

GREAT LAKES POLICY FORUM
MEETING REPORT
July 10, 2003

The July forum focused on the policy implications of the current political dynamics in Burundi and the DRC specifically, as well as the Great Lakes region as a whole. With recent international attention turning to eastern DRC and this month's attacks on Bujumbura in Burundi, the context and content of this forum were extremely relevant. Participants included Pascal Kambale, Congolese human rights lawyer at Human Rights Watch; Ambassador Howard Wolpe, current Public Policy Scholar at the Woodrow Wilson Center and former Presidential Special Envoy to the Great Lakes Region as well as seven-term member of Congress; and Alexis Sinduhije, current director of Radio Publique Africaine.

The most recent attacks on the capital city of Bujumbura by the Forces National de Liberation (FNL) have forced all actors, groups, and parties involved in the Great Lakes Region to re-evaluate the current situation in Burundi. The attacks are thought to be in response to President Ndayizeye's harsh public statements that if the FNL does not join negotiations the government will crush their movement militarily. The FNL and the Conseil National pour la Defense de la Democratie-Forces pour la Defense de la Democratie (CNDD-FDD) continue to refuse the implementation of the December 2, 2002 cease-fire agreement. Consequently peace remains elusive as the FNL refuses to negotiate with the government and continues its barrage of violent attacks against the capital city. Many relevant questions remain: Is there an actual peace process happening in Burundi, or is it the continuation of war? How can the cease-fire that the FDD signed be implemented fully? How can Ndayizeye's administration bring the FNL to the negotiating table? How can there be power sharing and a move to democracy? What concrete next steps can be taken to move further towards peace?

The May 1 presidential transition of power from former President Buyoya to Ndayizeye is seen by most as a positive in the peace building process. During his presidency, Buyoya failed to take into account the changing dynamics of his country and neglected to analyze critically mistakes that he made in trying to work towards peace. These failures led to a continuous cycle of implementation of ill-designed and ineffective policies. In contrast, Ndayizeye (a Hutu) has worked to foster a strong and positive relationship with the Army and cultivate a level of confidence with many Tutsis. While Ndayizeye's actions have increased trust between Hutus and Tutsis, they have exacerbated intra-Hutu tensions – particularly with the FNL and the FDD.

Another positive within the government in recent months has been the sharing of power by actors that have been a part of the ongoing negotiations in Arusha, Tanzania, which have allowed the country to move in the direction of peace. Those intimately involved in the Arusha talks have been working cohesively within the transition government. Historically, Burundians would only discuss power sharing within the context of one political party or group. Now they are doing so within multiple, integrated groups. Unfortunately, the exclusion of rebel factions from the Arusha talks have served to

further alienate the FNL and FDD. Arusha has invested too much in the assumed leadership of the two major ethnicity based political parties, the Frodebu for Hutus and Uprona for Tutsis. The assumption was that each of these parties would represent the entirety of their respective ethnic groups, believing that if these two groups could cooperate and share leadership responsibilities peace would be established. This perspective was an unfortunate oversimplification of a complicated political and social system, and did not allow for intra-ethnic power-struggles.

The fact that Burundi is in the Great Lakes Region and thus amidst other recent large-scale conflicts perpetuates the conflict within Burundi, and in some ways creates a culture of thinking and believing that war is just a part of living in the region. For example, Ugandan President Museveni is reluctant to organize a planned regional summit for fear of its failure. Within the region what is signed is often not respected, engaged in, nor honored in its entirety.

Regional actors have contributed to complications in the Burundian peace process. South Africa and Tanzania continue to compete for dominance in the facilitation of the transition process. Tanzanian encouragement of rebels has consistently undermined South African efforts at reconciliation. Tanzania has also demanded a larger role in peacekeeping efforts before it will exert more pressure on the FDD. In contrast, the AU (African Union) prefers peacekeepers to come from African countries that are not as geographically proximate to Burundi; however, AU deployment of other African peacekeepers has been slow because of serious financial resource issues. The AU will ultimately be forced to relinquish its peacekeeping leadership because the organization cannot financially or militarily sustain a long-term peacekeeping presence in Burundi. The UN has been reluctant to send peacekeepers to Burundi without the implementation of an effective cease-fire agreement. The UN position has been heavily criticized in the wake of recent UN interventions in neighboring states such as the DRC. If the UN were to take over for the AU finances would not be a problem as UN assessed contributions would pay for 2,000-3,000 peacekeeping troops in Burundi. There is a question of if the FDD enters negotiations whether the UN will go ahead with peacekeepers. Currently there is also a World Bank plan for disarmament, cantonment, and reintegration that has not yet been put in place. Overall, the international community has shown a hesitancy to intervene in Burundi. The international community needs to encourage the rebel groups to enter negotiations and also honor its pledges of \$90 million in aid to Burundi.

