

African Conflict Prevention Programme (ACPP) –Pretoria



ACPP Daily Briefings

Week 15

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The **ACPP Daily Briefings** are held weekday mornings in the ACPP Pretoria's Situation Room and the Briefing Notes are the minutes of this meeting during which each regional expert of the Programme reports on the latest human security developments in his/her region, followed by general discussions around the table. An intern then compiles a summary of the meeting, which is reviewed by the respective researchers, and a senior researcher edits the report and provides quality control before returning it to the intern to prepare it for dispatch to the mailing list to which you have subscribed.

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Today's Briefings Compilation

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CONTENTS

Southern Africa

- Democratic Republic of Congo: Displacement along the Congolese and Ugandan border.

Summary of Briefings

Southern Africa

Democratic Republic of Congo: Displacement along the Congolese and Ugandan border

Remark: The notes related to this theme are based on the contribution of Ms Sandra Oder, from the Conflict Management and Peace-building Division at the ISS Pretoria.

Continued fighting in North Kivu province in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) has forced more than 3 000 civilians into Uganda since the beginning of the year. Recent reports by the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) indicate that an average of 50 Congolese are crossing over into Uganda every day, following violent attacks in the north-eastern region of the DRC. In February alone, about 2 200 refugees crossed into Uganda. It is clear that the humanitarian situation and displacement in the Kivu provinces of the eastern DRC, and across the borders, has again worsened with the remobilisation of armed rebel groups. Significantly, the new wave of refugees includes many Congolese who had returned home to the DRC last year following a tripartite agreement signed by the DRC, Uganda and the UNHCR in 2010. Between 2010 and 2011, about 7 000 displaced Congolese living in Uganda returned to the DRC. In mid-March this year, the UNHCR reported that displaced persons were moving into Uganda from North Kivu's Rutshuru District after walking for as many as 5 days to reach the Ugandan border points, from as far as Masisi and Walikale territories, located inside North Kivu – about 200 km and 350km from Uganda respectively. There have been reports of mass human rights violations, extortion, abduction, looting of livestock, recruitment of minors, sexual abuse and killings. In a communiqué issued by the UNHCR, it was stated that the perpetrators of these violations have not yet been identified. However, it is widely known that local armed militia and bandits, taking advantage of the instability, are perpetuating the growing security threat in the Kivu provinces. There are also reports of clashes between the Congolese army and local militias.

The Ugandan government has said that the situation is overwhelming. The government, with the assistance of the UN, has opened a third transit camp in Nyakabande in Kisoro District, which is bordered by Rwanda in the south and the DRC in the east. While Kinshasa has not articulated its position or how it intends to respond to the growing instability, a provincial officer from the DRC visited the refugees, unsuccessfully urging his people to return home.

Historically, fighting in the eastern part of the country has resulted in displacement, both internally – about 600 000 internally displaced persons in the North Kivu alone – and across the border. This is primarily caused by the Congolese government's inability to protect its people and to control its territory, further compounding the complex security challenges in the region. If the current influx of refugees is not carefully monitored, the border areas could easily become a transit point for the flow of arms and movement of rebels masquerading as refugees. A balance needs to be struck between the humanitarian response and the human rights situation, which relates to the issue of reconciling the immediate responses and longer-term solutions to the underlying problems that keep re-emerging in the eastern DRC and along the border areas.

Various agencies have come on board to assist in responding to the situation, but ultimately, the DRC government has to step in and address the fundamental sources of the recurring displacement of persons. Moreover, the situation in the DRC at large has resulted in donor fatigue.

It appears that while there have been some efforts by the Ugandan government to alleviate the humanitarian challenges faced by the refugees, there is very little regional coordination of the

brewing humanitarian crisis. There has been no immediate response from SADC, and the AU has not issued any statement on the issue, while the UNHCR (the main actor) is grappling with issues of underfunding and lack of resources. Although Kinshasa does not exercise any real authority in the eastern part of the country, the state must be held accountable for not responding to the increasing instability and not upholding its basic responsibility to protect its population.

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