



USIPEACE BRIEFING

Disaster in the DRC:

Responding to the Humanitarian Crisis in North Kivu

AUTHORS

Go Funai and Catherine Morris

December 2008

UNITED STATES INSTITUTE OF PEACE
1200 17th Street NW, Suite 200
Washington, DC 20036-3011
www.usip.org

SYNOPSIS

This *USIPeace Briefing* discusses a recent event that focused on human security implications of resurgent violence which left hundreds dead, thousands displaced and millions destitute in North Kivu province in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The conclusions and recommendations from this event highlight the importance of going beyond traditional short-term humanitarian interventions to adopt more comprehensive and sustainable solutions that effectively balance security and development.

BACKGROUND

Since August 2008, renewed violence in the Democratic Republic of the Congo's (DRC) North Kivu province has created a humanitarian catastrophe by displacing more than 250,000, killing scores of innocent civilians, disrupting aid efforts and destroying critical infrastructure.¹ The clash between pro-government forces and rebel militias, mainly the National Congress for the Defense of the People (CNDP) and the Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR), was precipitated by a host of factors, including continued concerns about the influence of Hutu extremists in the region, weak governance and competition for access to the region's vast mineral wealth. In response to the unfolding crisis, the United Nations (U.N.) recently approved 3,000 additional troops to join its mission in the DRC (MONUC) for a total of 20,000 peacekeepers, and humanitarian agencies, such as the World Food Program and UNHCR, have provided upwards of 10,000 metric tons of food and equipped thousands with essentials such as blankets and cooking stoves.² A high-level consultative meeting on October 31 (involving representatives from the African Union, U.N. agencies, the United States, South Africa, France, the UK, Sweden and Belgium) sought, among other goals, to forestall this humanitarian disaster by agreeing on a coordinated and comprehensive effort to stop the violence and address humanitarian concerns.³

A USIP event on November 19, 2008 assessed the efficacy and sustainability of ongoing humanitarian efforts and examined options for a more robust approach.

The panelists were:

- Dr. Faida Mitifu, Ambassador of the Democratic Republic of Congo to the United States;
- Dr. Patience Kabamba, visiting lecturer at the Institutes for Critical International Studies and African Studies at Emory University;
- Seth Kaplan of Alpha International Consulting and author of “Fixing Fragile States: A New Paradigm for Development”

Kaliza Karuretwa, the first counselor from the Rwandan embassy, also participated, and [Raymond Gilpin](#) of USIP’s [Sustainable Economies Center of Innovation](#) moderated. The panelists discussed the origins of the recent violence and its continuing humanitarian toll. Analyzing the conflict, they examined long-term solutions to the humanitarian crisis and offered recommendations aimed at bolstering human security in the DRC. This *USIPeace Briefing* discusses the event’s main points.

IMPROVING HUMAN SECURITY IN THE KIVUS

Recurrent violence in the DRC in recent decades has eroded the political, social and economic foundations of society. Governance has worsened, poverty has increased, communities have been torn apart and impunity is pervasive. Thus, efforts to craft sustainable solutions to the DRC crisis must go beyond short-term initiatives to halt fighting and provide temporary relief and focus on providing human security for all Congolese.⁴ This means that every citizen must be guaranteed safety in communities that are free from fear and want.

Development, law and order, and military goals must be pursued in tandem if a lasting solution is to be found.

In August 2008, just two years after the country’s first successful democratic election, violence broke out in the troubled North Kivu province as a result of

three main factors: the continued activities of Hutu extremists in the FDLR; the apparent inability of the authorities to govern and protect; and a battle over control of valuable mineral resources in this region. This recent resurgence of violence echoed the early stages of the five-year Second Congo War (1998-2003), which involved eight countries, took as many as five million lives, internally displaced millions and resulted in over 40,000 cases of rape and torture.⁵ The fragile government, hindered by a lack of coordination in assistance from international partners, has been unable to maintain order and contain the rebel groups in the East.

