



ISS Public Seminar Report

The Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC): The Situation in the East: Taking Stock and Looking Forward

Tuesday 14 July 2009

Hilton Hotel, Addis Ababa

Chair:

H.E. Guillaume Nseke, Ambassador and Permanent Representative, *Organisation Internationale de la Francophonie*

Speakers :

Hon. Josiah Batabiha Bushoki, Provincial Minister, Goma, North Kivu, DRC

Mr. Claude Iguma Wakenge, Life and Peace Institute, Bukavu, South Kivu, DRC

Mr. Joseph Felli, Head of MONUC office in Kigali, Rwanda

Background

The Conflict Prevention Programme (CPP) exerts its effort to compliment and support the work of the African Union on issues of peace and security. This seminar is part of CPP's effort to provide a platform for sharing information, encouraging policy debates

and dialogues on the African peace and security agenda. The main objective of this seminar was to stimulate discussion and interaction between participants on the situation in the Democratic Republic of Congo, specifically in the eastern provinces of North and South Kivu. Both provinces have witnessed various developments in the first half of the year that have altered the hitherto prevailing situation. Most notably amongst these developments is the rapprochement between the DRC and its neighbors in the East, Rwanda and Uganda, the agreement signed between the DRC and the *Congrès National pour la Défense du Peuple* (CNDP), and the joint military operations against the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) in the north-east and the *Forces Démocratiques pour la Libération du Rwanda* (FDLR) in the eastern province of North Kivu. Following the withdrawal of the Rwandese forces at the end of February this year, the Congolese government with support of MONUC mounted another operation against the FDLR, entitled Kimia II, this time in both North and South Kivu. In light of this, the seminar aimed at taking stock of the current situation, understanding the developments that led to the *status quo* and discussing options/recommendations for contributions to bringing sustainable peace in Eastern DRC.

Focus of the Discussion

The seminar started with welcoming remarks by Roba D. Sharamo, Programme Head, CPP, at the ISS Addis Ababa office. Following the introduction by the chair of the session, three panelists made presentations. These presentations provided DRC government, civil society and MONUC perspectives on recent developments and challenges and opportunities for the way forward.

More specifically, one presentation provided an overview of the various waves of violence that have engulfed the province of South Kivu in recent years. It was explained that the two main causes of current instability are the various armed groups still active in the province as well as the ongoing joint military operation by the Congolese army supported by MONUC. However, besides the continued presence of armed groups and the challenges related to the disarmament of those that took part in the Amani Programme as well as the issue of FDLR, there exist major challenges in bringing about sustainable

peace. Amongst others, these challenges relate to nationality and minorities, land tenure, proliferation of small arms (available for about 30 US\$ apiece), weak national army and impunity. In terms of governance, it was noted that the democratic process is not yet complete: the national governance structures are not yet supported by functioning structures at the local levels. Corruption is still rampant whilst redistributing the country's wealth remains problematic (40% is supposed to be distributed to the provinces).

The situation in North Kivu was also presented in more detail. Here the main issues centre around the FDLR and the CNDP.

Another important point that was made concerning both provinces as well as other parts of the country was the lack of communication or dialogue between the leadership in Kinshasa and those at the local levels.

The weak state of the Congolese army was also discussed as a major challenge. The recent integration of combatants of various armed movements has resulted in additional challenges, besides ill-discipline and lack of training. Especially a lack of cohesion was discussed as a problem.

The elections held in 2006 were also discussed. This election was the first since independence and Congolese people for first time were able to elect their leaders. It was successful although it was explained that the election could also be one of the main cause of the problem currently facing both North and South Kivu since it was not able to address some key issues, especially the political participation of the minorities. This added to the fact that the main peace agreement had also failed to adequately address the causes of the conflict.

An overview of the steps taken that led to the normalisation of Rwanda – DRC relations was presented. Triggered by the renewed fighting in the Kivus, particularly between the CNDP and the Congolese army, the rapprochement process commenced in late 2008. In

October the so called 4+4 committee, composed of Rwandan Congolese diplomats, was established which aimed at discussing the issues of the FDLR, CNDP and the normalisation of relations between the two countries. In early December the two countries reached an agreement on the joint operation against the FDLR and the issue of General Nkunda, who was arrested by Rwanda in January 2009. It was explained that the joint military operation, entitled Umoja Wetu, was more a political than a military operation, although it did succeed in weakening the FDLR command structure and destroyed several of their bases. As clear a result of the normalisation of the relation between the two countries, both Rwanda and the DRC has appointed ambassadors to each country.

Views on MONUC in Congo were also presented. It was explained that to some MONUC has become a state within state, especially if one compares MONUC's budget with that of the Congolese government. It was explained that MONUC has several problems that hinder its capacity to carry out its mandate effectively:

- The bureaucratic decision making process has put MONUC in a position that does not enable it to respond immediately specially protecting the civilians when problems occur. Although MONUC has about 17,000 staff, about 6,000 of these are soldiers, which is not enough to carry out its mission in the area facing instability.
- Member states that do not live up to commitments made such as contributing troops as well as necessary equipment.
- The behavior on the part of some of it staff that has affected the reputation of the mission.

On a more positive note, it was noted that MONUC is expecting the long awaited additional troops: Egypt has committed to deploying troops whilst equipment is also expected to arrive shortly.

In response to the presentations, participants raised different questions:

One question concerned the issue of decentralisation. Instead of adopting a *décentralisation forte*, why does the country not take on federalism? The discussion that followed provided a variety of perspectives on this issue, such as the fact that the current decentralisation process is practically federalism. Another perspective was that federalism would be problematic because the east of the country is inhabited by various minority groups and most of the country's resources are found here.

Another issue raised regarded the efforts undertaken to support the process of rapprochement as well as the negotiations between the Congolese government and the CNDP: how does one deal with the various actors wanting to be involved in this process?

Another discussion that followed the presentations concerned the military operations against the FDLR. It was noted that various research has indicated that the FDLR issue is a complex problem that is not likely to be resolved militarily. Suggested other step to be taken to deal with this issue is targeting more specifically the radicals among the FDLR. It was explained the since Umoja Wetu, the leadership has instituted very severe punishments for those intending to desert.

Recommendations

Some of the recommendations that were suggested include the following:

1. Strengthen democratic processes so as to encourage political and economic decentralisation;
2. Build capacity of the Congolese army;
3. Regarding the question of the FDLR: support political dialogue (Rwanda – DRC – FDLR) to allow for a peaceful disarmament of those who were not involved in the Rwandan genocide in 1994.
4. Promote dialogue between various communities in both North and South Kivu;
5. Put in place a policy to manage land conflicts (taking into consideration customary and modern ways of dealing with this).

Closing Remarks

Mr. Sharamo thanked the three panelists for their in-depth analysis of the situation in Eastern DRC and the participants for their comments and questions triggering a rich and interactive discussion. Mr. Sharamo also thanked CPP donors, namely Humanity United (USA) and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Federal Democratic Republic of Germany for the financial support, which enabled the holding of this important seminar.