

ODUMUNC 2009 Issue Brief
Security Council
The Crisis in Democratic
Republic of the Congo
And the U.N.
Ersin Elibol



Background and the 1997-2003 Wars

Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) is the third largest country in Africa with its 2,344,410 km² territory, roughly the same as America, east of the Mississippi River. With a population of about 60 million, it has the third largest African population, after Nigeria, and Egypt. Formerly colonized as the Belgian Congo, it became independent in 1960. The DRC should not be confused with the neighboring Republic of Congo (Congo-Brazzaville).

From 1971 until 1997 the country was known as Zaire, renamed by its long-time dictator, Mobutu Sese Seko. After his death in 1997 the country was plunged into a series of civil wars, made worse by spill-over from conflicts in neighboring countries and rise of semi-independent regional war lords and ethnic insurgencies. As neighboring countries and outside powers were drawn into the chaos, Congo became the scene of what many observers called Africa's first "world war." In practical terms, the DRC ceased to exist as a meaningful country or state. Government authority was limited to the capital city of Kinshasa. The government had minimal communication and no authority with most other regions of the country, where power shifted to regional leaders, often highly corrupt war lords, often preoccupied with controlling key export industries exporting commodities like diamonds or timber.

The chaos surrounding the death of Mobutu in 1997 was made worse by regional fighting. Most serious was the impact of the civil war in Rwanda. When Tutsis took control of Rwanda in 1997, the former rulers, members of the Hutu majority, concentrated in refugee camps on the Congo side of the border and continued fighting. Conflicts spread into Congo. Later, this violence triggered a regional war in the region which directly or indirectly affected the other Rwanda, Uganda, Angola, Zimbabwe, Namibia, Sudan, Chad and Burundi. Thus, the violence in Congo should not be considered as a one state or one nation case but it was a regional tragedy, although the people of Congo suffered most directly.

The rise of a stable government in the capital city of Kinshasa under Joseph Kabila (president since 2001) under brought stability to parts of the country. Warfare declined since 2003. But an estimated 3.5 million people died as a result of the fighting, which still continues in much of Congo. Public services, including roads, health and education, are non-existent in much of DRC.

Current conditions

Because of civil wars and political crisis, the country's economy is very poor and unstable. It is ranked as one of the low income countries in the world by the U.N. Like the United Nations, other international organizations, volunteer groups, NGO's have some social and humanitarian programs in the region but these seem to be insufficient.

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| | | D.R Congo | USA |
|---|------|-----------|-------|
| Mortality rate, infant (per 1,000 live births) | 2005 | 129.0 | 6.0 |
| School enrollment, primary (% gross) | 2003 | 61.7 | 99.0 |
| Prevalence of HIV, total (% of population ages 15-49) | 2005 | 3.2 | 0.6 |
| Improved water source (% of population with access) | 2004 | 46.0 | 100.0 |

(World Bank, 2008)

“The government has difficulty to perform some of its basic duties including paying its employees. Taxation is really problematic because of informal economy. Mine and timber exporting are the essential income resources of the country. There is little or very poor infrastructure for electricity, telecommunication, water supply and transportation; even in the capital city, Kinshasa. The internet and phone communication is essentially operated by foreign firms via satellites.

Most of the products are imported from abroad and very expensive for local people. People widely consume “fufu” which is made of flour from the roots of vegetable called manioc. Other than that, rice is some luxurious for the local people. Although there are many kinds of tropical fruits prices are very high because of insufficient transportation. Agriculture is not developed and there are just a few animal farms.

Because of instability the country can not attract foreign investment. Recently, China has interested to invest some 10 billion USD for constructing a harbor on the shore of country’s Atlantic shore and making railways and roads in turn mining authorization. Like China, companies mainly from the U.S and Europe have some kind of business in Congo especially in mining sector.”

A country-wide constitutional referendum in December 2005 and democratic elections in July 2006 were held with extensive the support and observation of the UN and the European Union. The election improved the legitimacy of the Kabila government, although major regional and ethnic factions continue to resent his rule. Although the security situation in much of the country is currently peaceful and stable, banditry involving former combatants remains a serious threat and armed conflict routinely breaks out.

The role of UN and the international community

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The United Nations has been heavily involved in efforts to restore stability, leading to the largest and most expensive UN peacekeeping mission ever. International intervention has been a high priority for many African leaders concerned with regional

stability and European governments and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) with humanitarian priorities.

UN efforts have been slowed by disputes between African countries, some of whom have strong differences with the Kabila government and refuse to support measures that might directly or indirectly strengthen his rule. Other countries in Africa and outside the region are concerned about international action that might create precedents to reduce the sovereign independence of any government. Even countries that support aggressive action often have been slow or unwilling to supply the funds and peacekeeping troops required to improve peace and stability.

The enormous size of the country guarantees that any action there must be on an unprecedented scale to be effective. With support and intervention of the UN, the rebel groups, the Congolese government and the other five nations agreed in ceasefire and sign a peace agreement in 1999. According to the agreement, African army has been sent to the region to observe ceasefire and local militants were started to be disarmed. Since then, the UN has a peacekeeping and monitoring mission in DRC to maintain peace, MONUC, mandated by Security Council resolution 1291 of 24 February 2000. With a budget of roughly one billion US dollars annually, this is the most expensive and largest peacekeeping mission in UN history. As of July 2008, the UN had 18,388 total uniformed personnel, including 16,669 troops, 677 military observers, 1,042 police; 926 international civilian personnel, 2,120 local civilian staff and 504 United Nations volunteers. While this is the largest peacekeeping operation, it is widely acknowledged as impossibly small for a vast country, unable to do more than monitor strategic regions and refugee concentrations. Peacekeepers in Congo have not been above criticism; some nationalities have been harshly criticism for encouraging corruption and prostitution.

For the UN, continuous diplomacy is needed to contain conflict in the region. Regional conflict spill-over remains a serious problem, as combatants from Uganda. One of the most important UN activities in Congo is *DDR* (Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration, or sometimes *DDRRR*, for Disarmament, Demobilization, Repatriation, Resettlement and Reintegration) of former combatants. This program is seen as the most important instrument for preventing former fighters from returning to war or banditry as a way of life. The Security Council also faces major problems with corruption among peacekeepers.

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