

103rd Great Lakes Policy Forum

Meeting Report

February 5, 2004

Introduction

The overall tone of the 103rd Great Lakes Policy Forum was refreshingly hopeful, optimistic, and forward thinking. The forum featured Mr. Azarias Ruberwa, one of four Vice Presidents in the Democratic Republic of Congo's (DRC) transitional government, and included commentary from Professor Herbert F. Weiss from the *Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars (WWICS)*. Ambassador Howard Wolpe, also from *WWICS*, facilitated the forum. Participants provided insight and up to the minute details of the progress of the new transitional government that gained its mandate and legitimacy following the culmination of the eight-party, power-sharing agreement that was signed in Pretoria, South Africa in December, 2002. There was a general sentiment of relief and excitement at the progress that has been made, while still acknowledging the daunting task ahead of reunification and reconciliation of the country, which has been plagued by five years of war and three years of intense and fragile negotiation. Durable peace seems possible, but not without persistent, diligent work from all levels of Congolese society; NGOs; international financial institutions; the United Nations; and other international, regional, and sub-regional actors.



VP Ruberwa discusses the transition in the DRC at the February GL PF

Accomplishments

Seven months after the launch of the new government in the DRC, the transition process is going quite well. Legislative and executive government institutions have been set up, 2004 Cabinet budget negotiations are in progress, a new army has been established, and a legitimate judiciary now functions normally. The four government Commissions and their respective Vice Presidents (Political, Defense, and Security; Reconstruction and

Development; Economy and Finance; and Social and Cultural) as well as President Kabila and members of the Senate are actively touring various cities and provinces throughout the country, including the East, to assess the situation and listen to civil society concerns and communicate those to the whole government. This signifies an improving security situation, especially in the East. An action plan has been negotiated by the government and is beginning to be implemented by all levels of Congolese society. Significant advances have been made in the area of soldier and child soldier reintegration and demobilization. Most importantly, there is a high level of goodwill, respect, and support from all opposition parties and the population en masse.

In terms of outside actors, MONUC has been reinvigorated by its new association with the transitional government and by its new leadership, Ambassador William Swing. Once criticized for its inefficiency and weakness in ameliorating security concerns, MONUC's new mandate gives the UN greater leeway to engage in the transitioning country. The World Bank and International Monetary Fund have also pledged their commitment to the process. Preparations are underway for an international conference to address issues surrounding regional and sub-regional economic integration; building trust beyond diplomatic relationships; and sustainable peace and security, acknowledging the interdependence of regional actors. This international summit could contribute greatly to the sanctification of regional peace, if not undermined by violent struggles that remain unresolved. Economically, regional actors must cooperate in order to stimulate much needed development, recognizing that the lack of resources throughout the region contributes greatly to ongoing conflicts.

Challenges

Broadly, there is the challenge that this high spirit and respect will hold out another year and a half when the first democratic elections are projected to be held. Delays could be devastating to the already fragile peace. Conversely, it was recognized that the legitimacy of the elections is also vitally important. For that reason, it is imperative that refugees and IDPs return home, that the security situation is further improved, and that a proper census is conducted. To face the myriad of challenges, all partners need to come together in solidarity to ensure success. There was a specific call for support and solidarity in relation to the overwhelming amount of refugees and IDPs. Estimates vary, but generally the number of Congolese refugees outside the country is between 350,000 and 500,000, with at least 100,000 concentrated in Tanzania, and 3 million IDPs within DRC. The Ministry for Solidarity and Humanitarian Affairs, Ministry of the Interior, and the Ministry of Social Affairs have recently set up a commission to address this issue, but the government cannot meet all of the needs of the returning population or assure the status of their property when they return. To this end, the government is hoping to partner with NGOs, especially because the reintegration of these significant portions of the population is a necessary precondition for fully legitimate elections. Overall, there is the realization that this deadline and many others may not be met as outlined in the *All-Inclusive Agreement* (signed in Pretoria), *Lusaka Accord*, and interim constitution and that “fall-back” protocols and “shortcuts” in the process may be necessary to sustain the popular support and momentum.

Supreme Court Decision

A significant portion of time was allotted to analyzing the recent request by President Kabila to the Supreme Court for clarification on two clauses of the interim constitution. He needed illumination on whether he was allowed to appoint provincial government officials and if security forces could report to him rather than the Minister of the Interior. Many feared that this could cause problems because the spirit of the agreement was based on consultation and power sharing; such independent action by the president could jeopardize the peace process. There is significant trust, however, that President Kabila’s objective remains the establishment of durable peace and that he will not abuse his power.



Professor Weiss, Vice President Ruberwa, and Ambassador Wolpe at the 103rd GLPF.

Paradigm Shift

It was acknowledged, finally, that specific deadlines become less important if there is not a full commitment to durable peace and reconciliation by the population. A legacy of the Mobutu regime, war, and bad governance is institutionalized corruption and a political culture that stresses self-interest instead of interdependence. Thus there is the need for a paradigm shift away from the belief in “zero-sum” games and to the recognition of common ground among all actors. Without this shift, sustainable peace is not possible. There was once again a call for support and research into mechanisms that address this issue.

End.