

116th Great Lakes Policy Forum

“The Congolese Elections: Preparing for the Day After”

Meeting Report – March 2, 2006

The 116th Great Lakes Policy Forum focused on the current situation in the DRC prior to the upcoming June 2006 elections. Guest speakers were Dr. Howard Wolpe, Director of both the Africa Program and the Project on Leadership and Building State Capacity at Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, and Dr. Suliman Baldo, Africa Program Director at International Crisis Group. The speakers broadly discussed the current situation in the DRC and particularly examined the potential causes of further conflict that might be brought on by the elections. Dr. Wolpe began with a briefing on major recent events related to the elections and the impact of those events on the current election process. Dr. Baldo detailed some of the major concerns related to the elections as well as some of the reasons behind the current conflicts occurring throughout the DRC.

Events surrounding the Elections

The international community sometimes gets preoccupied on the technical and logistically complicated issues surrounding elections, missing the other key factors necessary for continued success after the elections in a country with very little infrastructure. At present, the DRC electoral registration has been going well. There has been enormous enthusiasm and excitement for the elections, but there has also been a continual delay. Recently, the electoral commission stated that the earliest the elections could occur is on June 18th of this year. There are currently a lot of questions surrounding how the elections might successfully be completed by June 30th, the end of the Transitional Government’s mandate. Should the first round of elections on the 18th result in a run-off, it is doubtful that a second round could be organized before this mandate has run out, further complicating the issue. The International committee established by the 2003 Sun City Peace Agreement in South Africa is doing everything it can in quite an accelerated process, however there is a great deal of fear that any further postponement will cause more problems amidst already growing anxieties.



A major event that recently occurred in the DRC was the Supreme Court decision responding to claims that Olivier Kamitatu, speaker of the National Assembly, was not properly in place because he left the party that he represented in the Assembly. The Supreme Court decision acceded, requiring all those who shifted parties to step down. Originally, under the Sun City peace accord the governmental posts were divided among the various parties, with each party being allotted positions. Because Kamitatu had changed parties, he no longer represented the party for which his Assembly seat was allotted. Individuals therefore felt that he should be removed from his post. This situation not only affects Kamitatu, but also 40 other people on the Assembly who, like Kamitatu, have shifted their political positions. The question remains: how will those asked to step down respond to this mandate? Challenging the Supreme Court’s decision could cause problems between the Court and the Assembly, thus creating another prolonged crisis and further complicating the country’s transition process.

A third issue presenting itself involved political tensions in North and South Kivu, as well as in Katanga. The speakers noted there is no question that these tensions are severe. Related to such tension was the issue of boundary limitations in South Kivu.

The last major issue, which the speakers addressed, which directly ties into the tensions in Katanga and the Kivus, is the total failure of the integration of the security apparatus. There are a number of elements of MONUC on the ground; however, rebellious militia groups are active, particularly in North Kivu. As well, ethnic Mai-Mai militias continue to create difficulties in Katanga.

Concerns related to the Elections

Many of the political leaders' concerns do not involve the elections, but rather center on what might happen to them politically after the elections. Many do not want to be forced into political exile again and would like to know what will happen to those who lose the election. This issue is key to the question of why many leaders are reluctant to disband their rebel groups. Such reluctance has led to the failure of the DDRRR process and the integration of the army. There are currently weak political structures in the transitional government, which has led to many failures. The lack of integral administrative services and various other weaknesses have made the transition difficult. During voter registration in 2005, 25 million people registered, with 15 million participating in the December 2005 public referendum, largely without incident. The next elections may not necessarily be as successful. The nationwide poll on the constitutional referendum was peaceful and largely supported by the government and population. But the elections hold higher stakes for many and cause great concern about the possibility of further conflict. The two main sources for such conflict are electoral fraud and intimidation, both in the campaign and at the polls.

The speakers established several concerns about the current situation surrounding the elections. One being the limited amount of time to logistically prepare for the elections, another being the lack of consensus of law for financing political party campaigns, and finally that election security mechanisms are not properly in place. As a result, there is a major concern about social control. The Congolese army



Speakers addressed concerns related to the upcoming elections

is not sufficient and does not have the proper security structure to maintain control, a fact that has already presented itself in conflict areas like Katanga. To further complicate the issue, political players are teaming up with militias in these areas, using security forces for their own use to intimidate people politically. The current issue of political party attacks in Katanga was offered as one example. In addition, in Katanga and Kinshasa, State security forces were involved in the intimidation of UDPS (Union for Democracy and Social Progress, headed by Etienne Tshisekedi) supporters for political gains using intimidation tactics, dispersing rallies and threatening NGOs involved in politics.

Another major problem involves the manipulation of the media using hate speech, which have been observed in Katanga, Kinshasa, and the Kivus. In response, an international commission was established to police the media. The agency is meant to ensure equal media access for all, but the agency does not have enough resources to adequately do its job effectively. Currently, individuals are campaigning using hate speeches as well as ethnic mobilization, but little is being done to stop or discourage it. It was suggested that these hate speeches should be monitored and denounced.

Further concern lies in the justice system. The Congolese Judiciary has been tasked with settling disputes related to the elections, but it has major weaknesses. Kabila, current President of the DRC, appointed the Supreme Court justices just before the transitional government was established, so it is

likely that they will side with Kabila on election issues. Currently, there is an absence of the neutral judiciary necessary to settle election disputes. UNDP has conducted a study and come up with a proposal for a group of partners who would be involved in the electoral process and serve as an international committee that could settle disputes among the different players. The government, as well as various political players, however, is only allowing international intervention under limited circumstances.

