

## **117<sup>th</sup> Great Lakes Policy Forum**

### *“Humanitarian Consequences of the Conflict in Katanga”*

Meeting Report – April 6, 2006

#### Panelists:

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The focus of the 117<sup>th</sup> Great Lakes Policy Forum focused on the humanitarian consequences of the conflict despite the recent emphasis placed on the upcoming elections. More specifically, panelists spoke about the situation as it relates to Katanga. Since the outbreak of the civil war, 4 million people have died. Majority of those who perished did so not because of the direct violence but rather because of preventable diseases such as malaria and measles. With estimates of more than 220,000 internally displaced persons (IDPs), major outbreaks of cholera, soaring rates of malnutrition, and human rights violations by both the Mai Mai and FARDC, there is growing concern regarding the human impact of the continuing conflict in the DRC. In recent months, the situation in Katanga has deteriorated. Médecins sans Frontières (MSF) is one of few NGOs working in the area and Michael Neuman offers his reports on the conditions MSF has seen in Katanga. Andrea Lari and Rick Neal present on two Refugees International (RI) evaluation trips to the Congo and report their findings and recommendations on the situation in Katanga.

### **MEDICINES SANS FRONTIERES IN KATANGA**

MSF works throughout the DRC, with a specific focus on conflict-ridden North Kivu and Katanga. Last year, MSF gave a speech in Washington, DC on the conflict between rebel and military troops in North Kivu, which caused thousands of civilians to flee into the bush. At the same time last year, 100,000 were displaced near Lake Albert. In June, MSF suspended activities in Bunia because two of MSF staff members were abducted (later released). For a time, military activity calmed in Kivu and in Ituri provinces, but in the last month new episodes of violence have erupted. In Ituri, thousands of civilians have been displaced following fighting between renegades and the Congolese army. About 20,000 of these people have fled eastward to Uganda, while others have fled north. The violence suffered is relatively un-documented, but reports received by MSF staff involve major human rights violations.

The only change seen since last year has been a further deterioration of the situation in Katanga. Elections have been postponed to July, a number of laws are being passed, but conditions for the majority in eastern DRC have not improved. The region of Katanga, particularly northern and central Katanga, has been the center for local insecurity for about 2 years due to the involvement of Mai-Mai militia groups, local bandits, and Congolese army. Since last November, 150,000 people have been displaced from their villages, pushed out by military sweep operations. MSF has been assisting these populations in regular programs, but is one of few organizations doing so. They have 50 international staff and 1,000 Congolese working in the region Katanga including Dubie, Mitwaba, Nyunzu, Upembe, Kabalo, Ankoro, and Pweto. MSF is running primary healthcare programs through hospitals, health centers, and mobile clinics and has a new project in Sampwe. They often encounter the usual diseases such as malaria and diarrhea because of poor quality of water. More recently a cholera outbreak has arisen in the area. MSF has been involved in a massive cholera intervention in Malemba and Nkululu with 1,007 cases of cholera with another 770 in Kikondja since January 6th. In the last year, cholera has been a major issue and it is a crucial problem that has to be monitored.

### REFUGEES INTERNATIONAL IN KATANGA

Refugees International visited Katanga twice in the last year and a half. The first visit was to Kalemie in the north and the second was to Lubumbashi in the south. The military is operating in what is known as the “two triangles.” Conflict in Manono-Pweto-Mitwaba began last year and recent conflict has erupted in Nyunzu-Kabalo-Kongolo. RI conducted interviews near these areas in order to determine what has caused so many people to flee. . It is important to understand that this conflict has a long history. The army has been fighting Mai-Mai for several months, but many forget that the Mai-Mai have been around for many years. They were strengthened by Kabila’s father and currently number in the thousands moving throughout the region causing havoc. The Mai-Mai have disassociated themselves from the community and in conjunction with renegade groups, are burning villages and pillaging, killing civilians, and preying on the villages for support. Those who could flee live in the bush and only come out when humanitarian assistance comes, security is offered, or when they become aware of IDP camps. Currently, in the triangle, there are 3 unorganized camps or settlements that are hosting the new arrivals and the 18,000 displaced from last year. In general, 150,000 IDPs have been identified but there is a fear that many more are still hiding in the bush—totaling more than 220,000 people.

### CONFLICT IN KATANGA: CONSEQUENCES AND FACTORS

**Malnutrition.** There is a high level of malnutrition and people have resorted to eating cassava scraps, which are normally thrown out to the animals. In February, the market RI visited was empty with no food for the locals or IDPs. The problem is exacerbated as the rainy season approaches and there is no opportunity to plant or ensure crop production. In March, MSF conducted nutritional surveys in three camps for displaced Congolese around the town of Dubie, near Lake Mweru, in Katanga province. The results are staggering, with the prevalence of global malnutrition at 19.2 percent and of severe acute malnutrition at 5 percent. Global malnutrition rates of 10-15 percent indicate a food

security crisis. Besides the lack of food, the response is slow and inadequate. In one area RI visited, a food shipment arrived more than 60 days late, contained less than the planned amount and was incomplete in nutritional value (lacked protein).

