

Briefing to the Security Council on the Situation in the Democratic Republic of Congo

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Thank you, Mr. President, for this opportunity to brief you on the humanitarian situation in the eastern and northern provinces of the Democratic Republic of Congo.

As the Council is well aware, the last six months saw deteriorating stability in several areas: renewed fighting between various rebel groups, principally the CNDP, and the FARDC in the Kivus; the resurgence of armed groups and subsequent clashes with FARDC in Ituri district; and new vicious attacks by the Lord's Resistance Army in Province Orientale. These worrying developments left many hundred dead, provoked the displacement of a further 500,000 people, and worsened already dire humanitarian situations, though humanitarian needs in DRC are sadly not limited to areas affected by conflict.

My visit last week came as the government and the international community are pursuing new political and military initiatives to address long-standing and fundamental concerns, with major potential humanitarian implications. In the east, while the mediation co-led by the Secretary-General's Special Envoy to the Great Lakes Region, President Obasanjo, and President Mpaka from the African Union continues, the DRC and Rwandan governments are carrying out joint operations against the FDLR in North Kivu, and CNDP elements are being integrated into the FARDC following the arrest of Laurent Nkunda in Rwanda. These initiatives have created a new dynamic which could have a significant and favorable impact, including on the humanitarian situation, but which also brings with it significant risks.

North and South Kivu will be most affected one way or the other. In North Kivu, I met displaced people in camps near Goma who had been caught in the crossfire between the CNDP and the FARDC; these were some of the 250,000 new IDPs created by that conflict since August 2008, to add to the longstanding North Kivu caseload of over 800,000.

These IDPs, living both in camps and with host populations, often continue to face miserable conditions, despite an active and effective humanitarian response in difficult and dangerous circumstances. The quality of services provided to them tends to decrease the further they are located from Goma, due to security and capacity problems. While tens of thousands had already returned home in areas where their relations with the CNDP were friendly, others driven out by the CNDP are still waiting. Those I met in Kibati camp, near Goma, are keen to go home as soon as possible, not least as the planting season is already under way, but serious concerns still prevent them from doing so. Their memories of the CNDP offensive are fresh, and while the campaign to integrate CNDP military cadres into the DRC armed forces is making progress, the CNDP still maintains parallel administrative structures and a military presence in many villages. Perceptions of insecurity have been heightened in some areas by the current offensive against the FDLR ex-genocidaires. And sadly the presence of the FARDC in some areas is far

from always seen as reassuring, given their own dreadful indiscipline and violence during the CNDP offensive. Moreover, those IDPs I spoke to made clear that they have nothing left. Their houses and fields have been burned or taken over by someone else, such infrastructure as there was has been destroyed, and their personal possessions taken. They will need substantial support from the international community if they are to return voluntarily in safety and in dignity. We are working to put in place appropriate return packages.

Mr. President, my last visit to DRC in September 2007 focused on gender-based violence and on how the United Nations and the international community could fight the scourge of rape in eastern DRC. Unfortunately I cannot say that the situation has improved since. Women I met at the Heal Africa hospital in Goma, and in the camps, bore disturbing and eloquent witness that little has changed. Sexual violence, particularly by those with guns, continues to be a horrific feature of every day life. Impunity remains the fundamental issue. Lack of capacity means that even if sexual violence perpetrators can be arrested and convicted, there is often nowhere to keep them. In this context, I raised with the government, from the President downwards, the continued presence of known perpetrators of sexual violence in the senior ranks of the FARDC, and stressed that this sends absolutely the wrong signal to all concerned. I hope appropriate action will be taken soon.

