

## New Approaches to Rescuing Peace in the Democratic Republic of the Congo

By Rigobert Minani Bihuzo, S.J., Southern Voices Network for Peacebuilding Scholar  
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The Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) has been in conflict since 1996, particularly in its fragile eastern regions. The first and second wars (1996-1997, 1998-2003) killed more than 5.4 million people, generated at least five million internally displaced persons (IDPs) and refugees,<sup>1</sup> and cost more than 29 percent of its GDP.<sup>2</sup> Today, more than 20 years later, the question of widespread insecurity in the eastern DRC stubbornly remains at the top of the agenda. Insecurity has been particularly acute in Beni,<sup>3</sup> a region bordering Uganda that has suffered widespread killings and repeated massacres since the beginning of 2019.<sup>4</sup> The Congolese army and United Nations peacekeeping troops are struggling to bring peace and stability to the eastern DRC, and now face accusations from the local populace of complicity in the massacres.<sup>5</sup>

Since 1999, a number of peace initiatives have been undertaken, including the Lusaka Agreement (1999), the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region (ICGLR) (from 2000), the Tripartite–Plus-One (2004), the Goma Conference (2009), the Kampala Agreement (2013), and the Addis Ababa Framework (from 2013). Each was aimed at ending rebellions. The peace initiatives did defang some rebels including the National Congress for Development (CNDP, 2003-2009); the M23 Movement (2012-2013); and the Defense Force of Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR, 2005 and 2010). Despite these peace initiatives and their occasional successes, the security situation in the eastern DRC regions has not improved.

There are a number of reasons why conflict and instability have persisted in the DRC.

First, the initial UN peacekeeping mandate of 1999, which had focused on a ceasefire and withdrawal of foreign troops involved in fighting in the eastern DRC, was selective and narrow. It did not tackle the security, political, and economic motivations of the neighboring countries<sup>6</sup> involved in the conflict. Second, once Rwanda and Uganda officially agreed to withdraw their uniformed troops from the DRC in 2002, no action was taken to address their continued destructive meddling across the eastern DRC through the sponsorship of armed proxy groups. Third, while UN peacekeepers in the DRC (United Nations Organization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo [MONUC]) initially helped to control the violence upon their deployment in 1999, when the situation began to deteriorate in 2004 MONUC failed to adapt adequately to address the proxy forces and

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other armed groups. Fourth, from 1998 to 2003, the eastern DRC was divided into four separate and rebel-controlled administrations. The government in Kinshasa exerted authority only in the western part of the country. Fifth, the DRC Government of National Unity (2003) and successive elected governments (2006, 2011, and 2018) never managed to have full control of the entire country. Sixth, since 2001, the UN has repeatedly documented how Rwanda, Uganda, other neighboring countries, and international corporations have engaged in illicit trafficking of Congo's mineral wealth, yet little has been done to address or punish those responsible.

Seventh, the international community failed to study and address the impact of refugees on already stressed and fragile eastern DRC communities. Some two million Hutu refugees fled Rwanda in 1994 and inundated the eastern DRC, yet no measures were taken to address the consequences implied by the influx. Eighth, the various UN-sponsored peace efforts in the eastern DRC were consistently based on faulty and biased diagnoses of the root causes of the region's conflict.

The result of over two decades of conflict and atrocities is that today, local communities in the DRC lack confidence in both MONUSCO (the successor mission to MONUC) and the DRC's security forces. This, together with the overall failure of multiple peace processes, the high number of conflict victims, and the country's chronic humanitarian crises, highlights the need to revisit the conflict management practices in the DRC.

## Policy Options and Recommendations

### 1. For the DRC Government

- a. Improve and consolidate democratic governance:** After three electoral cycles (2006, 2011, and 2018), democracy in the DRC has yet to be consolidated. Violence before the 2018 election, and the controversy that followed the vote, has generated an acute political legitimacy crisis which is impacting the prospects for peace in the DRC. Among other systemic needs, the government should reform the country's electoral commission and justice system in order to foster democracy.
- b. Finalize security sector reform:** Security sector reform, principally of the national army and police, has been at the top of the list of institutional reforms in previous DRC peace agreements that prioritized disarmament, demobilization, regrouping, repatriation, reintegration (DDRRR), and development of a strong and professional republican army. The current government should prioritize security sector reform, review the national military strategy, and adapt the army to current security challenges.

