

October 2008

Picture of the Armed Groups in the Democratic Republic of Congo: The Case of the Southern Province of Kivu and of Ituri

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Recommended Citation

Kamaragi, Pilo (2008) "Picture of the Armed Groups in the Democratic Republic of Congo: The Case of the Southern Province of Kivu and of Ituri," *Peace and Conflict Management Review*. Vol. 1 : Iss. 2 , Article 14. Available at: <https://digitalcommons.usf.edu/pcmr/vol1/iss2/14>

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THE ROLE OF EDUCATION IN DEMILITARISATION IN THE GREAT LAKES REGION

Peter Boswell MCOMALLA, Executive Director, HUREPI-TRUST

The Great Lakes Region (GLR) has been a home to more than its fair share of violence. The history gives us much about it. Recently the Kenya General Election results which stormed into national violence left almost 1000 dead and more than 600 homeless. While peace talks were going on in Dar Es Salaam between the disputing parties in Burundi, some death reports occurred.

In exploring the role of education in demilitarising the Great Lakes Region (GLR) of Africa it appears that a holistic form of peace education-incorporating disarmament education would be a logical starting point in terms of curriculum content. The concept of peace is being considered, no longer taken only as absence of war (negative peace) but also as being conditioned upon justice and social equity (positive peace). Today practitioners and academicians alike recognize that peace and development are to a large extent but two sides of the same coin.

Numerous initiatives have taken place at the political and diplomatic level, as well as on the sub-regional, regional, continental and international stage in order to create appropriate mechanisms that will not only prevent, manage and resolve conflict situations but also and perhaps most importantly ensure that a comprehensive strategy which link peace, security, good governance, economic growth and education is put in place.

To great extent the demilitarisation of the minds must be sought through education. The efforts of education through peace education activities can support well in contributing to the demilitarisation in the Great Lakes Region. There is a very great and urgent need for the Governments at the national levels to work, support and recognize the efforts of CSOs/Academic institutions and peace practitioners who are the agents for change to share in this. A good examples are the roles played by some of them at the National, the Sub-region and the Continent as Peace- Nets, GPPAC, Coalition for Peace in Africa, NPI-Africa, Amani Forum, (HUREPI-TRUST), CECORE, UPEACE Africa program, APFO and many others as National and Sub-regional Small Arms Networks in the Great Lakes Region.

The Great Lakes Region has now emerged with very prominent strategies and initiative in promoting the regional integration policies geared towards achieving peace, security, development, good-governance, respect for human rights, humanitarian Law and political stability. Many countries in the (GLR) have also embarked on addressing the root causes of conflict and the issues of illicit proliferation, trade, trafficking and

misuse of small arms (SALW) or Control Arms measures which have shaken, threatened and weakened the stability of security in the sub-region. Demilitarizing a sub-region as large and as militarized Great Lakes Region is an enormous task and not for the governments alone but holistic and participatory.

This demilitarization needs a lot of support from human, material, time and financial resources, commitment and voluntarily and this can be done by people who are ready to spread this message through peace education initiative, supported by their governments. CSOs are very good champions to support the government initiatives in this through non-formal education. If this end is to be pursued as commitment to a sustainable future would indicate, it must, - it will have to be pursued through a variety of means. Education clearly has a crucial role to play in this process.

The effectiveness of a number of the other non-military tools demilitarization explored in this presentation requires that the population be educated to the specific end - (e.g. befriending the neighbours and building democracy). It is primarily education that is required for the fundamental processes of demilitarizing the minds of the population - AND it is education that can develop in the population the knowledge and skills required for the specific task of civilian - based defence as well as for generally living more peacefully together.

Picture of the armed groups in the Democratic Republic of Congo: The Case of the Southern Province of Kivu and of Ituri Prof. Pilo KAMARAGI, Institut Supérieur Pédagogique de Bunia

The "armed groups" phenomenon is a real issue in the socio-political history of the Democratic Republic of Congo. Ituri and Southern Kivu constitute, in East of DRC, the two Congolese spaces that have faced a multitude of armed groups. The Southern Kivu Province, with Bukavu as its headquarters, is composed of 8 territories with several ethnic groups while the Ituri Province of Ituri includes 5 territories with about 15 ethnic groups.

In the Southern Province of Kivu, each territory, even each community has one or more armed groups of its own made up exclusively of the Mai-Mai, a self-defense force which generally includes all men and women from the village. One could distinguish the May-May soldiers whose main activity is fighting from the Mai-Mai civilians who are old men, women and children.

Nearly all the May-May in the Southern Kivu have been created with the aim of resisting, for some time, against AFDL forces before embarking in the philosophy of Interahamwe of going to war with the Banyamulenge that they qualify as the enemy number one in the Uvira territory.

As for the armed groups in Ituri, they were formed in two phases. First, there are armed groups, the real rebels, who transformed themselves into politico-military movements in the political and administrative administration of Ituri.

