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## JOINT STATEMENT

### by the Special Envoys for the Great Lakes on their visit to Burundi

*'Special Envoy of the UN Secretary-General to the Great Lakes Region Mary Robinson, US Special Envoy for the Great Lakes Region and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) Russ Feingold, Special Representative of the African Union for Burundi and the Great Lakes Region Boubacar Diarra, and European Union Senior Coordinator for the Great Lakes Region Koen Vervaeke, took part this past weekend in the Children's Forum of Hope held in Bujumbura, an event organised to empower the youth of the Great Lakes Region and to ensure the inclusion of their voices in the process of implementing the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework for the DRC and the Region. The Envoys praised the commitment of the 52 young people from the seven signatory countries who participated in the Forum and encouraged them to be voices for peace in their respective countries.*

*The Envoys appreciated the opportunity to meet His Excellency Pierre Nkurunziza, President of the Republic of Burundi. They met the President individually and shared their joint analysis of the situation in Burundi.*

*The Envoys also met with government representatives and leaders of the ruling party, opposition parties and civil society about the political and security situation in the country. The Envoys welcomed the adoption by consensus of the new Electoral Code and the agreement in principle by the Burundian political parties and actors to adopt a code of conduct for the 2015 elections. They also took note of the Government of Burundi's commitment to organise transparent, inclusive and peaceful elections, and to invite international observers. However, the Envoys are very concerned about the constraints on*

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*political space and civil liberties which hinder the efforts of the opposition, civil society and the media, in the lead-up to the elections in 2015. Burundi has made commendable progress in overcoming a history of conflict, but that progress risks being lost if action is taken to undermine the electoral process and prevent the full participation of all stakeholders.*

*An election is more than a day; it is a process. Only if the electoral process is inclusive, transparent, and peaceful, can the election itself be considered free, fair and credible. In the run-up to elections, the media and civil society must be free to speak up and report on the entire electoral process. All political parties and actors must have an equal opportunity to participate in the process, including meeting at any time and as often as necessary to prepare for peaceful elections. Any effort to prevent meetings, intimidate participants, or undermine the opposition jeopardises the process and runs counter to the Burundian government's expressed commitment to democracy. The Envoys urge all parties to renounce violence and to call upon their members to exercise restraint and peaceful expression.*

*This election has the potential to build on Burundi's recent progress and contribute to a stronger future. The Envoys encourage the Government of Burundi and all stakeholders to seize this opportunity to bring about a better future for their country through a transparent, inclusive, peaceful and credible electoral process.'*