As a result of the heavy fighting, looting, destruction of property and killings, the total number of internally displaced people in the region has reached more than one million. In addition, violent rape and torture have been used systematically as weapons. Since January 2008, more than 400 cases of sexual violence have been reported each month in North Kivu province alone.⁶

Mitifu advocated international support to bring stability to the country and offered the following recommendations:

- Address impunity by ensuring that perpetrators are held accountable for their crimes. No one should be rewarded for war crimes and giving criminals a seat at the negotiating table should not be an option.
- Ex-rebels and ex-combatants, once demobilized, must be assisted in either joining the DRC National Army or integrated back into society. Without proper support and training after disarmament, ex-combatants with no clear vision of a decent future are generally more susceptible to further recruitment by rebel forces. Thus, supporting ex-combatants in their journey back to civil life must remain a priority.
- U.S. leadership is needed to implement an international verification scheme that covers the trade of all mineral exports from the DRC—similar

to the Kimberly process, established in 2003 to deter trade in “blood diamonds.” As much of the conflict in the eastern DRC revolves around the demand for Congo’s natural resources, a mineral certification process would decrease the incentives for rebels to participate in the mineral extraction industry and the accompanying incentive to use violence.

- Increase the troop strength of MONUC. While the U.N. recently announced plans to increase the MONUC force from 17,000 to 20,000 troops, this step, although positive, remains deficient given the DRC’s size.⁷ Even more Blue Helmets are needed to make any significant strides to peace.
- Support MONUC with more robust international interventions along the lines of the European Union’s Operation Artemis in the DRC in 2003⁸ and the United Kingdom’s 2000 Operation Pallister in the Sierra Leone civil war.⁹ A strong international intervention could help stanch the immediate crisis, but the international community currently lacks the political will to commit themselves to extended involvement.
- Increase support in building the capacity of democratic institutions to strengthen the DRC’s political, economic and social fabric.
- Dedicate more resources for preventing and responding to sexual assault. With such high levels of sexual assault, stronger sanctions are needed against perpetrators and more resources required to combat the crippling stigmas attached to victims.

TOWARD A MORE SYSTEMIC APPROACH

Typical remedies for fixing fragile states—national elections, economic reform and administrative restructuring—fall short of their promise. Research suggests that such conventional thinking is inadequate to address the challenges

stemming from the country's volatile combination of abundant mineral wealth, ineffective government and weak national cohesion.

A more systemic approach based on incentive structures and locally owned solutions is required to overcome persistent instability. Kaplan emphasized the need to consider about what social systems are in place in the region and ways to change them.¹⁰ Changes in individual behavior require structural alterations, created with realistic assessments of the stakeholders' capacities. Multinational companies, for example, are the only actors in the resource rich-provinces of North and South Kivu with the incentives and capacity to secure mining sites and provide public services. Under the right contractual agreements, they could improve the lives of the Congolese, as well as eliminate some of the conditions that exacerbate conflict and undermine efforts to improve governance.

A country the size of Western Europe, the DRC's communities are divided because of poor infrastructure, distance, weak institutional linkages and linguistic differences. Because of these complexities, local solutions are more viable and effective. Local communities also have greater incentives to develop and invest in their immediate area more than any coalition of national groups. Moreover, local solutions provide valuable lessons for humanitarian and international communities.

Kaplan recommended:

- Leveraging multinational natural resource companies: Under the right contractual agreements, these companies have the greatest incentive to ensure that the state's mineral wealth improves the lives of the Congolese. For example, contract provisions could obligate companies to patrol mining sites or to pave roads.
- Encouraging horizontal, or bottom-up, models of governance: Instead of familiar models of vertical development local governance should be

supported. Current attempts to improve governance from Kinshasa have no immediate impact on the lives of anyone living outside the capital's direct vicinity. Instead, international organizations could focus their efforts on improving government and service delivery around the country's 21 major cities.

- Supporting decentralization by improving accountability beyond the central government. An overemphasis on Kinshasa, particularly during national elections, diverts scarce resources from local programs. Systems need to be designed to construct effective accountability loops and keep local officials responsible to their constituents.¹¹
- Making better use of local capacities: International partners should fund and support activities that build upon the strengths of local communities. Locally owned solutions, such as traditional conflict resolution mechanisms, tend to be more durable than shortsighted "band aid" measures.

