

CALL FOR A GENUINE PEACE PROCESS IN THE DRC AND THE GREAT LAKES REGION

For years the international community has attempted to help stabilize Eastern DRC, at the expense of billions of dollars, yet sustainable peace remains elusive. Elections in November 2011 were widely seen as lacking credibility¹ and provincial and local elections have been delayed indefinitely. There has been scant progress on critical reforms in justice, security, land and governance. Successive military campaigns have failed to remove foreign and domestic armed groups and have increased the population's suffering causing large scale displacement. A mix of armed groups continues to control various areas of eastern DRC, of which the M23 proved to be strong enough to seize Goma town, the provincial capital of North Kivu province, in November 2012.

Since April 2012 in North Kivu and December 2011 in South Kivu the security situation has significantly deteriorated as military and armed group activity and ethnic tensions have increased. The unraveling of the Ituri accords in early 2012 resulted in fighting between the FARDC and the M23 as well as the resurgence and expansion of other armed groups. This has created the most recent in a long series of crises, following failed attempts at peace, which have ignored key causes of violence. Its impact on the population of the Kivu provinces has been devastating; it is ordinary people who suffer the most. As control over their communities constantly shifts hands between armed actors, people caught in the middle are most vulnerable to human rights violations.² Between January and September 2012, 767,000 people have fled their homes within North and South Kivu and an additional 60,000 people have fled to Uganda and Rwanda.³ By the end of 2012 over 2.7 million people were estimated displaced in DRC, up from 1.7 million in 2011.⁴

Research has shown that the roots of conflict in eastern DRC relate to the distribution of power and economic resources, and are inextricably linked to the way in which the country's social and political structures operate.⁵ They combine local, national and regional dynamics; creating a particularly complex climate of conflict, which tends to have a paralyzing impact on policy makers. Achieving peace in eastern DRC, and stability in the DRC as a whole, requires a context-specific response based on a frank analysis of the real causes and dynamics of conflict. This analysis needs to be collectively owned by relevant stakeholders and lead to a comprehensive strategy focused on taking action.

Above all, achieving peace requires an inclusive and locally owned peace process with strong backing at national and regional levels. This should provide a framework for coherent and long-term actions to be undertaken by civil societies and governments in the region, with support of international donors.

To this end,

We recommend the Government of DRC to:

1. Prioritize non-military solutions to conflict in the East, based on the failure so far of military action to fully address the presence of non-state armed groups and the negative impact of such action on the civilian population.
2. Initiate broad-based and inclusive dialogue with provincial and local actors in the east, aiming to establish a coherent and shared vision for peace and a detailed peace implementation plan.

¹ European Union, Electoral Observer Mission, DRC, 2011, Press Release – 13 Dec 2011; Carter Center: DRC Presidential Election Results Lack Credibility, Press Release, Dec 10, 2011.

² See: Oxfam, 'Commodities of War. Communities speak out on the true cost of conflict', Briefing Paper 164, November 2011.

³ Source: UNOCHA, UNHCR. <http://www.unhcr.org/5058439a6.html>

⁴ Source: UNOCHA.

⁵ International Alert: Ending the Deadlock – Founding a new Vision for Peace in Eastern DRC', October 2012.

3. In line with this plan, revise the Stabilization and Reconstruction Program for eastern DRC (STAREC), in coordination and discussion with international partners and Congolese civil society actors working in conflict-affected communities and DRC institutions.
4. Formulate concrete step-by-step Action Plans to implement key reforms necessary for sustainable peace in eastern DRC. These must include elections, decentralization, reinforcing the country's security sector, establishing a strong justice sector, land and natural resources ownership and management, and the disarmament and demobilization of ex combatants.
5. Take concrete steps to address ethnic tensions and put in place a process to protect the right of minorities, including supporting inter-ethnic dialogue initiatives and holding to account those engaging in ethnic hate-speech.

We recommend governments in the region to:

1. Strengthen their role as positive actors for peace in eastern DRC by supporting non-military strategies and political dialogue, as outlined in international commitments relating to peace in the region such as the 2006 "Pact on Security, Stability and Development in the Great Lakes Region"
2. Actively support attempts to achieve peace, as it relates to regional dynamics of conflict, such as the illegal arms trade, the movement of refugees, the cross-border movement/support of non-state armed groups, and the illegal trade in natural resources.

We recommend international multilateral and bilateral actors to:

1. Engage the Government of DRC in political dialogue on peacebuilding and the necessary governance reforms mentioned above.
2. Monitor and support the engagement of the DRC government and the regional actors in establishing and implementing a meaningful peace process.
3. Urgently appoint and deploy the UN Special Envoy for the Great Lakes, whose mandate should focus on supporting specific national dialogues - including the current M23 negotiations - but also have a broader mandate to support peace-building dialogue at the regional level.
4. Recognizing the failures of past military initiatives to resolve conflict, critically review any plans for a proposed Neutral International Force (NIF) where the mission concept involves neutralizing non-state armed groups through armed intervention. Any proposed military initiative can only work if there is a political solution as well, in particular to prevent new armed groups emerging.
5. Fully support the revision of the International Security and Stabilization Support Strategy, critically analyzing its capacity to support a peace process, and ensure that Congolese civil society actors as well as Congolese institutions participate in its formulation. If the revised strategy remains a technical program, divorced from a genuine peace process and efforts to obtain clear, and realistic and long term commitments from the Congolese state, then it cannot achieve real impact.
6. Take urgent steps to improve donor coordination and shared analysis in order to strengthen the coherence of donor programs and enhance their impact.
7. Continue to provide support for community-level peace processes and peace initiatives at other levels undertaken by Congolese actors.

Co-Signed:

International Alert.

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