


**Search for Common Ground**

## Situation Update

The situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) remains tense and fragile. Political tensions and military activities from armed groups constantly threaten to derail the process. The transitional government and the international community have to work closely together to overcome the numerous challenges that still lie ahead on DR Congo's path to peace.

Violence has persisted in the mineral-rich Ituri district in spite of a disarmament agreement; as fighting over control of the region between militia groups, militaries, and dissidents of those militaries intensified thousands of people were displaced. Although the military high command now includes former generals of the armed opposition, and the Belgian and South African military have started training the integrated troops, military unification across the ranks has proven difficult. The Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration (DDR) of soldiers wishing to join civilian life has started, but has not yet been fully accepted by all armed groups, particularly in the Kivus.

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## Mopila Increases Understanding of Transition Process

**M**opila is a radio soap opera, which reaches out to Congolese around the country through an informative and entertaining drama format. This program is produced weekly in DRC's national languages -Kikongo, Kiswahili, Lingala, Tshiluba and French- and broadcast on 65 radio stations in all provinces. To reach the media-saturated audience in Kinshasa, who often prefer TV over radio, SFCG has begun a pilot project there playing Mopila and other programmes in markets and public buses.

Mopila is successful at enhancing understanding of the transitional process amongst Congolese, according to an independent evaluation commissioned by SFCG. The evaluation surveyed 237 members of 12 listener groups, through 'before and after' questionnaires. The survey aimed to measure the change in knowledge, attitude and behaviour after listening to twelve episodes of Mopila. The listener groups surveyed were from Kinshasa, Lubumbashi, Muanda, Kikwit, Kisangani, Kananga and Mbuji Mayi.

Initial results show that after listening to the program, respondents felt better equipped to understand and participate in the transition process. An example of an increase in knowledge relates to the exact length of the transition. Prior to listening, 53,5% of respondents knew the transition's duration (2 years with two possible extensions of 6 months each). After listening, this percentage rose to 83,8%. This increase is illustrative of other changes in knowledge of transition issues. However, the evaluation also highlighted areas still needing attention. For example, the number of people who are aware that Congolese need to register to vote tripled after listening to Mopila, but much confusion remains around eligibility. These findings will guide SFCG's prioritisation of themes and messages for the coming months. Issues requiring follow up include nationality and the criteria to use when voting for a candidate or political party (since a large majority seems to be lured by candidates who just promise a "bright future"). Lastly, listeners taking part in the evaluation replied that Mopila had affected their knowledge and behaviour, describing the following effects as positive: 'a greater interest in politics'; 'greater freedom of expression'; 'engagement in pushing equality and justice'; 'more cautious of political manipulation'; and 'resistance against corruption and fraud, especially vis-à-vis the forthcoming elections'.

### Inside this Issue:

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- *Jirani Ni Ndugu* mitigates conflict in schools
- *Sisi Watoto* Peace Songs available online
- 111th Great Lakes Policy Forum hosted Min. Nalwango of DRC and Amb. Sezibera of Rwanda

*Search for Common Ground in DRC is a programme of Search for Common Ground, an international NGO working in the field of conflict transformation. For additional information on SFCG in DRC, go to the SFCG website, [www.sfcg.org](http://www.sfcg.org) and the Centre Lokole website, [www.centrelokole.org](http://www.centrelokole.org).*

## Rebuilding Trust through Dialogue

Since February 2004 SFCG has been engaged in a confidential dialogue between young leaders from different communities in Bukavu. After a good start, this initiative was affected by the military mutiny in South Kivu mid-2004. This polarised communities in the Kivus and the young Banyamulenge leaders who were part of the dialogue fled into exile. SFCG maintained contact between the members of the dialogue

*“Centre Lokole [Centre Lokole is the name used by SFCG in DRC] gave us a good opportunity to recognise our misperception about each other.” – a participant in the youth dialogue*

group and some parallel meetings were organised in Rwanda and DRC, but never with the entire group. Attempts at a general meeting were regularly thwarted by events in the region, i.e. the Gatumba massacre of Banyamulenge refugees in August 2004. After months of discussions and preparation SFCG managed to organise a meeting reconvening twenty young leaders from all communities. This meeting took place early February in Kampala, Uganda, with support from MONUC’s Political Section. Young leaders from Bukavu were joined by Banyamulenge leaders in exile or displaced in Goma for five days of dialogue. Notwithstanding numerous

difficulties and sometimes heated confrontations the meeting enabled the youth leaders -who collaborated in the past but had been drawn apart by the recent events- to rebuild trust and understanding. The meeting achieved its objectives and was judged successful by all participants, which led the participants to make their sensitive initiative public.



Bringing polarised communities together: all the participants in the Kampala dialogue

A follow-up meeting was organised in Bukavu by participants residing there. This meeting constituted a reunion for a large constituency with participation of the local authorities and MONUC. A similar reunion is planned in the Banyamulenge refugee camp in Rwanda.

