

Notes for THE PROTECTION OF CIVILIANS IN CONFLICT ZONES seminar held on the 30th September 2009.

Main speaker: Anneke Van Woudenberg.

1. Contemporary history on the conflict in the DRC.

- Elections was held in late 2006
- Many saw the Elections in a positive light and had high hopes for democracy in the DRC.
- High hopes turned quickly sour however as large scale violence erupted in Kinshasa.

- It became apparent that the newly elected DRC government was unable to politically and militarily control the eastern DRC.
- The instability in the eastern DRC led to the rise of the Tutsi CNDP(National Congress for the Defence of the People). A rebel group led by Laurent Nkunda.
- The CNDP is considered to be a Rwandan Proxy group.
- CNDP launched attack on government forces in late 2008 threatening the large population center of Goma in eastern DRC.
- Government forces were totally unable to stop the CNDP's advance because of a lack of discipline and other factors in DRC army.
- UN forces were able to keep the CNDP's advance in check and Goma weren't captured.

- The DRC government had no choice but to go to the Rwandan government for help against the CNDP.
- Rwandan Government wanted however to take action against the Hutu FDLR (Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda) in eastern DRC in trade for action against the CNDP to which the DRC government agreed to.
- Rwanda launched an offensive against the FDLR followed by an offensive by the DRC army supported by MONUC.
- Both operations are considered a failure.
- FDLR launched counter attack on civilians in the eastern DRC leading to widespread destruction and the displacement of nearly 100 000 people.
- DRC government forces are considered as one of the biggest committers of human rights abuses in the eastern DRC.

2. How best to protect civilians in conflict zones?

- Demand compliance with international law and Geneva conventions by means of sanctions for example.
- Accurately reporting on violations of human rights.
- Ensure accountability of all parties.

-Ensure that Peacekeeping forces do not only have a strong mandate but also the means to enforce such a mandate by means of good intelligence, transport helicopters, rapid response capabilities and sufficient firepower.

3. Closing remarks.

-In 60% of rape cases recorded in the eastern DRC are violated against children younger than 18 years of age. This is for both male and female.

-A too slow UN bureaucracy leads to the slow response of UN military forces. You need to fill a form before UN command gives you permission to use a helicopter etc...

- Monuc needs a better framework to successfully complete mission in DRC.