

# Opening Remarks

## Council on Foreign Relations' Roundtable on Eastern Congo

Severine Autesserre, Barnard / Columbia ([sa435@columbia.edu](mailto:sa435@columbia.edu))

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In these very brief remarks, I want to emphasize that, when we design strategies to resolve the crisis, it is important to keep in mind that local causes of violence in the Kivus and North Katanga have been mostly ignored during the transition. There has been a lot of work on national and regional causes of violence but barely anything on local conflict. As a result, local agendas have continued to fuel the national and regional conflict, and we ended up with the crisis that we see now.

### **Brief analysis of the crisis**

When thinking about the crisis, it is useful to think about three interacting levels of conflict: local level, national level, and regional level.

- Local level is at the level of the individual, the family, the clan, the municipality, the community, the district, or the ethnic group.
- Regional level is at the level of the Great Lakes region.

We all know very well the regional and national causes of violence so I want to focus on the local causes of violence. The roots of the tensions in North Kivu lie in local conflict over land, local traditional power and local administrative power. Before, during, and after the war, local, national, and regional agendas interacted to produce violence in the eastern Congo, and this pattern continues now. Local agendas are the main motivations of Mai Mai militias groups in North Kivu. They fight with Kabila against Rwandophone groups not only because of their loyalty to the president or because their hatred of Rwanda but mostly because it is the best way for them to settle in their favor the ongoing conflicts over land, local administrative positions, and local traditional power. And these local agendas often motivate local alliances with the FDLR. Similarly Tutsi hardliners refuse any kind of settlement because they are afraid of revenge killings on their families and ethnic group and because they are afraid to lose the local economic and political power they acquired during war.

In sum the history of North Kivu since independence, and especially the parallels we can see between the situation now and the situation just before the 1996 war, show that local problems are likely to get out of hand, they can very well generate yet another national and regional war, thus threaten US interests in the region and, above all, worsen the ongoing humanitarian disaster.

### **How to prevent the crisis from escalating (and ultimately stop it)**

In these circumstances, how can we defuse the crisis – and ultimately stabilize the Kivus and the Congo?

The presence of MONUC has already had a very positive impact on the situation. It has probably prevented the situation from degenerating into a national and regional crisis so far. But still there are many things to improve both in MONUC strategy and in the broader international intervention.

To stop the fighting, what is needed is

- o to intensify the diplomatic pressure on the Congolese government and on Nkunda so that they stop their offensive operations against one another and so that they start a real dialogue.

- to intensify the diplomatic pressure on the Rwandan government, so that Rwanda stops and actively prevents any kind of cross-border activity in support of Nkunda.
- Meanwhile, UN Security Council members should request the UN to use MONUC troops to protect the population in immediate danger, instead of focusing first on protecting UN buildings and equipment. And the UN Security Council should provide MONUC with added financial and human resources so that MONUC can overcome the massive logistic and security obstacles it usually faces.

But that will lead only to a temporary cease-fire, as we've already had plenty of. So we should also immediately help the Congo address the underlying causes of violence at the local, national, and regional levels.

I will start with the local level because it is at the local level that we can most improve current international interventions and it is at the local level that even limited funding and technical assistance could make a real difference.

Countries such as the US should increase their support to local conflict resolution programs

- First, make clear to the UN that they expect MONUC to finally start working on local conflict resolution, reconstruction of the justice system, and training of police forces in the Kivus. And give MONUC the resources to do so – it would not require much more resources than what MONUC already has but rather a different distribution of these resources.
- Second, it would be crucial to support the Congolese government in its desire to launch an inter-Kivu dialogue (for which, if necessary the UN could be facilitator and international donors like the US could provide funding)
- And third, donors should have an emergency budget for local conflict resolution

Because donors, the UN, international NGOs, and local NGOs absolutely need to work immediately on land issues and inter-community reconciliation.

- We should provide technical assistance to help the Congolese government and the representatives of all communities of the Kivus work on land reform. A land reform is needed to end the existing confusion between traditional and legal property rights and to design a fair and realist land redistribution policy. Donors could then provide funding to train local NGOs and local justice official in the new legislation, and then send them to rural villages so that they can resolve the ongoing conflicts over land. This is the best way to ensure that the return of Tutsi refugees to the Kivus does not trigger another major crisis.  
And it should also help with the extension of state authority over mining sites of the Kivus
- It is also crucial that donors provide funds for inter-community reconciliation. Already the work on land issues and the holding of an inter-Kivu dialogue would be steps in the right direction, but in conjunction, donors should fund NGO programs on local conflict resolution among all communities (not only reconciliation between Rwandophone and other communities But among all communities). The most effective strategy is to build health centers, markets, or schools, to rebuild social links between the different communities in conflict and to fund workshops to find solutions to local conflict over traditional and administrative power.
- Finally, donors should fund a dialogue among Kivu communities to talk about how to reconcile the imperatives of peace and justice: to what extent do they want to punish the authors of war crimes and how can they do that without jeopardizing the peace

At the national level, foreign governments can help the Congolese government address the causes of the North Kivu conflict by providing funding and technical assistance.

- The most urgent is to provide additional support to the Security Sector Reform.

- To fund a workshop for Congolese and international military experts to find a solution to integrate all armed groups into the national army (including Nkunda and Mai Mai troops)
- Also provide funding and technical assistance so that the reintegration program starts working efficiently at last,
  - And finally, the US government should provide funding and technical assistance to train on military and human rights issues not only a rapid response force but rather all integrated brigades deployed in the Kivus. Because what the Kivus need are reliable and well-trained brigades that can disarm the remaining militias when needed, secure mining sites and provide security to the whole population (including, and this is absolutely crucial, provide security to the Tutsi community).
- o It would also be extremely important to provide funding and technical assistance to help with the extension of State authority in the Kivus and north Katanga (so basically replicate what has been done in Bunia). Through bilateral aid or through the UN, we should help reconstruct the justice system (not only reconstruct the facilities but also train and pay the staff). We should provide funding and training to the police (including again training in human rights). This is crucial, the Kivus do not need more soldiers but more well trained and efficient police who can provide security to the whole population (including, again the Tutsi community). We should also provide funding and training to provincial authorities in order to reconstruct their capacity to oversee the exploitation of local mining sites in a way that is fair to all economic and ethnic groups.

To defuse tensions at the regional level, what the US government can do is help Rwanda and Congo find a long term solution to the FDLR problem. Just encouraging talks through the Tripartite Plus Joint Commission won't solve the problem. What we need is

- o a strong armed action by the MONUC and the FARDC to capture the genocidaire leaders & the Rastas -- And MONUC troops need to fight because we all know that the FARDC are way too weak for this task.
- o And, in conjunction with this military operation, we should allow FDLR members not guilty of crimes of genocide to settle in the Congo (but far from the Rwandan border). Donors like the US could provide funding for such a resettlement program.

## **Conclusion**

To conclude, action at the national and international level is extremely important, and should be continued, but intervention in local conflict is also absolutely needed to resolve the crisis, and that is where we can really improve current strategies.

In this regards, the opening of a US consulate in Goma is a fantastic opportunity for the US Government to have a positive impact on local conflict, which, again, is often neglected and thus continues to fuel national and regional tensions. The US official based in Goma could be charged with monitoring local tensions, brokering talks when needed (or asking MONUC to do so), and alerting his or her superiors when the Congolese or Rwandan governments start fueling violence again. He or she could also be given a budget to fund Local Conflict Resolution programs, and he or she could be charged with identifying reliable local partners on the ground.