



119th Great Lakes Policy Forum

“Cross Border Conflict in the Great Lakes: Regional Problems Demand Regional Solutions”
Meeting Report – June 15, 2006

Panelists:

Ambassador (ret.) Joyce Leader
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Mr. Mark L. Schneider
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The Tripartite Plus Commission

The forum began with a description of the Tripartite Plus Commission's history, mandate, and future. The Commission provides a much-needed forum for political and military leaders of the Great Lakes region to come together to address security concerns. It is facilitated by the United States and acts as a confidence building mechanism to help the cooperation and regional dialogue necessary to maintain peace. To date the Commission has had fourteen meetings in two years, and has been credited with playing a considerable role in preventing further incursions into the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) from neighboring countries. Currently, representatives from the DRC have refused to discuss the upcoming elections during the Commission's meetings, citing the fact that it is a national issue and not regional.

The Commission is limited in their capacity to implement agreements made during the discussions, and has been criticized for its limited capacity to effectively implement change or prior resolutions in the region. However, the discussion's existence are progressive in that they brought political and military leaders from quarrelling nations together in a constructive and meaningful manner. Leaders from various regions all express their desire to help solidify regional security despite their varying interests. However due to the limited mandate and funding available the scope of effectiveness is significantly hindered.

The Tripartite Plus Commission is meant to be only a temporary mechanism to facilitate dialogue in the region. There is the hope that the Commission will ultimately become self-sufficient and the United States will no longer need to facilitate. However, it has recently been decided that the Commission along with American facilitation will continue beyond the originally deadline due to its considerable success and the overwhelming need in the region. In addition a fusion cell has been developed to continue addressing the needs of the region.

The Role of Civil Society in Regional Security

It is without contention that the Tripartite Plus Commission is a positive step towards regional security and stability. One of the largest problems with the Commission, however, is the glaring absence of civil society representation as well as other regional initiatives. The Commission continues the trend of international efforts where far too often the leaders who perpetrated the violence/instability are those who are then asked to represent the interest of their respective countries at formal discussions, while civil society is allocated a marginalized role.

There are various examples of regional initiatives and forums where civil society organizations have played an effective role. It is believed that if the Tripartite Commission, as well as other regional initiative, are to have true and lasting impacts civil society must be involved. One untapped community is that of the church and their extended network. The Great Lakes region is nearly 80% Christian and if utilized properly, the Church could help promote the message of peace and security at a more organized and effective level than top down discussions and initiatives.

Failures, Successes and What More Needs to Be Done

The audience was reminded that to date nearly 4 million people have died as a result of the violence in the DRC, yet 34 times more money is allocated to the genocide currently underway in Darfur. While this money and international attention are desperately needed in Sudan, one must also be critical of the international community, and more specifically the United States', lack of involvement in the DRC.

While the Tripartite Plus Commission is a necessary first step towards regional dialogue there is growing concern with its inability to effectively deal with illegal armed groups in the DRC, which are arguably the true "spoilers" of the peace process. For example, there is the overwhelming presence of the LRA and the international community continues to be ineffective in their ability to effectively halt their continual insurgence. There is also the FNL, which has considerable mobility and no effective mechanism is currently in place to stop them. Furthermore, the Commission does not adequately address the issues and needs that arise due to the vast amount of refugees and IDPs in the region. Civil society organizations need to be represented more in peace dialogues if regional security and stability is ever to be established.

In addition, MONUC has failed in its mandate to help create a national army, and the lack of judicial infrastructures will create a situation where the upcoming elections in the DRC may be flawed. There is also the problem with a current trend of "hate campaigning" occurring in the DRC, which has the potential to incite violence and continual internal strife. Overall, however, the DRC has progressed significantly in comparison to ten years ago, however more efforts, funding, and attention needs to be paid to the DRC for the security of the region, and arguably the continent as a whole.

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Ambassador Joyce Leader currently serves as a consultant on African Affairs with particular interest in conflict management and coordinates the activities of the State Department's Africa Bureau regarding the Great Lakes Tripartite Plus Joint Commission. Ms. Leader has served as Ambassador to the Republic of Guinea and as Consul General in Marseille, France. She has also served as Deputy Director of both the Office of Refugee Assistance for Asia and the Near East

and Office of West Africa Affairs at the U.S. Department of State. As a Senior Fellow at the Fund for Peace in Washington D.C. Ambassador Leader wrote *Rwanda's Struggle for Democracy and Peace, 1991-1994*, which details U.S. policy efforts to contain the violence that escalated into genocide. She is the recipient of five Superior Honor Awards and four Meritorious Honor Awards from the State Department, and upon her retirement in 2003 she received the Secretary's Career Achievement Award. Prior to joining the State Department, Ambassador Leader served in the Peace Corp, managing education programs in then Zaire and then the desk for programs of Southern Africa. She holds Masters degrees in International Affairs from the University of Chicago and in Journalism from the Columbia University School of Journalism.

Dr. John Katunga Murhula currently serves as Acting Director of the Nairobi Peace Initiative (NPI), a pan African resource organization committed to the promotion of peaceful transformation of conflict and reconciliation in Africa. NPI-Africa exists to contribute to the emergence of a peaceful and developing Africa, through initiating and facilitating processes of conflict transformation, peacebuilding and reconciliation; accompanying and building the capacity of individuals, communities and strategic actors; and carrying out research and informing policy. In 2005, Dr. Katunga received a Masters degree from Eastern Mennonite University in conflict resolution and peace building. He is currently beginning a five-month research fellowship at the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars. In addition, Dr. Katunga serves on the Advisory Board of Partners for Democratic Change.

Mr. Mark L. Schneider has served as the Senior Vice President at the International Crisis Group (Crisis Group) since 2001. He directs the Washington advocacy office, where he conveys Crisis Group's analyses and recommendations to the White House, State Department, Department of Defense, Congress, as well as the World Bank and other international organizations. Prior to working with Crisis Group, Mr. Schneider was the Director of the Peace Corp from 1999-2001 and Chief Director at the Office Analysis and Strategic Planning at the World Health Organization from 1981-1993. He has also served as the Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Human Rights from 1977-1979. Mr. Schneider has written extensively on and spoken about issues of post-conflict reconstruction and nation building as well as U.S. foreign policy in the 21st century. His opinions appear in various newspapers and in testimonials to the Senate and House of Representatives.

For More Information

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