

**Great Lakes Policy Forum
Meeting Report
5 September 2002**

At this month's Forum we heard from Dr. Jacques Depelchin Secretary General of the Rassemblement Congolais pour la Democratie-Mouvement de Liberation (RCD-ML) His presentation centered on an analysis of the peace process in the DRC, an assessment of the implementation challenges for the recent political agreements between the DRC, Uganda and Rwanda, and discussion of the ongoing efforts to build a sustainable peace for the country as a whole.

Introduction

The point of departure for the forum discussion was to reflect on the success, or failure, of the talks at Sun City, South Africa, in April 2002. Dr Depelchin from the RCD-ML faction was of the opinion that poor facilitation, lack of understanding of the negotiation process and the absence of a draft document resulted in nothing more than a talk shop. He expressed a concern that relates to the lack of understanding of the conflict in the DRC that has existed since the 1961 when Patrice Lumumba was assassinated. The current situation in his opinion is that the majority of the population in the DRC is in favour of peace, but that a small portion, supported by the United States, France and Belgium, has managed to hold all the political power in the country. This dilemma highlighted the issue of roles of respective parties participating in the DRC peace process.

The political framework

Dr Depelchin expressed concern with the so-called troika (US, France and Belgium), and the issue of support given to individuals as opposed to that of institutions, or the establishment of a civil society. The focus on personalities could possibly be addressed by more track II efforts of conflict resolution and negotiation. Another point of contention is the external factors of the conflict; foreign troops engage militarily and this exacerbates the conflict. There is a view that the military intervention from Rwanda contributes to the military tactics employed by rebel leader Jean Pierre Bemba. Furthermore, it has become increasingly evident that Rwanda only can enable the RCD-Goma to participate in meaningful negotiations with the other parties. The speaker covered the topics of increased corruption and ethnically based preferential treatment of certain factions.

Issues raised

Dr Depelchin stressed the importance of curbing minority tactics, and the necessity for redirecting international support to the majority of the nation. However, this is problematic if one considers that parties that participate in the peace process cannot impose their preference for leadership in the DRC. A top-down approach from developed countries may only lead to more instability in the SADC region and not sustainable stability. If the majority of the population in the DRC (assuming Dr Depelchin is correct in his estimation) desires intervention, what kind of intervention is required? If good leadership is required, do they propose that the international participants appoint someone? If a reconstruction of a state is required, what ideology or system should be followed, and by whom? If a truth and reconciliation commission is needed, who should monitor this process? Should the process be monitored? And, what is the desired outcome of such a commission? The issue of President Kabila's inability to distance himself from factions participating in the peace process may be over-ambitious; all current leaders in the DRC may be

too involved in the conflict. This raises the question of the ripeness of the conflict – individuals may be desperately trying to save face whilst the peace brokers are desperately trying to achieve peace. Even though these elements are not incompatible they certainly seem that way at present with the perception that certain individuals are holding the process hostage with their personal agendas.

Q & A session

The attending audience raised interesting questions, especially with reference to the establishment of a civil society. The audience hoped that Dr Depelchin could explain in detail what exactly is necessary to establish the required institutions. He made a few suggestions and also mentioned the valuable contribution that could be made by Tanzania and its civil society – partly because it shares in the regional problems, and partly because it has experiences and expertise in successful processes of democratization.

The necessity of monitoring a corridor between Rwanda and the DRC is also important. Interestingly, the issue of the status of women and their rights were raised, as well as contributions that have been made by women. One pivotal question stands out, though: What should happen now? And the answer is simple: Stop the war. However, Dr Depelchin correctly pointed out that in reality this would require a process, and a process requires time that the Congolese can ill afford.