

## **109<sup>th</sup> Great Lakes Policy Forum**

**October 7, 2004, Washington, DC**

**Theme: Update on the Democratic Republic of Congo's Transition Process**

### **Meeting Report**

The 109<sup>th</sup> Great Lakes Policy Forum (GLPF) was held shortly after the UN Security Council voted to extend the United Nations Organization Mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo's (MONUC) mandate until 31 March 2005. The decision included the deployment of an additional 5,900 peacekeepers to maintain a presence in key areas of potential volatility, assist DRC in its transition, and discourage violence in the eastern part of the country. The theme of the forum was an "Update on the DRC's Transition Process."

The October forum featured Mr. Jean-Pierre Bemba, Vice President and head of the Commission for Economy and Finance, Democratic Republic of Congo; Mr. Parfait Moukoko, the National Democratic Institute's Resident Director in DRC provided commentary remarks on the current transition. Ms. Ozong Agborsangaya, Director of Search for Common Ground's Sub-Saharan Africa Programs, facilitated the forum.

The discussion centered on actions taken since the establishment of the transitional government, as well as challenges ahead as DRC moves towards elections in 2005. While the Sun City Accords unified the DRC in April 2002, and elections are set to take place next year, the continued violence in the eastern regions of the country, primarily the Kivus, threatens the ultimate success of the transition.

The conflict, although devastating, has allowed the DRC to create a new political order and unite the country. On the political side, the transitional government is structured with one president and four vice presidents. Each VP is head of one of the four commissions (Economy and Finance; Political, Defense, and Security; Reconstruction and Development; and Social and Cultural). The transitional government also recognizes that a Corruption Commission needs to be established in order to address atrocities and injustices committed during the civil war, as well as ongoing corruption within various parts of the government.

Decision making via a five-person consensus can be time consuming and can potentially cause delays for important decisions, which underscores the importance of the elections and the creation of a classic system of a president and vice president or prime minister. But while the current system does have drawbacks, it has helped to unite the country, bring together former adversaries, support the elections process, and help the Congolese work towards a lasting peace. Throughout the transition there has also been economic progress: inflation has stabilized and the economic growth rate has increased over the past two years from 5.4% to 7% this year.

The different parties have been preparing themselves for the elections—an important step that must take place for the success of the transition. It was emphasized over and over again that legitimate elections by the people are a critical, if not the critical, part of this transition. The transitional government feels that DRC is ready for elections and that not respecting the time frame for elections could worsen the situation. In ongoing efforts to dissuade fears, the government will continue to dialogue with other political groups to convince all the different

parties involved that elections are the best way to legitimize the governance structure. There remain many challenges to be resolved before elections can take place. The continuing violence in the Kivus presents one such challenge. Episodes of violence have been attributed to the work of a few undisciplined officers manipulated by neighboring countries. It is a fragile region, with ethnic, security and border-related issues. The government is looking at the situation very carefully and is engaging dialogue and security activities to stabilize the situation. It is very important for the transitional government to stabilize the volatile regions in the East, so that the people there can participate fully in the elections process. This will be an important factor in the elections' success.

One of the greatest concerns to be resolved is the question of nationality. There are approximately 450 ethnicities in Congo, and ultimately the government's responsibility is to protect all Congolese, regardless of ethnicity. The government does not feel there are any special ethnic groups or particular tribes that need to be protected more than another, but acknowledges that there is a need for dialogue between all groups. The decision regarding nationality and other sensitive issues will be left to the future elected legislature.

There are also administrative and political challenges ahead. Voter registration is not set to take place until 2005 and laws regarding the referendum do not yet exist. Civic education for the Congolese has not started and it is unclear to the people when the electoral process is to begin. The transitional government's electoral commission is just beginning to focus on electoral law.

Also, the 2005 budget has not yet been allocated, causing delays within the commission as the budget will determine the possibilities of the electoral commission. With 53% of the DRC budget dependant on the international community, delays are inevitable until donors commit to contributions. A meeting is scheduled for November 11, 2004 with various donors to discuss commitments to DRC, which will help clarify FY 2005 budget allocations.

The transitional government would like MONUC to redeploy with an updated, more robust mission, in which they would have more than an observer role in general and take on a larger role, specifically, in the Kivus and Ituri as well as during the elections. In the most recent updated mandate, the Security Council did not provide a role for MONUC during the elections.

Finally, DRC needs to continue to improve its relationship with neighboring countries. While there have been great improvements, there is still a lack of confidence on all sides. Recently there was a meeting in Rwanda in which a permanent verification commission was established. It is intended that the commission will monitor activities along the borders, such as transportation of arms and troop movements. It is hoped that this will continue to help restore the relationship between neighboring nations.

End.