disarmament, demobilisation and community reintegration of all armed groups;
- To reform the Congolese army so that it can assume its role as guarantor of national sovereignty and of the security of the population;
- To effectively fight impunity, to guarantee justice and the rule of law, and to ensure the full protection and promotion of all human rights and fundamental freedoms.

During his meetings, Minister Prévot will also recall that the Belgian position regarding the conflict in the East of the DRC will remain anchored in respect for international law, human rights and the rule of law. Belgium has no other agenda and does not seek to favour any one of the stakeholders in its diplomatic action. Each country and the actors concerned have specific responsibilities in the crisis and are therefore called upon to play a role in contributing to a lasting solution.

A delegation from the Belgian (Dutch-speaking and French-speaking) written press will accompany the Minister.

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