

In Pursuit of Peace

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The end of all political effort must be the well-being of the individual in a life of safety and freedom. In the case of the Congo...this goal requires the maintenance and progress of economic life, the functioning of a good judiciary system, a soundly working administration, all under the responsibility of a government, stable thanks to its firm roots in the free will of the people, expressed and developed in democratic forms. This is the perspective in which the effort of the United Nations must be seen.

-- Dag Hammarskjöld, October 17, 1960

On June 30, 2010, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) will celebrate fifty years of independence. As the anniversary approaches Congolese people and their leaders are very mindful of the presence of a large force of UN peacekeepers in their country—just as there was when the Congo marked its first anniversary of independence. So not surprisingly they ask themselves what has been achieved during those fifty years and why do we still need such a large UN force, currently the biggest in the world?

A Nation Divided

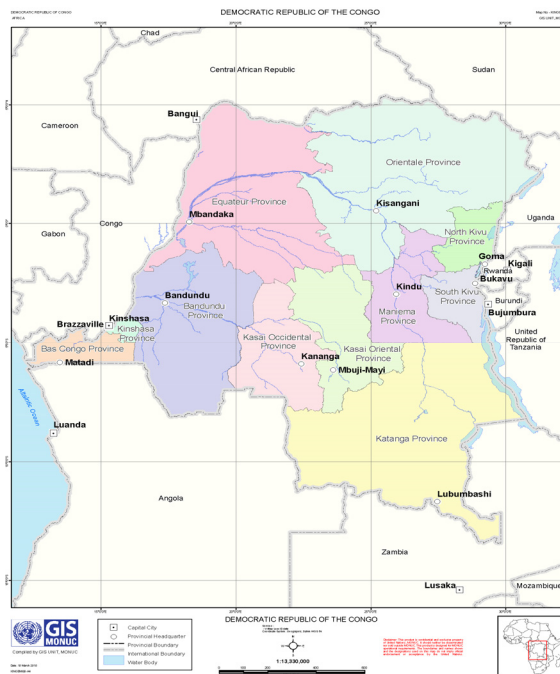
When the Security Council established the United Nations Organization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUC) on November 30, 1999, Congo's survival as a nation state was in jeopardy. The country was divided into four large rebel zones under the influence of foreign powers that battled for control over resources deep inside its territory. The human toll from overlapping conflicts, estimated in 2003 to have cost over three million lives from conflict and related causes, has been compared to the devastation of World War II. Recent debate about the accuracy of these estimates notwithstanding, there can be no doubt about the devastation wreaked on Congolese society by years of cross-border and intra-State conflict. It is equally clear that peace and stability in the DRC and the region required a major commitment by the international community. MONUC represents a major portion of that investment.

Since the conclusion of the Lusaka Accords in July 1999, MONUC has helped to implement a succession of peace agreements that have led to the withdrawal of eight foreign armies that were embroiled in the conflict in the Congo. MONUC and the international community encouraged a transition process that led to a democratically elected government and a constitution that pledged fundamental human rights and national unity. Over the course of the last five years, most of the areas that experienced violent conflict have been pacified, allowing millions of internally displaced persons (IDPs) to return home and enabling freedom of movement in all parts of the country.

Making the Country and the Region Safer

These gains now have to be consolidated and the causes and legacies of conflict addressed. This means creating governance where there has been none, countering the culture of corruption, restoring or establishing absent institutions and equipping Congolese society to resolve grievances related to land tenure and ethnicity. Halting the illegal exploitation of natural resources that feeds armed conflict and lifting the population out of deep poverty everywhere in the country are also essential. Economic development is critical. Armed militias will thrive and the violence they unleash will continue as long as young men lack jobs or productive work. At the center of peace and stabilization for the DRC and the region is the creation of a truly professional, capable republican army.

The Congo—metaphorically and physically—is at the heart of Africa. With nine international frontiers, the DRC is the junction between Central, Eastern and Southern Africa, and the crux of regional stability.



Source: MONUC.

Fortunately, the relations between the DRC and its eastern neighbors are improving. Over the past 18 months, Kinshasa, Kigali and Kampala have sought to improve their relations and increase cooperation especially in dealing with regional threats to security. The DRC and Uganda have conducted joint military operations on Congolese soil in pursuit of the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA), as the DRC and Rwanda have done against the ex-Rwandan forces now named the Forces Démocratiques de Libération du Rwanda (FDLR). This sea change in DRC-Rwanda relations helped bring an end to the rebellion by the Congrès National pour la Défense du Peuple (CNDP) whose combatants are being integrated within the national security forces. Ambassadors have been exchanged and initiatives are underway to develop and manage oil, gas and other energy resources.