BUILDING ON POSITIVE LOCAL DYNAMICS

A bottom-up approach to governance and security in the DRC is vital to successful peace-building there. Kabamba, a Congolese national who has recently done fieldwork in the country, cited the example of Nande traders in the Butembo community, a city in the northeast of Congo, as a case study. While renewed violence plagues the surrounding area, the city of Butembo remains relatively stable. In fact, many millionaires reside in this thriving town where the concept of wealth is linked to the community. No paperwork is needed for a \$10,000 loan, because the ethnically homogeneous community governs itself, functioning on trust and reputation. As a result, the Nande have traded successfully both internally and externally with international companies and players such as China, Hong Kong and Saudi Arabia for years with no stake in the neighboring violence.¹²

While the Nande community in Butembo may be anomalous in comparison to the majority of communities in eastern DRC, the group nonetheless demonstrates the possibility of a community that functions economically and politically on a local level, independently from the national government. This model, however, is not necessarily scalable and would most likely not function as well in a larger context.

Some criticize MONUC for trying to restore a national state that never fully existed in the first place. “[They] tried to build a house by starting from the top,” Kabamba said, “but the only successful top-down building is a grave.” Therefore, bolstering bottom-level financial channels and modalities will help set the DRC on a path to a lasting recovery.

A SUB-REGIONAL PERSPECTIVE

Instability in the DRC directly affects security, investment and livelihoods of neighboring countries as a result of the porous borders and business relationships that bind regional countries’ fates. The infamous Second Congo War or “Africa’s World War”¹³ clearly proved the interdependence of these neighborhood relationships as a conflict in one nation turned into a conflict involving eight. This regional interdependence coupled with the recent flare-ups has also contributed to widespread environmental degradation and exploitation of women.

Despite an imminent regional crisis, Karuretwa expressed optimism that a recent meeting between foreign ministers of the DRC and Rwanda to address the renewed violence in North Kivu could lay the foundation for improved regional cooperation in the areas of security and humanitarian assistance.

When questioned about Rwanda’s involvement, Karuretwa maintained that Hutu extremists led by the FDLR were to blame, a view shared by the U.S. Department of State.¹⁴ Some question Rwanda’s involvement and charge that

Nkunda and the CNDP are in fact Kigali proxies. Karuweta acknowledged existing tensions among regional governments and stated that overcoming mistrust was the first step to regional progress.

MOVING BEYOND SHORT-TERMISM

The usual response to such crises in the DRC and elsewhere has been to address immediate needs—food, shelter and medicines—without a plan to provide lasting solutions. Of course, such humanitarian assistance saves lives (at least in the short term), but the transition from humanitarianism to sustainable development must be emphasized and fully understood.

The following broad suggestions could help policymakers and practitioners address immediate security concerns more effectively and move beyond humanitarianism to broader-based and sustainable human security for every Congolese citizen.

Stabilize the security situation

- Support MONUC with more troops, adequate resources and a stronger mandate.
- Provide additional international resources and troops under the European Union or other bilateral mandate. Focused short-term deployments (like Operation Artemis) could stabilize flare-ups expeditiously and effectively, thereby creating a more conducive peacekeeping environment for MONUC troops.
- Flush out FDLR from the DRC and contain the CNDP militia. This is urgent, as durable peace cannot be achieved while Hutu extremists remain in eastern DRC.
- Increase dialogue with neighboring countries to foment regional cooperation to quell the fighting.
- Design and implement multi-stakeholder security sector reform (SSR). The DRC armed forces need to be trained, the security strategy needs to

- be redirected, and the doctrine made more accountable if the military forces are to be part of the solution and not part of the problem.
- Involve local communities in both the decision-making and the implementation processes.

Effective Humanitarianism

- Integrate local economies in relief efforts: buy and hire locally and build upon community strengths. Local communities must have ownership in the peace process and the national economy.
- Facilitate the return of displaced persons and refugees. The government and its humanitarian partners must resettle the thousands of displaced persons in the DRC to create a sense of normalcy and to reduce the threat of extremists using displaced persons and refugee camps as havens. Donor and domestic mechanisms to coordinate and verify such a process are vital to its success.
- Support self-sufficiency and limit dependency syndrome by enabling individuals to provide for themselves.

Transition to Sustainability

- Measures advancing human security and economic development must go hand in hand to ensure effectiveness and sustainability. This should include initiatives to integrate the informal economy and provide economic, social and financial services to benefit micro, small- and medium-sized enterprises.
- Focus on effective coordination of development assistance from NGO bilateral and multilateral sources.
- The DRC government should promote policies that assure natural resources become true national resources, benefiting every Congolese citizen.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Go Funai and Catherine Morris are, respectively, research assistant and program assistant in the [Sustainable Economies Center of Innovation](#) at the United States Institute of Peace. The views expressed here are not necessarily those of the Institute, which does not advocate specific policies.