Nevertheless, there have been some positive moves. I had the sense that public opinion in DRC itself may be shifting, thanks largely to the efforts of Congolese civil society and Congolese women themselves, including the President's wife, Mrs. Kabila. For the UN, a senior advisor on sexual violence has developed a system-wide strategy to strengthen prevention, protection and response to sexual violence. I hope that all donors will align their programmes and activities with this strategy, including much stronger efforts to establish the rule of law through a functioning judicial system, vigorous security sector reform and extension of state authority, and better medical, psychosocial and social reintegration support to the victims. Meanwhile, it is vital that the government themselves continue to regard this as a major priority and make clear publicly and frequently that sexual violence is completely unacceptable in Congolese society.

Mr. President, it is hard to be sure at this stage of the overall final effect of the continuing combined Rwandan Defense Force/FARDC offensive against the FDLR ex-genocidaires. I added my voice to those, including MONUC's leadership, who have stressed the importance of reducing the risks of the offensive for the civilian population by ensuring strict compliance with international humanitarian and human rights law, and giving top priority to protection of civilians. In particular, there are 'hostage populations' in the areas concerned who are acutely vulnerable to any abuse or reprisals from the FDLR. So far our worst fears do not seem to have been realized, either in terms of displacement or atrocities, but reports at the end of last week including from Human Rights Watch painted a disturbing picture of revenge attacks on civilians by the FDLR already beginning. As the operation is officially drawing to an end MONUC, already present in numerous key locations, will have a vital role, with the FARDC, in helping to fill any security vacuum and in preventing FDLR militants from returning to areas they previously occupied and exacting a terrible price from civilians.

There are positive signs too. At a Goma UNHCR-run transit center, I spoke to young Rwandan refugees, men and women, who had been in DRC since 1994 and had now decided to

return home. During the last month there has been a significant increase in the number of refugees transiting the center. The numbers of Rwandan civilians who have voluntarily repatriated under the auspices of UNHCR, from 1 January to 16 February 2009, has reached 2,902 - 883 from North Kivu and 2,019 from South Kivu. Meanwhile, the number of FDLR combatants presenting themselves for MONUC's DDRRR programme is equally on the rise, having already reached 376, plus 655 dependents, for a total of 1,031, with several hundred more candidates waiting to be screened. These numbers are striking when compared to 1,103 total FDLR repatriations and 7,992 civilian repatriations in the entire year of 2008. I hope these developments signify that the running sore of the FDLR presence can now be significantly reduced, if not removed altogether. But robust and comprehensive political solutions will also continue to be needed, on both sides of the border.

Mr. President, I also went to the Haute Uele district of Orientale Province, where the Ugandan People's Defense Force and the FARDC are carrying out joint military operations against the Lord's Resistance Army. The LRA have reacted by carrying out horrific and unprovoked attacks against the local civilian population. In Doruma, I met those displaced by some of these attacks. I was shaken by their accounts and their obvious anger and trauma. The so-called Christmas massacres triggered a wave of displacement from at least 22 villages around Doruma, tripling the population from its normal 6,000 to 18,000. There have been similar attacks elsewhere, including around Faradje. The casual brutality, total disregard for human life, and the treatment of women and children in particular, are appalling even for those used to the depredations of the LRA in so many places in the last 20 years. The number of deaths is believed to approach 900 since December 2008, with many victims hacked to death with machetes, or bludgeoned by clubs. Many women have been raped before being killed. 160,000 people altogether are estimated to have fled their homes. Moreover, according to UNHCR, in Southern Sudan's Western Equatoria State, the registered population of Congolese refugees who fled LRA attacks in the Dungu area in January has surpassed 9,000, in addition to the thousands of Sudanese already internally displaced for the same reason.

UN agencies and partners are working as rapidly as possible, with the central and local authorities, the military forces in the area, and MONUC, to expand humanitarian assistance and step up efforts to protect the local population. These efforts are constrained by the huge 40,000 square kilometer area where the LRA are hiding, their dispersal into several groups, the difficult terrain and isolated location, chronic lack of infrastructure, and the threat still posed by the LRA, including on the major roads.

