

Great Lakes Policy Forum
Meeting Report
November 6, 2003

The November Great Lakes Policy Forum was dedicated to discussing and analyzing the status of the peace processes in the Democratic Republic of Congo and Burundi. The forum consisted of two segments: the first featured Paul Simo and John Prendergast's analysis of the DRC, the second Ambassador Antoine Ntamobwa and Howard Wolpe's perspectives on Burundi. A common trend emerged as all speakers noted that progress towards peace has occurred over the past months, while also warning that without concerted domestic and international willpower, the realization of a sustainable end to conflict is unlikely.

Summary of DRC Remarks:

Recent developments in the DRC indicate that the peace process has taken hold and that the population is hopeful that a sustainable end to conflict can be found. MONUC, for example, has begun to take a more proactive role in Ituri province to both end the fighting there and stem the inflow of small arms into the region. The national army is also beginning to take shape, a critical factor towards the realization of a unified and stable DRC. And finally, the International Criminal Court's decision to use Ituri as a test case has the potential to serve as a catalyst for ensuring accountability for human rights abuses in the country. But the situation in the DRC still remains a precarious one, and these small but important steps toward stability need to be reinforced and expanded upon.

Perhaps the greatest threat to this progress is the issue of Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR), which has been a critical factor throughout the conflict. Without a sustained and coordinated effort to implement the DDR process, it is likely that the conflict will continue indefinitely. Currently, there is no institution for cantonment on the ground, and militia leaders have yet to seriously urge rank-and-file members to participate in demobilization. International efforts must spearhead the effort to address this lack of preparedness, while domestic constituents must commit—no strings attached—to the DDR process.

The hotspots of Ituri and the Kivus remain another potential roadblock to DRC's progress, but recent developments indicate the potential for improvements in these volatile regions. The Ituri militias, for example, have continued to terrorize civilian populations, show little sign of unification and rarely initiate attacks on one another. In South Kivu, fighting has continued, but the Mayi-Mayi and RCD recently reached an agreement negotiated by MONUC and the NGO Life of Peace.

The following recommendations were also enumerated as essential steps towards facilitating the creation of a stable DRC:

- MONUC should take a more proactive role confronting the rebel groups in the Ituri region, particularly given each of these groups' relative weakness and isolation.
- The Kinshasa transitional government must actively persuade ex-FAR / *Interahamwe* rebels, whose presence in the Kivus justifies Rwanda's involvement in the DRC, to participate in the disarmament process.

- The international community must maintain its intensive support of the peace process, and the DDR process particularly, having initiated the majority of achievements to date.
 - The DRC peace process is not an internally driven phenomenon; in fact, the competing domestic interests agree on very little, creating the potential for future gridlock. With prodding from the international community, however, these groups have agreed to a ceasefire and transitional government. It is imperative that the international community sustains this pressure to see the creation of a peaceful state.
- The international community must encourage the development of the DRC's political and legal institutions, which, in place, will lend domestic credibility/ownership to the peace process.
- In order to prevent additional arms from entering eastern DRC, a system for monitoring and enforcing the UN-mandated arms embargo must be implemented. Currently, the ban is in name only and thus requires a comprehensive monitoring system—including the use of helicopters, for example—to end the influx of weapons from Uganda and Rwanda into eastern DRC.
- The international community should cease sending mixed signals to both regional and domestic players involved in the DRC.
 - Rwanda and Uganda must cooperate with the DRC peace process or else face financial and political consequences from donor countries.
 - To help facilitate regional cooperation, the international community should help facilitate bilateral border agreements between Rwanda / Uganda and the DRC.
 - Domestically, evidence of non-compliance is present in the Kivus, where militias continue to recruit youth despite promises to participate in demobilization. To counter this trend, international support should be contingent upon rebel groups actively supporting the DDR process.
- Finally, all parties to the DRC peace process must establish a zero tolerance policy for impunity to bring about an end to the human rights abuses that have plagued the conflict. The ICC will be using the Ituri province as a test case; the hope is that this effort will serve as a catalyst for other justice initiatives.

Summary of Burundi Remarks:

The peace process in Burundi is progressing and providing Burundi's citizens with the hope that the conflict can reach a sustainable resolution. These achievements have occurred because of a persistent international effort to bring the government and militias together for inclusive discussions. Several militia groups have learned that by participating in the dialogue, they can not only defuse the conflict, but also achieve meaningful representation in the new government. The FDD, for example, now has three governors and a number of important advisors in the transitional government.

There remain, however, a number of significant challenges to sustaining this momentum:

- The peace in Burundi has been forged under external pressure and does not necessarily represent domestic accord. As the process continues, it is imperative to shift ownership of the peace process to Burundi's population and to move beyond the adversarial approach of the earlier negotiations to a stage of rapprochement. This transition has begun, evidenced by the transitional government's increasing cooperation, but will require additional support.
- The FNL must be brought into the negotiations, an increasingly difficult challenge given their isolation and paranoia.
- There is the risk of marginalizing the Arusha signatories; many groups now feel displaced by subsequent agreements. The increased attention given to recent signatories—and the need to attract the FNL to the process—should not replace the sense of inclusiveness that has forged the successes to date.
- The current timetable for elections is tight, requiring the parties' mentality to change from one of winner-takes-all to the acknowledgement that everyone will remain party to Burundi's development.
- The issues of justice and immunity must be addressed; both external and internal (e.g. Truth and Reconciliation Commission) initiatives have been discussed. Currently, the government has granted immunity to militia members (rebels and the army), a policy that deserves reevaluation.
- The donor community must reward the progress on the ground by augmenting their financial support of Burundi's developing institutions.
- Burundi's sustainability is contingent upon the presence of peacekeepers, and the current South African force is only scheduled to remain for six months. The UN should be encouraged to assume this role, as it would be a financially viable approach to this urgent issue.

Burundi also faces the challenge of incorporating civil society into the political and peace processes, as the country's established political elite has traditionally excluded this important constituent. A number of steps have been taken to address this dearth of participation, beginning with the government's awareness of the importance of including all stakeholders in the peace process, especially women. Training workshops aimed at strengthening civil society have been implemented by a number of organizations outside the capital. All parties to the Burundian peace process should continue to support this encouraging development.

Finally, the country must begin preparing for the possibility of a large influx of refugees from Tanzania, a situation that to date has been largely ignored. Should this occur without preparations, there would be an enormous strain on the country's already limited resources.