The final concern focused on power distribution in the DRC. It was noted that many of the key power players fear losing power as a result of the elections, particularly the RCD (Rassemblement des Congolais pour la Democratie) and others of the RCD movement. This is leading to conflict now. Local government districts are being used as election arenas. It is alleged that the Banyamulenge are dispersing in order to change the population of constituencies, thus ensuring an Assembly seat. It is believed that their populations are large enough to redraw the local and government constituencies. At the risk of losing representation, there is a feeling among some Congolese that they are being sidelined in their own country's government and politics. Some, such as Laureant Ukunda, are using this to justify mutiny. Ukunda's militia is small, between 200 and 400 fighters, but has been able to fight and disband the Congolese Army in several battles. A partial reason for this relates to internal problems of the army. Soldiers of the Congolese Army receive a small salary and are provided inadequate food and supplies. This lack of support results in very little motivation to do their jobs. Overall, we see that in South Kivu, the current conflict is related to the Banyamulenge. In North Kivu, the major issues relate to the collective identity and efforts of the ethnic groups in ensuring that they are represented in the local elections. Political players are making arrangements among themselves to continue their power.

Leadership Training in the DRC

In conclusion, the discussion shifted to current efforts being made in the DRC, specifically leadership trainings held last month by Dr. Howard Wolpe. DFID was concerned about the situation in the DRC and asked Howard Wolpe to conduct leadership trainings, similar to the trainings he had conducted in Burundi. The concern was the lack of cohesion in the DRC's transitional government where political players were operating on a kind of winner takes all, zero-sum mentality. As such, there had been very little preparation for the election itself. At first Dr. Wolpe was unsure whether the diplomatic community would be willing to support a program related to conflict transformation, but everyone was very receptive to the idea. Four challenges in every conflict were outlined during the presentation:

- *Zero-Sum conflict*: there has to be a change in the paradigm of war from a zero-sum mentality to collaboration. There has to be a transformation of mentality to the belief that collaboration with others is in individuals' self-interest.
- *Broken relationships between Leaders*: during conflict there is a fracturing of relationships and trust among key leaders. Trust between leaders is key to have confidence in promises and agreements.
- *Power Struggle*: how power is organized has to be broken down and a consensus has to be formed on how it is to be shared among leaders.
- *Communication*: the capacity to negotiate and communicate must be rebuilt.

There was a great deal of political ill will in the Congo, largely based on lack of trust among leaders and disbelief that there were other ways to communicate with one another. The training was not a negotiation venue, but instead was a technical capacity building exercise, teaching people the skills they need to collaborate and come up with solutions together. The leadership program was launched in the DRC a month ago and included 36 key leaders from civil society, church, and political groups. The training began with a political party-oriented, confidence-building workshop that included between 30 and 40 people, followed by a security workshop with people from the major military factions. Among those taking part in the program were a vice-president, the president of the National Assembly, key

advisors to the president such as the President's security advisor, and parliamentarians representing every major political movement in the DRC including the former governor of Katanga, who was responsible for events in the 1990s where thousands lost their lives, and leaders of groups who had been victimized by others present at the training. In addition, participants included several religious leaders, a well-known television journalist, prominent businessmen, and leaders of women's organizations, distinguished academics, and an artist. In the first three days of the workshop, the focus was not on country issues, but rather on breaking down barriers. Typically, if the focus is on country issues then there is a tendency to just defend individual positions.

Several remarkable events, which occurred in the midst of this training, were also highlighted, demonstrating the overall success of the training. During one workshop in Kivu, the participating governor had surprisingly befriended one of his enemies. During the workshop violence broke out in his governing area, forcing the governor's absence. He passed the word of his absence, as well as his plans to unite the factions in conflict, through his former enemy to the rest of the participants. These leaders had developed a personal relationship during the training and though once enemies, had now come together in an effort for peace. Another success was that of a key leader named Gabriel. Gabriel had affirmed accusations that he had caused conflicts, specifically for one leader, who had, prior to the training, never been in the same room as Gabriel. Later this leader said, "Gabriel is not my enemy," a major statement from a proven opponent. Gabriel in return had informed those in his community that this former leader was to be revered and warmly welcomed upon visits. These men had come to have a direct relationship with one another, which changed everything. In another training, the same happened between Ituri leaders. A church leader present, upon completion of the training, went home and trained his entire congregation. He has further plans to train his 46 other congregations in the workshop's principles. It was found that those who participated in the training moved quickly in applying their training to reality and many carried it back to their communities. The only regret is that this work did not begin sooner. There are plans to continue this training in North and South Kivu in March and May.

Conclusion

Overall, the 116th Great Lakes policy forum, while touching on controversial and sensitive topics concerning the crisis in the DRC, highlighted the important issues relating to the upcoming elections and addressed some of the major reasons for the current conflicts. Dr. Wolpe and Dr. Baldo provided information on what issues currently and urgently need to be addressed in order to prevent further conflict. The speakers also briefed the forum on successful efforts that brought together key leaders, training them in the ideas of conflict transformation. There needs to be continued efforts prior, during and after the elections in order to achieve sustainable peace in the DRC.

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For more information:

Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars (article on the DRC leadership training):
http://www.wilsoncenter.org/index.cfm?topic_id=1417&fuseaction=topics.item&news_id=172243

International Crisis Group (DRC web page):
<http://www.crisisgroup.org/home/index.cfm?id=1174&l=1>