Other attempts have been made but the amount of aid needed is not being provided. In Malemba Nkulu, IDPs have been there for several months, fleeing from fighting in the surrounding areas. When Refugees International arrived in Malemba Nkulu there was a sense among agents that the number of IDPs was small and that the issue of assistance was not a major concern. The real fact was that there was no sense of emergency because no one, except MSF, ventured into the areas where the IDPs were hiding. Locals identified 15,000 IDPs in the surrounding areas, but this currently lacks confirmation.

**Water Sanitation.** Water sanitation is another problematic issue. When RI visited Mitwaba they observed that there were only a few pumps for water. Water issues are especially a problem for those IDPs living on islands around Lake Upembe, where they are squeezed between the Mai Mai and Congolese army with no where to go. They have no tools, no supplies and disease is rampant. RI could not venture into the area because it would have taken days. Logistics are difficult because there are only small planes, poor roads and bridges can handle only 10 tons, planes stick in the sand. These obstacles make it difficult for organizations to operate effectively in areas where their assistance is desperately needed.

**Protection needs.** The lack of protection from soldiers and renegades who prey on villagers and abuse civilians is a major problem. The area where the worst abuses by the national army occur is in Mitwaba. The army is not integrated, fed, or well equipped so they are encouraged by their corrupt commanders to exploit the villagers. One lady in a camp in Mitwaba noted that the military camp by the water, but at night the soldiers go into the village where they steal necessary items and rape women for their pleasure.

A family in Maremba Nkulu described how communities are interacting with IDPs. This family fled at night because they saw the Mai-Mai arriving to burn their houses. The community they arrived at originally welcomed them. They provided them with housing, helped them get their kids in school, and find work in the fields. However, the lack of resources put a strain on the community and therefore they were unable to support them for elongated periods of time. IDPs are unable to return home because of the attacks, yet they are unable to provide for themselves in their host communities.

Peacekeepers role must be security focused. In one case in Mitwaba, leaders representing 400 IDPs came when RI arrived because they saw what they thought were peacekeepers. This outpour demonstrates that protection is needed and IDPs are seeking it. RI believes that if peacekeepers were deployed then it would help to control the actions of the army, offer IDPs a sense of security so that they could venture out to get help, and it would provide protection for other UN agencies.

**The FARDC and MONUC.** FARDC soldiers have been abandoned by the army and are living off the population. In other areas, such as Kivu, this relationship works and is

mutually beneficial, however this is not the case in central Katanga. The army has become the major human rights violator in the country. While there are efforts to demobilize and integrate rebels groups into society, the army is not ready and this process is creating more instability.

MONUC is collaborating with the national army in major operations and has been able to force the army to act in a more professional manner. However, when abuses take place, especially after joint operations, and the army is left unto themselves human rights violations occur and MONUC is blamed by association. The future of MONUC has come under speculation, specifically in regards to their capacity and purpose. This is further complicated by the fact that MONUC is facing reductions in budget because of the elections and the presumed peace that will follow. The U.S. Congress has proposed a funding cut to MONUC from 300 million in 2006 to 152 million in fiscal year 2007. This could have dire consequences considering MONUC is the only force that has any control over the army and that role is one that has to be supported.

***Systems and Planning.*** It is also important to look at the systems and planning which have not been effective to date. While various assessments have taken place from organizations such as OCHA and MSF, action and intervention rarely occur, or do so ineffectively.

There have been several mechanisms that the international community has been using to try to deal with this situation. One is called a ‘rapid response fund’ that OCHA and UNICEF have used and it *has* functioned. Through UNICEF, nets and sheeting, BP5 biscuits, and non-food items have been distributed, but it is just an immediate relief for when displacement occurs. The idea is to fill the gap until more assistance occurs. There is also a pool fund (about \$80 million from the UN) managed by OCHA, for unfunded priority projects, but it has not taken effect yet. The UN has a number of “cluster” programs, which are suppose to protect IDPs, but this program has yet to come to fruition as well. This cluster process was applied in situations like Pakistan after the earthquake, yet it remains dormant in areas such as Katanga. The UN has displayed little interest in applying these procedures to Katanga, primarily because there is a belief that it will not work.

In 2006, the UN appealed for \$680 million, but pledges were low. Major donors such as the US and EU said the UN was setting unrealistic goals and could not manage such a proposal. There needs to be a government response but how quickly can they respond? Yes, International groups should work with government but how quickly can that work? The pool fund should be available soon, and OFDA and ECHO will continue to provide, but there is going to be a huge push for development NGOs to step up. NGOs are going to have to change the way they propose projects, including a development purpose in their projects.

