



Programme de la R.D.Congo

US Engagement in the Democratic Republic of Congo – A Policy Brief

Background

A flurry of diplomatic and political activity in the last few months has placed the Congolese conflict in international spotlight. The UN Security Council on 28 March authorized the deployment of an “intervention brigade” within the current UN peacekeeping operation to eliminate rebel forces including the M23 group. The U.S. House of Representatives is currently considering a bipartisan bill aimed at supporting international efforts to forge a peace deal.

U.N. Special Envoy to Africa’s Great Lakes region, Mary Robinson, has been working to establish a “more comprehensive and inclusive peace process that addresses the core drivers of violence in the DRC”. In February, she and 11 African heads of state established a diplomatic framework to identify reforms that would enable Rwanda, Congo and Uganda to cooperate on the extraction and export of minerals. One of the most prominent warlords and alleged M23 founder, Bosco Ntaganda, has surrendered to U.S. embassy in Rwanda and was transferred to the International Criminal Court in The Hague.

The World Bank is devising a new four-year country assistance strategy (2013-2016) which proposes funding of approximately US\$760 million in the first period and an estimated US\$500 million for the last period.

The process of revising the UN-led international stabilization plan for Congo is also underway.

International advocacy campaigns have gained momentum to bring in focus issues of gender-based violence, conflict minerals, refugees and internally displaced persons, and institutional reform for state-building.

Areas of US Engagement

The following areas remain the main focus of U.S. engagement in the Congo:

1. Diplomatic and financial support for the state-building project
2. Civilian protection and action against rebel groups, mainly through the UN
3. Livelihoods and economic growth projects, mainly based on concerns about conflict minerals
4. Security sector reform

Recommendations by the Life & Peace Institute

Against this background—and in light of its peacebuilding work experience in the Congo since 2002—the Life & Peace Institute would like to make the following suggestions:

Treat the symptoms, but cure the causes: While the increased international attention and reinvigorated U.S. policy is a welcome sign of progress, these efforts are only addressing the



symptoms of the malaise in Congo, not its root-causes. Gender-based violence, the problem of the refugees and IDPs, exploitation of the country's precious mineral resources and the weakness of the state are the consequences—not the underlying cause—of the conflict. While treating the symptoms is important, lasting peace cannot be achieved without tackling the roots of the problem, which requires long-term commitment from the international community.

Build the state, but resolving conflicts at other levels is essential: The various levels of intervention in Congo need to be linked into a coherent and comprehensive approach. A focus on state building and stabilization alone will not ensure enduring peace unless the conflicts that divide communities at the local level are resolved through the active participation, engagement and representation of the local people themselves. Communities engaged and affected by the recurring conflicts cannot be brought together by foreign military interventions and remote institution building in Kinshasa: it requires conflict transformation at the grassroots levels which is a slow and long-term process.

Land reforms: The foremost cause of mistrust, mutual enmity and conflict among different communities—both pastoralists and farming people—is the question of land ownership and land use. Multiple mechanisms of land rights and rival claims of land use are the main drivers of most intra- and inter-community feuds. The state-ordained legal codes are outdated or disputed; the customary laws are often arbitrary and depends on tribal chiefs whims and, in many cases, the small-scale peasants do not have either a legal title or customary sanction.

A top-down harmonization of the legal system cannot resolve the deeply entrenched and complicated problem. A more democratic system for access to land needs to be established through mutual agreement and consent of local communities which will take a long process of dialogue, negotiations and local agreements between these communities.

Engagement by the U.S. is critical for all these alternative approaches to peacebuilding to take hold in the Congo. LPI urges U.S. policymakers to learn from the several failed attempts to establish the peace through a top-down only approach—what needs to be done is to bring all levels of peacebuilding together and focusing on nonviolent, peaceful and sustained interaction among communities-in-conflict.