



Land disputes complicate refugee return to eastern DR Congo, UN says

9 June 2008 –The United Nations refugee agency is helping to promote dialogue to ward off disputes over land in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) province of South Kivu, one of the largest issues facing refugees returning to the region.

Land is at the root of many quarrels between Congolese returnees and those who never left the DRC, as well as between refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs), according to the UN High Commissioner for Refugees ([UNCHR](#)) today.

To ease the reintegration process for those returning to South Kivu – a province which borders Rwanda and Uganda and has seen relative stability – UNHCR, together with its partners, has been working to encourage mediation.

"There is now a real window of opportunity to help uprooted Congolese return and rebuild their lives," Nasir Fernandes, the head of the agency's office in Uvira, said.

The main thrust of UNHCR's efforts is to use a combination of communication, collaboration and reintegration activities to facilitate renewing relationships between returnees and those who stayed in South Kivu.

In a project called Search for Common Ground backed by the agency, 75 actors have been trained in conflict analysis to listen to communities' concerns and set up a dialogue to allow audience members to take part and find constructive means to end conflicts.

This initiative has reached over 400,000 people in the past 18 months in the main areas of return in South Kivu and parts of neighbouring Katanga province.

UNCHR and its partners are also assisting in boosting local conflict resolution avenues, such as traditional mediation committees, which are often the only means available for addressing land disputes in the absence of effective government institutions.

In one instance, Lucie, a refugee returning to South Kivu from Tanzania last year, found a house being built on property owned by her late husband by his niece Amina, who argued that the land had been sold to her father in Lucie's absence.

Police intervention failed to resolve the dispute, and Lucie asked UNHCR-supported Arche D'Alliance, which referred her to a mediation committee. When Amina still refused to budge, the project was called in and produced a drama based on the two women's disagreement, which ultimately led to an agreement: Lucie will stay in the house with her children while Amina will be allowed to build a new house nearby.