

**“In the Wake of Laurent Nkunda’s Arrest: What Next for the DRC?”**

The Great Lakes Policy Forum convened on February 5<sup>th</sup>, 2009 to discuss the impact of Laurent Nkunda’s arrest in January 2009 on the DRC, Rwanda-Congo politics, and MONUC’s freedom and effectiveness.

Rwanda has fulfilled its aim, as has Congo: Rwandese troops have been allowed into Congo, and CNDP troops have agreed to reintegrate with the Congolese army. On a more unsettling note, it has become clear in the weeks following Nkunda’s apprehension that he profited greatly from Rwandese support, and that his increasing stronghold in the east was a leverage point between Rwanda and Kinshasa. In a sense, Kinshasa had its back to the wall, and it could be argued that the Congolese government had no choice other than to permit Rwandese forces to enter Congo and deal with the FDLR. There has also been significant criticism of Tutsi general and former second-in-command to Nkunda, General Bosco, who has been indicted by the ICC and faces charges as a war criminal, in light of claims that he is still being supported by the government of Rwanda, and some would say, implicitly by MONUC.

MONUC response to the latest events in the Congo has been reactive, but not without provisos: in the first instance, UN forces are fully prepared to work *with* Rwandese forces but only if joint planning occurs. Similarly, UN forces will not operate without taking into account the full and absolute protection of civilians and their human rights, and are continuing on their mandate to ensure that all former CNDP militias reintegrate fully into Congolese military or civilian life. As a part of the Nairobi Process, MONUC are obligated to support Rwandese forces with transport, medi-vac, etc., but are in no way involved with General Bosco, due to his war crimes and consequent indictment. There is some sentiment that MONUC has been drawn into the conflict by force, and that they are “following” the Rwandese forces; however, clarity of the mandate by international players will be crucial to ensuring that MONUC’s reputation is maintained as Rwandese operations are carried out.

On the matter of the future of the Democratic Republic of Congo, several questions are being asked but as yet cannot be answered: are we entering a post-Nkunda era? Is Rwanda going to limit its operations to North Kivu or extend force to South Kivu, where the FDLR is stronger, thus extending its somewhat unrealistic 3-week deadline on operations? What will be the short-term impact of Nkunda’s arrest? Of Rwandese involvement? How will this impact the international missions? And what will be the impact of foreseen heavy civilian casualties on President Kabila’s government?

There is speculation that Nkunda’s arrest could be the result of deal between Rwanda and the DRC government, or between Rwanda and Nkunda for that matter, and that it may reveal itself as a ploy to deceive the new Obama administration, until international forces are removed from the region. Until more is known, the international community will continue to keep a watchful eye on the region and be prepared to act as necessary, given much-needed political will.