Ending the Cycle of Violence

Stability is the prerequisite for economic recovery and regional development. This will not be possible while dozens of armed groups defy the authority of the State and create chaos in the eastern regions of the country. Stability requires a trained and disciplined national army capable of dealing with insurgents, securing the national borders and blocking the illegal flow of natural resources across them. Congo's tragedy is that metal, mineral and forest wealth that could lift tens of millions of people out of poverty is illegally exploited for the benefit of a few. While social indicators for sub-Saharan Africa

have risen over the past 30 years, they have stalled in Congo. Average life expectancy in the DRC is just 46 years.

MONUC is working with the government to put an end to the recurring violence that has blighted the Congo's prospects for many years. As mandated by the Security Council, MONUC is aiding the armed forces in their struggle against foreign armed groups, notably the FDLR and the LRA, as well as home grown militias.

This campaign against the armed groups has not been cost free, particularly in terms of civilian suffering that has caused understandable alarm. Humanitarian organizations have rightly expressed concern and none of us can be indifferent to this suffering, least of all MONUC. Many thousands of people have been displaced and isolated communities have endured brutal reprisal attacks. Women and girls have borne the brunt of much of the violence and suffer appalling levels of sexual violence.

Sadly the government's own forces have themselves engaged in abuse and attacks against civilians. Today's Congolese army is largely the product of successive peace agreements that led to the integration of former militias—many with records of serious human rights violations. The fast-track integration of CNDP fighters—an integral part of the arrangements underpinning the normalization of relations between Kigali and Kinshasa—has brought major challenges. The chain of command in newly integrated brigades is unclear. Discipline is very poor in some units and capacity for delivering military justice is sorely lacking. Delayed payment of salaries has also contributed to indiscipline. The result is that the armed forces themselves have sometimes become a risk to the population, alienating the very people they are supposed to protect.

Making Protection a Priority

Given the circumstances, it is not surprising that the Security Council has made the protection of civilians MONUC's number one priority. Unfortunately it is not possible for the United Nations to provide blanket protection for civilians throughout eastern Congo, a region the size of France, Spain and Germany combined. Nevertheless, many hundreds of thousands of people are protected every day and receive essential assistance through patrols, escorts and convoys manned by UN peacekeepers.

MONUC has gone far beyond "static" protection. We have deployed military and civilian personnel in some of the remotest parts of the country, often at short notice.



Source: MONUC.

Mobility is essential. Our military and civilian logisticians strain against difficult terrain and weather to bring peacekeepers close to vulnerable populations and allow for better deterrence, earlier warning and quicker reaction to threats. That contact with the people ranges from day patrols that escort women villagers to market, to night time patrols in high-risk communities and the distribution of mobile phones preloaded with emergency contacts to community leaders who can call MONUC for emergency help.

Since early 2009, the tempo of operations has been unrelenting. MONUC forces have established dozens of mobile operating bases (MOBs) with the flexibility to move as security demands. We now have more than 50 of them in the Kivus. We have created Joint Protection Teams (JPTs) that deploy in sensitive areas to help the military and local authorities analyze, anticipate, and respond to specific threats against civilians. JPTs comprise civilian experts in human rights, child protection, civil and political affairs and other fields. They enable us to better understand the needs of local communities so that field commanders can better direct and position MONUC forces. Around 50 JPT missions have been launched in North and South Kivu over the last 12 months, and one in Province Orientale. This is ground-breaking work for UN peacekeeping.

Limited resources require us to work intelligently. A Rapid Response and Early Warning Cell assembles and analyzes information gathered from multiple sources at ground level to help guide deployments by assessing areas of vulnerability, identifying threat patterns and recording the performance of individual battalions of the FARDC (Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo). Close monitoring helps us to identify those who violate the rights of civilians and to encourage Congo's military leaders to take corrective measures.

When I travel to villages where communities have long lived in fear of rebel attacks, I find overwhelming support for the UN presence. Congolese civilians affected by the military operations want the fighting to end of course, but they increasingly see the current military operations as a necessary, if painful means of bringing an end to the FDLR and other armed groups' control over their lives.

Ensuring Accountability

The Security Council has mandated MONUC peacekeepers to intervene to protect civilians from abuses from any quarter, and the government has been advised that the mission will condition its support to individual battalions involved in operations, on disciplined performance. With the end of operation Kimia II against the FDLR on December 31, 2009, the rebel threat in the eastern region has been significantly diminished. A new phase of operations code-named 'Amani Leo' is focused on holding territory liberated from the rebels and helping restore State authority. Amani Leo foresees targeted action against remaining FDLR elements, but defense of communities and civilian protection has been integrated at all levels through joint planning by MONUC and the FARDC command. Areas of risk have been mapped to determine the most effective organization and deployment of forces and to minimize reprisals and ensure that armed groups cannot retake territory.