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National elections, originally scheduled for June 2005, will be postponed due to delays in passing necessary legislation and a slow start for the Independent Electoral Commission (IEC). When the postponement was announced in January, several violent protests erupted. More recently, deaths were reported in violent clashes between police and political demonstrators. Although official registration of voters began in late June in parts of Kinshasa, logistical, security and political obstacles lie ahead, and the government and the IEC will need to maintain their credibility at each step of the process.

MONUC (the UN peacekeeping mission in the DRC) continues to support the transitional process, and adopted a more proactive stance towards militias in Ituri province. In March, following the killing of nine peacekeepers by renegade forces in the east, MONUC launched an assault on the FNI forces in Ituri. Fifty rebels were killed and UN comments made clear the time had come to either join the peace process or face the consequences.



The 11 winning songs of *Sisi Watoto's* national Peace Song competition are now available on SFCG's website. To listen to or download the songs go to:

[http://www.sfcg.org/programmes/drcongo/drcongo\\_cd1.html](http://www.sfcg.org/programmes/drcongo/drcongo_cd1.html)

Featured songs include: *Haki Na Amani* (rap); *Umajo Ni Nguvu* (salsa); *Acha Nirudi* (ballad); and *Tunataka Amani* (traditional)

## Jirani Ni Ndugu Mitigates Conflict in School Elections

Political tensions in Southern Kivu, mainly around the Provincial Governor's leadership and alleged mismanagement, have taken on a tribal dimension. These have spread to other institutions, including Bukavu's numerous higher-education institutions. In one case, student elections deteriorated into a violent confrontation along tribal lines. SFCG programming immediately addressed this in two consecutive weeks through *Jirani Ni Ndugu*. This was followed by a programme highlighting the role of various mediators and strategies used to calm tensions and transform the conflict. The programmes reiterated the need to elect representatives based on their abilities and policy programmes. Students contacted SFCG to express satisfaction with these programmes, and indicated that SFCG had been a positive influence which contributed to the successful, peaceful electoral processes in all other institutions.

*"NGOs reach only a small targeted number of people. Your media work reaches a much broader audience, it makes people aware and sensitised, it makes the work of NGOs easier."* - Ravier Aguillar, Save the Children UK, on SFCG

*Jirani Ni Ndugu* ('My Neighbour, My Brother') is a popular weekly soap opera broadcast in Swahili that focuses on common conflicts in people's daily lives and shows ways to resolve them peacefully.

## Great Lakes Policy Forum in Washington DC

For more information on the Great Lakes Policy Forum go to:  
<http://www.sfcg.org/Documents/GLPF/glpffeb2005.pdf.html>

The 111<sup>th</sup> Great Lakes Policy Forum came at a critical time both for the Great Lakes Region and the DRC. After months of mounting tensions

due to threats of invasion, accusations of supplying arms, and possible border breaches, the importance of this month's forum was evident. Panellists included Paul Musafiri Nalwango, the Vice Minister of the Interior for the DRC; Ambassador Richard Sezibera, Special Envoy to the Great Lakes from Rwanda; Dr. Suliman Baldo, Africa Programme Director at International Crisis Group; ; and Dr. Alison Des Forges, Senior Advisor for Human Rights Watch. Ozong Agborsangaya, Director of SFCG's Sub-Saharan Africa Programmes, facilitated the forum.

In general, the Forum agreed that Rwandans and Congolese have historically lived together in peace, moving freely across borders and sharing of cultures. The two peoples have many things in common and must not let their differences be exploited for malevolent purposes. Kinshasa should keep to the revised elections schedule and make logistical provisions for approximately 40,000 polling stations, 200,000 polling workers, and 100,000 policemen needed to ensure free and fair elections throughout the country.

Obstacles should be overcome politically through open and dispassionate dialogue while military escalations have to be avoided at all costs. Dealing with the FDLR will be a big step toward achieving reconciliation between Rwanda and the DRC. Military unification is a precondition for elections and must be encouraged. International actors (Angola, Belgium, and South Africa) can best help this process by pooling their resources and coordinating their training programmes. Finally, the international community must help by engaging with the DRC and Rwanda to rid eastern Congo of threatening forces, by facilitating dialogue between the two governments, and by supporting the preparations for elections in the DRC.

Contact Search for Common Ground:

1601 Connecticut Ave. NW  
Washington DC 20009 USA  
(+1) 202 265 4300  
fax (+1) 202 232 6718  
[Search@sfcg.org](mailto:Search@sfcg.org)

or:

Rue Belliard 205 bte 13  
B-1040 Brussels, Belgium  
(+32) 2 736 7262  
fax (+32) 2 732 3033  
[Brussels@sfcg.be](mailto:Brussels@sfcg.be)

or visit our website:

[WWW.SFCG.ORG](http://WWW.SFCG.ORG)

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