

DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO: STATE OF AFFAIRS

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY¹

The war sustained by the Democratic Republic of the Congo continues to be one of most devastating and ignored conflicts of our time. Almost two million people have been displaced as a result of the violence and insecurity that continues to affect the eastern part of the country, while another half million people have fled to neighbouring countries. The conflict continues to rage in the eastern part of the country and the Government has been unable to resolve the underlying causes, even being blamed at times for its continuation – it has failed in its attempts to spread state control to the entire country. The complexity of the situation is owing to the medley of agents involved and the multiple aspects of the conflict at a local, regional and international level.

Throughout the twentieth century, the DRC has been immersed in a state of despotism, scarcity, disintegration of the State and pillaging of its natural resources. The roots of the problem can be traced to the period when the country was under colonial rule by Belgium. Since then, except for a brief respite after it achieved its independence in 1960, it spent the next thirty years under the dictatorship rule of Mobutu Sese Seko, a period characterized by repression of political dissidents, violently quashed rebellions and serious human rights violations. The elite Mobutuists in the meantime have amassed vast personal wealth pillaging the country's natural

¹ This project is based on research carried out in the field in DRC commissioned by the non-governmental organization Lliga dels Drets dels Pobles through the International Catalan Institute for Peace (ICIP) and coinciding with legislative and presidential elections held in November 2011. During this period of stay, a broad spectrum of local and international political, military and social stakeholders were interviewed. By express request of those interviewed, the identities of sources consulted have been protected. The responsibility for the entire contents of this study lies exclusively with the author, who wishes to take this opportunity to thank all those interviewed for their contributions, as well as the members of Xarxa d'Entitats per la RDC (Escola de Cultura de Pau, Lliga dels Drets dels Pobles, Veterinarians Without Borders, Farma Mundi, Justícia i Pau, la Bretxa, Castelldefels Kasando). The author would like to express his gratitude to Congolese network GADHOP, and especially Moises Kambere Kayitambya and Cathi Kathungu Furaha. I would also like to thank the International Catalan Institute for Peace (ICIP), for their invaluable support throughout this project.

resources for their personal gain. A contributing factor to hindering any efforts to build a Nation state is the sheer size of the country. Measuring almost 2.4 million km², DRC is surrounded by 9 countries, has 9,000 km of borders and is home to more than 400 ethnic groups. In addition, some of its neighbouring countries have also suffered the threat of rebellions (Angola, Uganda, Rwanda and Burundi) by those who would use the DRC as their refuge, while Mobutu seemed at times powerless to bring these outbursts under control or complicit in failing to do so. Between 1996 and 1997, Mobutu was overthrown by a rebel coalition group led by Laurent Kabila, with backing from several neighbouring countries.

THE DRC ARMED CONFLICT: AFRICA'S WORLD WAR

The armed conflict raging in DRC has claimed over 5 million lives since 1998 and has been referred to by some as Africa's World War. The reason for this stems from the involvement of several countries in the region in the conflict, mainly Angola and Zimbabwe on the side of Kinshasa (although also to a lesser degree, Namibia, Sudan, Chad and Libya), and Rwanda and Uganda on the opposite side supporting the rebels, in addition to Burundi, and, to a lesser extent, the Central African Republic and South Africa. There have been reported cases of human rights violations, war crimes and crimes against humanity, among which the most startling must be the systematic use of sexual violence as a weapon of war. This has given rise to the country being referred to as the world capital of sexual violence: the DRC has been branded by many humanitarian organizations as one of the most dangerous places in the world for women and children. The United Nations and a host of NGOs estimate that hundreds of thousands of women and children have become victims of sexual violence since the outbreak of hostilities in 1996. During the Rwandan Genocide in 1994, one of the root causes of the armed conflict in DRC, it is estimated that between 250,000 and half a million women and children suffered rape.

The culmination of the peace process between 2002 and 2003, which brought about the formation of a transition Government between 2003 and 2006 led by Joseph Kabila, son of Laurent Kabila, subsequently elected president in what were the first democratic elections in over forty years in 2006, did not bring about an end to the violence. The 2006 elections brought a glimmer of hope that a solution to the grave problems facing the country might be at hand.