Where FARDC conduct is concerned, President Kabila has declared ‘zero tolerance’ for acts of sexual and gender-based violence. Military justice is haltingly but determinedly taking action against looting, corruption and other undisciplined behavior. A FARDC military court established for the Kivus has been prosecuting soldiers found guilty of human rights violations, and a few high-level commanders have been relieved of their duties for misconduct, including corruption.

UN forces have an obligation to demonstrate the highest standards of discipline and accountability, in accordance with a strict code of conduct. We apply a policy of zero tolerance for sexual exploitation and abuse and aggressively pursue measures to ensure that UN troops, police and civilian staff respect this policy. If they do not, rapid investigations ensue and, if warranted, disciplinary action is taken. Military peacekeepers serve under their nations’ military laws and are subject to sanction for misconduct as blue helmets.

Connecting the Dots

There are no small challenges in Congo. The country is roughly the size of the United States east of the Mississippi. Most of its 67 million people live in places disconnected from the seat of government by geography, poor or no roads, and the most rudimentary social services. And the majority of those living in the capital, Kinshasa, and other urban centers are not faring much better either. As peace is secured, the government’s focus and that of the humanitarian community must gradually shift from emergency assistance in the East to providing communities nationally with access to health and educational services and essential infrastructure such as roads and bridges.

Getting the Job Done

While MONUC has the biggest budget in UN peacekeeping—\$1.3 billion in 2009—it also has the longest list of tasks (49) ever entrusted to a UN peacekeeping mission. Tiny Kosovo had some 40,000 NATO troops and access to airlift and surveillance capacity that our peacekeepers can only dream about. MONUC’s deployment in eastern Congo ranges over rugged, often heavily forested terrain with a ratio of about one peacekeeper for every 110,000 people.

In October 2008, at the height of the crisis in the Kivus, the Security Council approved an additional 3,000 troops and 18 helicopters for MONUC. These much-needed reinforcements were intended to strengthen our protection efforts, which depend heavily on physical presence and mobility on the ground. But logistical assets remain in short supply. Most of the additional uniformed personnel have been deployed but we have received offers of just two of the 18 helicopters needed. MONUC nonetheless responded effectively to a flare-up of violence between ethnic groups and government security forces in the vast Equateur province in western DRC late last year, providing logistical support to newly-trained FARDC units deployed there, and assisting humanitarian agencies with deliveries of relief to displaced populations. We continue to operate in a “doing more with less” mode. MONUC’s troops and civilian staff are meeting daily challenges with imagination, determination and courage, but the “elastic” will stretch only so far.

Securing the Dividend of Peace

The Security Council recognizes that MONUC cannot remain in the DRC forever. In December 2008, the Council asked MONUC to focus its activities on securing the East and to prepare to hand over some tasks in western provinces to others, including United Nations agencies and programs. In December 2009, it reaffirmed that position by renewing MONUC's mandate for five months (Resolution 1906) to allow time to develop a plan for reconfiguring the mandate and a critical path towards eventual withdrawal. The resolution is in keeping with the government's wish for a gradual drawdown but also telegraphs the Council's intention to extend the mandate for a further 12 months from June 1, 2010, to safeguard peace gains already made. As this issue of *The Ambassadors REVIEW* went to press, the Secretary General was preparing recommendations for the Council as to "the critical tasks that need to be accomplished before MONUC can envisage its drawdown without triggering a relapse into instability."

Some 95 percent of the Mission's troop strength and about 80 percent of the capacity of the United Nations agencies are currently deployed in the troubled eastern DRC. This eastern focus is understandable: the consolidated humanitarian needs in the DRC, concentrated in the East, total over \$800 million. But, the United Nations is also very conscious of the risk of perpetuating dependency and of creating a national imbalance by investing in emergency activities to the detriment of longer term development in other parts of the country.

This is why we have been asked by the Secretary General to develop an integrated strategic framework that sets out how the United Nations as a whole can contribute in a cohesive manner to the complementary tasks of peacekeeping and peace building.

To develop this strategy MONUC and the UN system have engaged with the government and other national institutions to help stabilize the East while also pursuing essential national reforms that will help to strengthen and improve governance, national security and the rule of law, which are the foundation for enduring protection and sustainable development.

We will know that a new day has arrived when trained national police can assume responsibility for the maintenance of law and order; when survivors of sexual violence and other crimes have access to transparent and timely justice; when criminals no longer enjoy impunity for violent acts, corruption and the embezzlement of public funds; when public administration is strong enough to gather taxes and run public works; when natural resources are protected and developed for the benefit of all; and when the national budget gives fair measure to social service delivery in health, education, water supply and sanitation.

This is the dividend that the people of the Congo deserve from a peace that has been so long coming.