No-one doubts the urgent need to remove the LRA threat, one way or another. Their surrender would be the best way. Meanwhile, in meetings with the local commanders of the FARDC and UPDF, I emphasized the importance of placing the protection of civilians at the center of their planning as the military operations continue, and of better communication among all concerned about the risks to civilians and to humanitarians. I also discussed with MONUC locally and in Kinshasa what more might be done to strengthen their presence in the area, to help to protect civilians, and to support humanitarian assistance, following their help for the reinstallation of the humanitarian community in the main local town of Dungu. MONUC, with the FARDC, is already expanding escorts for humanitarian convoys as needed and requested. The Mission will seek to deploy extra troops from elsewhere in the country, including in a few of the key towns like Doruma and Faradje, and will work to improve some of the roads to help with

logistics. MONUC is also urgently looking to acquire more utility helicopters to cover the wide area, in support of the FARDC, where the LRA groups have dispersed.

Mr. President, let me take the opportunity to comment more generally on the work of MONUC from a humanitarian perspective. The last few months have been especially challenging for them, and the revised mandate from this Council is provoking positive reconsideration of how MONUC can use its limited resources to the best effect in this immense and complicated country in order to help protect civilians. This is never going to be an easy task, and we should beware of arousing expectations that cannot be met, and of unhelpful criticism which takes no account of the real problems and limitations. Units which have been trained for conventional warfare, static defense, or patrolling of ceasefire lines, and military structures designed accordingly, cannot convert themselves overnight into the kind of highly mobile and flexible operations, with good local intelligence, contacts and skills, which would be ideal.

Nevertheless the civilian and military leadership of MONUC are well into a far reaching review of operating guidelines, deployments and training. Newly formed Joint Protection Teams, deployed in locations where access is difficult, are already making a difference in anticipating and understanding threats to civilians, and in helping the military to interact with the population and better understand their protection needs. I would urge this Council and Troop Contributing Countries to give their fullest support to these changes, and TCCs in particular to allow maximum flexibility in operating procedures and rules of engagement. I am also convinced that the two additional battalions, together with the two companies of Special Forces, two engineering companies, extra air assets, and the information analysis capability recently authorized by the Council, remain badly and urgently needed, to enable MONUC to carry out their testing mandate.

Mr. President, I was able to raise many of these points in Kinshasa with President Kabila, Prime Minister Muzito, and Minister of Foreign Affairs Mwamba. We discussed in particular the prospects of the current initiatives producing lasting improvements in the political, security and humanitarian situation in the east and north. I emphasized to them the importance of doing everything possible to protect civilians, including tackling sexual violence, to address impunity, and especially to improve the discipline of the FARDC. They agreed, while stressing the need in their eyes to prioritize a rapid return to peace and stability in the short term. I pointed out that there should be no inconsistency between the two imperatives of peace and justice.

Mr. President, continuing and improved humanitarian assistance remains essential to relieve the suffering in the Kivus and in Orientale province, but is not enough to enable the people there to rebuild their lives on a durable basis. The authority and capacity of the central and local authorities have to be rebuilt at every level. The international community can help to achieve this, as it has been doing, including through the comprehensive stabilization strategy now being pursued by MONUC together with the UN and donor partners. But the Government must also effectively face up to its responsibilities in this respect.

Mr. President, in conclusion, let me return to the point that humanitarian needs are substantial throughout DRC, including the western provinces, and not only in the conflict areas. 76% of the population are undernourished and chronically subject to food insecurity. 54% have no access to clean water. Endemic diseases like malaria, cholera, plague, and Ebola weaken

further already vulnerable people. The 2009 Humanitarian Action Plan estimates that some USD 831 million are needed to cover humanitarian needs, an increase of 11 % from last year. So this is no time to turn away our eyes from DRC. As on my first visit, I was impressed by the quality and dedication of many of the officials I met, from district level upwards. If the government can establish proper control over the country's own natural riches and provide support and resources to its administration, DRC can have a bright future, despite the huge and multiple challenges.

Thank you for your attention.