As the Burundian government continues in its attempts to achieve peace, it must resolve to deal with the destructive activities of the rebels. The FNL is a small group of an estimated 500-1,000 fighters, without much political support from the population. The FNL has a limited capacity, but formidable defensive position because they are entrenched in the hills outside of Bujumbura. One main reason the FNL and FDD refuse to work with the new government is because they recognize their own political weaknesses, primarily the fact that neither group has a consistent political platform. Also, neither have skilled officers or many resources, especially in comparison to the Burundian army (Burundi spends 55% of its national budget on defense). There are reports that the FNL and FDD may be working together—for instance, the FNL attacks

on Bujumbura allow FDD forces to maneuver. These reported coordinated movements by FDD fighters in rural areas are in direct violation of the cease-fire. Realistically the FNL and FDD do not pose an urgent or major threat to overthrowing the Burundian government.

A common analysis of the current context of the Burundi conflict a sustainable peace has yet to be established. The transition government, while having achieved some successes, will not be seen as truly effective or legitimate until peace and stability come to the country. For this to happen, those involved in the peace process must admit that the process has in some ways failed up to this point. There need to be greater efforts to foster dialogue between the rebels and the rest of the country. The FNL and FDD must come to see that the self-interests of each of their groups are ultimately related to the community interests, and thus the communal good. Finally, there must be support for peacekeepers from either the AU or UN, the financial backing of the international community.

Within the DRC, the international community's focus is currently upon the transition government in Kinshasa and the recent brutal fighting in Bunia in the eastern Ituri region. Unfortunately, it seems that armed groups are preparing new fighting in North Kivu, which is south of the Ituri region, and outside of the current geographic focus of peacekeepers. French troops have begun to contain the fighting in Bunia, however, the current mandate for the EU-led French forces and for the MONUC peacekeepers does not extend outside of Bunia. Therefore fighting has moved elsewhere and could soon move to North Kivu. The local and regional actors responsible for the fighting in the Ituri region are also involved in the mobilization maneuvers and negotiations occurring in North Kivu. These groups have the ability to act outside the scope of the international community. The actors thought to be involved are local and non-local participants including the Mouvement de liberation du Congo (MLC), the Union des patriotes congolais (UPC), the Rassemblement congolais pour la democratie-Goma (RCD-Goma), and the Mayi-Mayi; plus DRC neighbors Uganda and Rwanda; and possibly even the Kabila administration. Negotiations have been taking place between non-local actors and rebel militias. The potential fighting in North Kivu is similar to Ituri in that the participating groups' often manipulate ethnic differences and operate with ethnic militias (instead of formal rebel movements). The Kivus are more ethnically homogeneous than the Ituri, which will make it more difficult to draw ethnic battle lines.

With the threat of new fighting in the Kivu and the persistent fighting in Ituri had encouraged many involved in the DRC continue to call for a more robust MONUC mandate. The Chapter Six mandate remains inadequate and there is growing appeal to increase the mandate. A Chapter Seven mandate would strengthen the number of troops in the eastern DRC, as well as authorize the use of all necessary means to protect civilians, humanitarian workers, UN personnel and others. A new mandate would have to include provisions for disarming rebel militias. The current French mandate in Ituri ends September 1. It remains to be seen if this mandate will be extended and if it is not who will replace the French forces when their mandate is expired. Furthermore, the MONUC and French mandates need to be extended into the Kivus and along the border

areas in the DRC. If the emergency peacekeepers are only in Bunia, then the rebels will take the fighting elsewhere.

During the DRC transition process there has also been a lack of confidence building and peace work between the groups involved. The process has in many ways been forced upon groups that sign onto agreements yet do not implement them fully. Numerous local and non-local actors have been guilty of this, including President Kabila as well as Ugandan President Museveni and Rwandan President Kagame. All parties involved in the East have attempted to manipulate power in their own interests. In order to create sustainable peace, there must be a national process that allows for shared partnership and joint responsibility among the different groups. The structure of the transition government, designed through the Lusaka Agreement, is a step in the right direction and the most visible sign progress in Kinshasa. Unfortunately, the conflict persists on the ground in the East and armed groups continue to maneuver to keep fighting in other parts of the country.

In Burundi and the DRC there is a real need for groups involved in the conflicts and in the transition processes to realize that each group's own interests can be met while benefiting the whole community. Also, the transition governments should emphasize bringing all groups together to participate in open dialogue, and to actively start addressing the ethnic and political divisions within each country. A positive sign of this in Burundi is a recent joint project between the World Bank and the Woodrow Wilson International Center that is aiming to decrease the levels of distrust among conflicting ethnic and political groups. The leadership trainings focus on building community skills and constructing alliances with the goal of creating working groups that develop and implement concrete projects that aid in peace building and economic recovery. Leaders from civil society, various rebel groups, and the government are all involved in the program. Projects such as these are encouraging signs in a region that has lacked dialogue between conflicting groups and long-term efforts to commit to shared power.