ABOUT THE SUSTAINABLE ECONOMIES CENTER OF INNOVATION

The Sustainable Economies Center of Innovation, headed by [Raymond Gilpin](#), seeks to develop practical approaches to integrate economic dimensions in effective strategies to manage conflict and promote peace, while providing guidance for a broad range of practitioners. The Center's work builds on sound practice by bilateral agencies, multilateral institutions, non-governmental organizations and private sector firms working in conflict-affected areas; and is predicated on the premise that economic activities and actors can be transformative building blocks for sustainable peace.

ABOUT THE UNITED STATES INSTITUTE OF PEACE

The United States Institute of Peace is an independent, nonpartisan, national institution established and funded by Congress. Our mission is to help prevent, manage, and resolve international conflicts by empowering others with knowledge, skills, and resources, as well as by our direct involvement in peacebuilding efforts around the world.

¹ Since the renewed violence, the World Food Programme has provided food assistance to 145,000 people in six camps around Goma and has completed distributions to almost 100,000 others in rebel-held territories of Rutshuru and Kiwanja. See <http://www.wfp.org/English/?ModuleID=137&Key=2999>. In total, the World Food Programme has required 10,000 metric tons of food for the Kivu provinces. See <http://www.wfp.org/English/?ModuleID=137&Key=3008>.

² To read more about MONUC's assessment of the crisis, please visit: <http://www.monuc.org/news.aspx?newsID=18718>.

³ "Ban Confers with Leaders on Ending Conflict in Eastern DR Congo," UN News Centre, October 31, 2008. <http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=28784&Cr=drc&Cr1=>.

⁴ The concept of human security was most notably introduced in the UNDP's 1994 Human Development Report, which related security to people rather than territories, and to development rather than arms. More recently definitions of the concept could be found in the annual Human Development Report (<http://www.hsrgroup.org/>) or the Human Security Network (<http://www.humansecuritynetwork.org/>).

⁵ "Country Profile: Democratic Republic of Congo." BBC News, November 20, 2008, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/country_profiles/1076399.stm.

⁶ "Tens of thousands more women and girls at risk of rape and attack in DRC, warns CARE," CARE, November 6, 2008. http://care.ca/main/index.php?drc_2008&PHPSESSID=fc3ac3cda1dbc9e4790891b785ccd40c.

⁷ At its maximum deployment, the successful UN Mission in Sierra Leone was comprised of 17,368 troops in March of 2002. This number is only a couple thousand less than the 20,000 troops the U.N. will be providing to the DRC. At a total area of 2,345,410 square kilometers, however, the DRC is almost 33 times the size of Sierra Leone, which has a total area of merely 71,740 square km.

⁸ The European Union undertook Artemis on June 12, 2003 under resolution n 1484 of the U. N. Security Council. The operation was undertaken in response to an urgent situation in Bunia marked by violent affronts from militia groups and a grave humanitarian situation.
http://consilium.europa.eu/cms3_fo/showPage.asp?lang=en&id=606&mode=q&name=.

⁹ One thousand British troops were initially sent to Sierra Leone in 2000 to help evacuate of foreign nationals, but remained to provide logistical support to the U.N. operation and training for Sierra Leone Government forces. The British intervention was said to have stopped a probable coup by the Revolutionary United Front of Sierra Leone.
http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/91060.stm and <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/4603382.stm>.

¹⁰ For information regarding Seth Kaplan's book, please visit <http://sethkaplan.org/>.

¹¹ For information regarding the decentralization process, including its revenue-sharing provisions, please see http://www-wds.worldbank.org/servlet/main?menuPK=64187510&pagePK=64193027&piPK=64187937&theSitePK=523679&entityID=000333038_20080312025825.

¹² Comments based on two years of fieldwork in the Bambenda area.

¹³ "Country Profile: Democratic Republic of Congo." BBC News, November 20, 2008, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/country_profiles/1076399.stm.

¹⁴ For information regarding the U.S. Department of State position on the FDLR, please see <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2008/oct/110642.htm> and http://rwanda.usembassy.gov/statement_by_sean_mccormack_spokesman.html.