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The November 2011 elections should have contributed towards strengthening this situation. Nevertheless, the electoral process has meant a reversion in political terms with a return to armed groups activity and demonstrated the fragile nature of the security sector reform. Political instability in the region has been aggravated by an escalation of violence stemming from the role of the Congolese Government, Rwanda, the presence of factions of groups which have not demobilized, and the Rwandan Hutu group the FDLR. Some members of this latter movement are those responsible for the genocide in Rwanda in 1994. As such, the region remains the setting for one of the most appalling armed conflicts of our time and whose resolution is complex. Since 2009, the Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of Congo (FADRC) have carried out several offensives with the support of the MONUC (changed to MONUSCO after mid 2010) against the Rwandan Hutu group the FDLR. Nevertheless, the attacks have failed to neutralize the group. Added to this situation of instability is the rebellion led by the ex-leader of the CNDP, Bosco Ntaganda, wanted by the International Criminal Court accused of war crimes during the early part of 2012. The rebellion bears several similarities with the 2004 and 2008 uprisings led by Laurent Nkunda.

CHALLENGES AND OBSTACLES AHEAD

Unresolved local unrest, peace agreement breaches, the destabilizing role played by Rwanda in the Great Lakes region, and the permissive stance of the international community have thrown the eastern region of the DRC into a new spiral of instability. Despite the Congolese Government's efforts, at least in the short-term, to engage in dialogue with the M23, responsible for latest episode of an escalation of violence which is linked to the M23 rebellion, pressure on Rwanda and the M23, the volatile state is set to continue in the region as the root causes for this complex situation have yet to be resolved.

Consequently, if a short-term solution to this problem is to be found then a series of complementary measures must be implemented, the most pressing of which include 1) a ceasefire agreement between the Government and the M23; 2) a security mission along the border between Rwanda and the DRC through the provision of a regional military mission or even a more powerful mandate, both on the part of an African intervention force or by the

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MONUSCO itself; 3) reconvening dialogue between the CNDP and the Government to review violations of the 2009 agreement; 4) sanctions against armed groups; 5) a weapons embargo and the suspension of international aid to Rwanda to force its arm in cutting support of the M23; and 6) application of the Armed Forces reform plans, together with other issues associated with governability. Even then, further measures designed to address the deep rooted sources of the conflict and bring an end to hostilities will need to be implemented.

The challenges facing the country are indeed daunting, the majority of which are a direct consequence of its colonial past, exacerbated by the plundering and impunity of previous governments of Mobutu and Kabila, father and son. These challenges include a judicial system must be rebuilt from the base up in an effort to put an end to impunity, persistent wide scale corruption in many areas of administration, especially surrounding the exploitation of natural resources, the security sector reform, monitoring and disarmament of armed groups, policing the arms embargo affecting existing armed groups in the region, poverty and social injustice, a badly run economy that must achieve growth to affect an improvement on the living conditions of the population, and the severe humanitarian crisis affecting millions of people.

The three most significant fronts where these challenges are present are: in the first place, at a local level. A framework to resolve the national dispute regarding land ownership, given that corruption, abuses and the political class's exploitation of this question is at the heart of many local conflicts. Secondly, the strategy of military pressure against the FDLR has proven inefficient. It is vital that Rwanda make its move on the regional board regarding the FDLR, and pressure from the international community is crucial. Military action against the FDLR must go hand-in-hand with a proposal for political dialogue between Rwanda and the FDLR (as well as other Rwandan political stakeholders) to bring an end to the group's armed struggle and hostile nature against the Rwandan regime. Guarantees must be forthcoming for their integration within Rwanda and freedom of speech should be fostered throughout the country in an effort to achieve complete reconciliation between the varying political forces and lay a solid base for rebuilding lives after the Rwandan genocide of 1994. Thirdly, it is vital that measures on the ground are accompanied by a decisive course of action on the part of the international community with regard to the exploitation of the country's natural resources. Principally, the EU and China must follow suit and take the path chosen by the US in fostering of mechanisms of transparency and control on an international level in order to put an end to illicit methods of

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financing local actors whose actions represent a significant contribution to perpetuating the conflict.

This study aims to reflect one state of the issue and to analyse some of the principal obstacles which contribute to the ongoing violence in the country. The Congolese Government's failure in providing protection for its civilian population and controlling the region, and as such, its responsibility for the insecurity, takes away from progress that could be made in other areas. Land ownership disputes, the security sector reforms and the ties between armed groups and the exploitation of natural resources are some of the issues the study aims to analyse. In a globalized world where the superpowers (USA and China) compete in the race to expand their area of influence, the list of those involved in these issues include the vast network of local and international economic, political and military stakeholders present in DRC and neighbouring countries (especially Rwanda), other countries and actors from the international community, as well as the huge network of companies who participate directly and indirectly in the conflict whose ramifications are felt by one and all.

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