

Speech by H.E. Mr Marc Pecsteen de Buytsverve, Ambassador,  
Permanent Representative

at the United Nations Security Council

**Debate: Mercenary activities as a source of insecurity and  
destabilisation in Africa**

New York, 4 February 2019

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Mr President,

I would like to thank you for organising this debate, and also thank the Secretary-General, the Chairperson of the African Union Commission and the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Rwanda for their interesting insights.

This discussion comes at an appropriate time, as mercenary activities are such a destabilising factor with a significant impact on several countries on the Security Council's agenda. Many of these countries are in Africa, but this is certainly not the only continent to be affected. Mercenary activity complicates and aggravates ongoing conflicts, but it can also contribute to the emergence of latent conflicts. This is why we must also remain attentive to it if we are to prevent conflicts.

As the framework note for this debate indicated, the consideration of these activities is complex, since they generally arise in a context that combines differing interests and motivations, ranging from organised crime to violent extremism and the pursuit of political objectives by undemocratic means. Mercenary activity is sometimes a source of funding for armed groups created for another purpose, while other groups are only looking to get rich. While there are different definitions of mercenary activities, a debate such as today's is useful for developing our views.

The Council is currently dealing with several examples of mercenary activity in its work. In Libya, for example, fighters from Darfur are selling their services to the warring factions. In doing so, they remain operational and pose a threat to Sudan and possibly other countries in the region. In Yemen, we are concerned about the use of children by mercenary groups. And we must not forget that maritime piracy can also be a form of mercenary activity, but I do not want to impinge on tomorrow's debate.

To curb the phenomenon of mercenary activities, which is generally international in scope, States would greatly benefit from making use of existing international instruments. We are thinking in particular of the 1989 Convention against the Recruitment, Use, Financing and Training of Mercenaries. Allow me, Mr President, to congratulate your country on ratifying this convention. Today, only 36 Member States, including Belgium, are parties to this Convention, which was adopted by the General Assembly in 1989. We therefore call on all Member States to ratify it without delay.

However, the standards and legal instruments to which we subscribe will only have an impact if our States implement them at national level. They include international humanitarian law and international human rights texts, as well as texts from regional organisations. Moreover, in this field as in others, we advocate a real strengthening of cooperation between States.

The Security Council already has tools in place to address the interests of sponsors or organisers of mercenary activities. By this we mean targeted sanctions aimed at individuals acting in a manner that contradicts the peace efforts and at the ways in which their activities are financed. These include illicit arms trafficking, illicit financial transfers and the illegal exploitation of natural resources.

Mr President,

Each State may have to face the problem of mercenary activities in one way or another and must find a way to react. Belgium, for its part, will always choose transparency and international cooperation.

Thank you.