***Neglect of the Situation.*** There have been instances, such as Sudan and Chechnya, where efforts were prematurely shifted from peace centered to development based. There is a sense that NGOs do not serve a purpose in an area once fighting has receded. What is

needed, rather, is infrastructure and institutions to help develop a country. However, in the situation of the DRC thousands must return home from the bush and the Congolese army has not stopped violating villagers. Furthermore, the Congolese army is unstable and their order has the potential to deteriorate and lead to a continuation and perpetuation of the problems in the area. The military approach should not be at the sacrifice of the immediate needs of those suffering in the conflict. Yet despite such a calamitous situation, organizations are still not being seen on the ground.

### **KATANGA, A CALAMITOUS SITUATION: WHAT IS BEING DONE?**

There are 150,000 displaced persons that we know about and many more hidden in forested areas, with no access to assistance and too afraid to come out. There is catastrophic malnutrition, major outbreaks of cholera, and serious abuses to the population and threats to their safety from the FARDC. There are huge problems and a weak humanitarian response.

DRC is the size of the Western Europe with minimal infrastructure. There are inadequate roads limiting the ways to reach the affected populations who are spread out over such a large area. If there is a credible model of government, it looks to maximize benefits from the extraction of natural resources with benefits to a very small population. This has led to the current focus on elections in hopes to establish a new government with new ways of doing things. However, the humanitarian situation in the Congo remains very serious. There are 1.7 million people displaced within the Congo with 450,000 refugees in other countries and that situation is not going to change the day after the elections. The conflict in central Katanga is a good example of that. It is a conflict of armed militias pillaging villages and military corruption complemented with a weak response that is going to continue before, during, and after the elections.

MSF has taken the Katanga situation seriously and has called the attention of aid agencies, the international community, and donors to speed up action. There are many difficulties though in working in Katanga. It is massive in size, a logistical nightmare with bad roads, compiled with the fact that there has been a lack of interest in Katanga for several years does not make it an ideal situation for aid agencies to operate in. But there are ways to deal with the situation. While it may be difficult, it is possible to charter planes or use motorbikes to reach populations. MSF has brought the case of Katanga to such organizations as USAID, ECHO, the Congolese authorities, and to the Security Council where MSF presented on the lack of international and national support. They described how villages are being burned, populations are being chased, fighters are looting and stealing the belongings of the people, women are being raped in high numbers, and the Congolese army's behavior and involvement in the violence.

MSF calls have not led to any major involvement. In the past, there have been a number of assessments by OCHA, USAID, the EU, etc, but it is only now that groups like Action Without Hunger are engaging in the area. It raises a real question for all of us as to why there is such a disinterest in this region. Despite the efforts of the peace process there is still does not exist a unified army. Various armed groups continue to work for their own



interests and at the expense of the general population. A humanitarian crisis of dire proportions is continuing in Katanga, North and South Kivu, and Ituri yet, the international community remains largely silent..

### RECOMMENDATIONS

- Donors such as ECHO and OFDA should provide resources to humanitarian actors
- WFP should send complete food rations and distribute food supplies in the areas that need it most. Airdrops are a welcoming step, but they also need to supervise distribution because it ends up in military hands and not the IDPs.
- FAO distribute and preposition agricultural tools and seeds because people need to prepare land and they are not returning home soon enough to do that. The planting season will end and the decreased availability of food after a missed harvest will only exacerbate problems.
- UNICEF should lead an intervention in water and sanitation, nutritional food, non-food items and in the emergency education sector
- International NGOs need to establish a presence in Katanga while existing ones need to expand their emergency capacities in the areas they are currently in.
- MONUC needs to deploy peacekeepers with funding at least at 2005 levels.
- Immediate withdrawal of the 63<sup>rd</sup> brigade.

### CONCLUSION

Why is the Katanga situation neglected? Why is the DRC as a whole neglected? Europeans have more of an interest in the DRC for historical reasons while the US is more interested in Liberia or Sudan. Even the enormous economic potential the Congo represents does not provide enough incentive. There has been progress, but there is not a champion like Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf in Liberia to put our faith in. Conspiracy theorists say there are many who do not want an international presence because of cobalt resources and economic exploitation and that is why nothing is being done. The challenge is that we need to find a way to make this crisis real, dating back the history to the exploitation of King Leopold. We have to convince people that it is beneficial, even economically, to the Congo and world to end this conflict. Despite the coming elections, the crisis will continue and the international community needs to be prepared to respond so that the crisis does not continue.

For further information on the conflict in Katanga, please see the following sites:

[Medicines sans Frontieres website on the DRC](#)

MSF Report: [Alarming rate of malnutrition amongst displaced in Katanga, DRC](#)

MSF Report: [Running for their lives - repeated civilian displacement in central Katanga, DRC](#)

[Refugees International website on the DRC](#)

RI Report: [Democratic Republic of the Congo: Central Katanga situation improves, but much remains to be done](#)

