

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum
Academy for Genocide Prevention

Monitoring Roundtable: Great Lakes Region

7 April 2005

In a two-hour session at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, two leading Central Africa experts briefed USG officials from the NSC, State Department (S/CRS, PRM, INR, and AF), and CIA, as well as officials from the UN and NGOs, concerning threats of atrocities and crimes against humanity in the eastern provinces of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and elsewhere in Africa's Great Lakes region. The presenters noted that significant violence persists in DRC, where civil war has caused 3.5 to 4 million deaths since 1998 and an estimated 30,000 continue to die each month as a result of the conflict. The violence is aggravated by struggles over resources, rivalries within the Kinshasa transitional government, and support for warring factions in Eastern DRC by Rwanda and Uganda.

Political leaders of a wide range of factions in eastern DRC and neighboring regions mobilize popular support by calling for ethnic solidarity, and by warning of the "genocidal" intentions of their foes. This politicization of ethnicity fuels the ongoing conflict and increases the risk of an escalation of violence, particularly as DRC moves toward national elections. Measures to counteract the manipulation of ethnic identities by political elites will be of critical importance for efforts to achieve stable peace in the region.

Conflict Drivers

Key factors fueling the violence in eastern DRC include:

- Struggle for political power in Kinshasa among members of the transitional government;
- Localized conflict over resources;
- Politicization of identity;
- Intervention and manipulation by outsiders, particularly Uganda and Rwanda.

(See attached brief by Suliman Baldo, pp. 1-3, for greater detail.)

In the jockeying for power during the lead-up to national elections, various factions within the Kinshasa transitional government have sought to advance their

interests by manipulating communal conflicts between Kinyarwanda-speaking residents and other communities in North and South Kivu provinces. RCD-Goma has sought to unite rwandophone communities in the Kivus under its leadership, and to keep the resources of North Kivu away from Kinshasa's control. President Laurent Kabila, conversely, has invoked the threat of Rwandan aggression in order to shore up his support. From across the border in Kigali, Rwandan officials continue to assert their right to preventive action, including attacks in the DRC, in order to defend Rwandans against the threat of genocide. Over the past year, Rwanda has expanded its security mission to include not just Tutsi in Rwanda but all Tutsi in the Great Lakes region. (*See attached brief by Alison Des Forges, p. 3.*)

Tripwires

Speakers in the session emphasized two factors that have the potential to trigger an escalation of violence in eastern DRC:

- **Elections with ethnic mobilization.** None of the parties in the transitional government is interested in moving quickly toward national elections, because all of them recognize that they risk losing power in an election. As the movement toward elections progresses, various factions may seek to enhance their position by sponsoring armed aggression.
- **Renewed intervention by Rwanda and/or Uganda.** A Rwandan invasion of DRC or the expansion of Rwandan support for proxy militia groups, which could be motivated by a Ugandan intervention, has the potential to spark retaliatory violence against Congolese Tutsi and other Congolese speakers of Kinyarwanda.

Opportunities for Engagement

The panelists agreed that donor nations' highest diplomatic priority vis-à-vis DRC should be to achieve the cessation of external support for militia groups in the eastern provinces by Rwanda, Uganda, and Kabila's faction in Kinshasa. Donor nations and the UN should also make clear to the Rwandan and Ugandan governments that they will not tolerate an invasion of DRC.

Participants in the session emphasized the importance of international support for national elections in DRC, although it is important to remain vigilant for signs of ethnic polarization in the electoral process. The virtual absence of functioning political and legal institutions in eastern DRC means that the various factions define their political and military options largely in terms of their memories of past practices, rather than on the basis of legal or constitutional constraints. Given the extreme and pervasive violence committed in the recent past in DRC, Rwanda, Burundi, and Uganda, many factional leaders tend to see genocide and atrocity crimes as viable choices within the political and military "toolkit"—whether as legitimate options for their own behavior or as crimes that might potentially be perpetrated against them by their foes. Participants in the roundtable argued that the UN must act forcefully to dispel the notion that it might tolerate a new

round of genocide in the Great Lakes region—particularly in light of its own record of passivity in the face of the genocidal violence in Burundi in 1993 and Rwanda in 1994.

Participants spoke of the need for MONUC to continue its recent practice of responding vigorously to incidents of violence. They also suggested that the UN Special Advisor on the Prevention of Genocide can play a productive role by emphasizing that the UN is closely monitoring political and military developments in the Great Lakes region, and that the UN will respond vigorously to threats of genocide and atrocities.. The Special Advisor should also stress both publicly (e.g. through radio interviews broadcast over existing stations and/or a “Radio MONUC” network) and in private meetings with regional leaders the importance of avoiding rhetoric that might incite ethnic violence.