### 2. For the United Nations and Other International Actors

- a. Confront plunder and other destabilizing acts by the DRC's neighbors:** While Rwanda and Uganda have denied these claims, UN reports have documented that the perpetuation of conflict in the Kivu and Ituri regions is a strategic aim of both Uganda and Rwanda, which are competing to maximize influence in eastern Congo and plunder its natural resources.<sup>7</sup> However, their negative influence appears to be a taboo topic and has been only lightly addressed, if at all, in peace negotiations in the DRC. Ending

this apparent taboo will help create pathways to consolidating past peace agreements.

**b. Implement past peace agreements fully:** At least two peace processes established regional follow-up institutions. One was the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region (CIRGL) Pact on Security, Stability and Development (2006) and the 2013 Addis Ababa Framework. Both of these peace processes should be revisited and supported by strong, insightful leadership in order to advance peace in the DRC.

**c. Ensure more robust regulation of the minerals sector:** Illicit mineral trafficking continues to fuel conflict in the eastern Congo. Mechanisms have been developed to check this illicit activity, yet it continues. Strengthening controls over the regional supply chain from mineral source to the end user could help to cut one of the main drivers of conflict.

**d. Involve and improve relations with regional ethnic communities:** The UN and other international actors have not adequately addressed the long-term impact of Hutu refugees who entered the eastern DRC from Rwanda. These refugees have created an imbalance in the region's ethnic demography. This has become a major driver of violence. Addressing the ethnic and regional aspects of the conflict would help to undercut destabilizing cross-border actions by armed militias.

**e. Develop real understanding of regional armed groups:** International actors have a shallow understanding of the plethora of predatory armed groups operating in the eastern DRC. Rebel groups from neighboring countries are incorrectly seen as local self-defense militias. There is a need for a clear-eyed understanding of the motivations behind foreign-sponsored rebellions and militias. Investing in a better understanding of the identity and claims of rebel groups could help avoid further escalation of the DRC's long-standing conflict.

For an in-depth analysis of peacebuilding in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), looking beyond traditional approaches for implementing peacebuilding strategies, see the accompanying Africa Program Research Paper No. 26 by Rigobert Minani Bihuzo.

*Rigobert Minani Bihuzo, S.J., was a Southern Voices Network for Peacebuilding (SVNP) Scholar during the spring 2020 term. He is a Ph.D. candidate at the Catholic University of Paris (Institut Catholique de Paris) and a Research Director with the Centre d'Etudes pour l'Action Sociale (CEPAS), a member organization of the SVNP in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.*

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1. "Democratic Republic of Congo," International Rescue Committee, <https://www.rescue.org/country/democratic-republic-congo>.
  2. Debbie Hillier, "Africa's Missing Billions: International arms flows and the cost of conflict" *Oxfam International*, no. 107 (October 2007): 10, <https://oxfamlibrary.openrepository.com/handle/10546/111036/browse?type=subject&value=Trade>.
  3. "Reports," Kivu Security Tracker, <https://kivusecurity.nyc3.digitaloceanspaces.com/reports>.
  4. Ibid.
  5. "DR Congo protesters storm MONUSCO camp, accuse peacekeepers of inaction after Beni attacks," *The Defense Post*, November 25, 2019, <https://thedefensepost.com/2019/11/25/dr-congo-beni-attack-monusco-camp/>.

6. The Democratic Republic of the Congo's neighboring countries involved in the conflict include Angola, Burundi, Namibia, Rwanda, Uganda, and Zimbabwe.
7. UN Security Council, Interim report of the United Nations Expert Panel on the Illegal Exploitation of Natural Resources and Other Forms of Wealth of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, S/2001/49, (January 16, 2001), <https://www.globalpolicy.org/images/pdfs/0116report.pdf>.

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1300 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.  
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