There was first Wamba dia Wamba's RCD-KML (1999-2000), Jean-Pierre Bemba's FLC and Mbusa Nyamwisi's RCD-KML 2 which will be expelled and replaced by Thomas Lubanga's UPC, which will hold in its hands the destiny of the Ituri Province for 8 months.



The last armed conflict in Ituri fostered the birth of several other politico-military movements, of tribal and ethnic tendency. One could mention PUSIC for the territories of Irumu and Djugu (Hema), FNI for the territory of Djugu and Irumu (Lendu and Lendu-Bindi), FPDC for the territory of Mahagi (Alur) and FAPC for the territory of Aru. Sponsored by Uganda, their mission consists mainly of destabilizing UPC, which is not under the thumb of Ugandan politics in Congo.

The armed groups in the Southern Kivu and Ituri have always had, with the exception of UPC, relationships with the Government of Kinshasa. The Mai-Mai and the Lendu fighters would be, according to the government terminology, patriot resistants against the Republic enemies.

For this reason, they are supplied with arms and assisted by government military advisers. In some places, like Ituri, FAC elements take part in fighting side by side with the Lendu fighters.

Moreover, these Congolese armed groups have always collaborated actively with the armed rebels or groups of the neighboring countries that operate from the Congolese territory. One could mention for example, the cases of Interahamwe and FDLR of Rwanda that operate with some Mai-Mai groups in the Southern Kivu and NALU and ADF of Uganda which, in their turn, at a given time, formed a coalition with the Lendu fighters to fight against the Ituri-based Ugandan army.

Even though some have been created or perceived at first with the aim of protecting their respective communities, obviously, in the Southern Kivu and in Ituri, the armed groups are inflicting terrible sufferings among the civil populations: slaughters, looting, rapes, setting on fire dwellings, destruction of socioeconomic infrastructures are causing constant movements of the civil population who seek refuge in the neighboring countries.

The worse situation of this infra human disaster can be observed notably in Ituri, where the genocide operation carried out by the Lendu and RCD-KML fighters, with their allies (Interahamwe, May-May, NALU, ADF, Government...), have decimated several thousands of the Hema population. In the meantime, FDLR fighters have granted themselves the right of life and death on the civil populations in Bushi and Urega where, in the Southern Kivu, the former kill, rape women, plunder as they see fit.

Peace, security and reconciliation in the Democratic Republic of Congo.

The case of the Southern Kivu (DRC)

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The Democratic Republic of Congo like all the other African countries of the Great Lakes Region in general and the Southern Kivu in particular have been confronted with the problem of peace and security for two decades. The logic of conflict and violence has damaged the socio-economic tissue while delaying any impetus to sustainable development. The political transition of more than one decade mingled with repetitive wars (AFDL in 1996; RCD in 1998) which ended in an electoral process didn't bring back peace and security to the Southern Kivu.

Indeed, the Province of the Southern Kivu is currently living a situation of non-peace, insecurity, social rejection because of the presence of local armed groups and Interahamwe, identity-based conflict and bad governance. That state of affairs has entailed several consequences at internal as well as external level: slaughters and massacres, the decrease of agricultural production, rape and violence against women, destabilization of the neighboring countries, etc. Obviously, this is as a result of an antagonism between the conflicts of interest and those of aspiration.

Peace and security are disrupted by the presence of the armed bands called May May, FDLR and Interahamwe; identity-based conflicts and the disparity in the distribution of and the access to resources.

As regards the representation in the politico-administrative institutions, there is an open harsh struggle between the communities for the occupation of higher political and administrative positions. The geopolitical and even ethno-political logics are given much magnitude in the political stakes by the transmission agents such as Churches, political parties, non government development organizations, tribal associations.

The military implication of Rwanda in the last two wars in RDC developed in the collective memory a social aversion against the Rwandan state considered as the enemy of the Congolese State.

This feeling is still more expressed in the neighboring provinces of North-Kivu and South-Kivu where the populations have had a feeling of being the victim of the deterioration of the diplomatic relations between the two States since the 1994 genocide which led to the massive

arrival of refugees until today (atrocities of Rwandan military factions: Interahamwe, Rasta, FDLR) including the consequences from the wars led by the various rebellions.

Faced with the challenge of sustainable development, now is the time to consider the mechanisms for achieving peace, security and reconciliation in the Southern Kivu. Among the endogenous and exogenous factors of peace and security, one can mention among other things the integration of the armed groups and/or their demobilization, the destruction of Interahamwe militiamen, the improvement of the regional economic and political cooperation.

Reconciliation also supposes the emergence of attitudes of acceptance and peaceful cohabitation between all ethnic groups living in the Southern Kivu with proper enforcement of national political implications; what requires the committed responsibility from the Congolese state and the States of the sub-region.

In spite of the heavy militarization of the Province, the antagonisms linked to the occupation of the space as well as the competition of identities in the political and administrative spheres, hopes for a reconciliation can be perceived. In this respect, the revival of the Economic Community of the Great Lakes Countries, the International Conference of the States of the Great Lakes Region, the Amani Forum and the other regional initiatives allow the process of reconciliation in Congo get moving again.

