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The Goma Conférence in January 2008: A Last Chance Solution Hampered by the Issue of FDLR

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Strengths, weaknesses and perspectives of faith institutions in the peace and security building process in the Great Lakes Region

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Conflicts constitute an important factor of change (external factors of change). It would be abnormal that, after so many conflicts that have been shaking the Great Lakes region, the faith institutions remain imperturbable in their life and functioning style.

The choice made by the faith institutions as regards peace and security in the Great Lakes Region is based on the fact that the faith institutions like the civil society use lobbying, advocacy and education. These are long-lasting factors in time, and as a result, there is continuity of their action and good knowledge of the societal tradition. They also have a large audience among the population, especially in rural areas.

Finally, the faith institutions have a great capacity of dissemination of information and huge intellectual potentialities because they use professional civil servants and institutional capacities from offerings of thanks to organizations at the national, regional and continental level which are already operational.

The choice of the Catholic Church justifies itself by its numerical importance, its historical seniority, its good geographical distribution all over the country, its great capacity of dissemination of information, its social importance (health, schools, charity, etc), by its intellectual capacity (professional civil servants).

Beyond their strengths in the peace and security building process in the Great Lakes region, the faith institutions show remarkable weaknesses at two levels : the diversity of the positioning strategies in relation to the respective States resulting in the difficulty of harmonizing their points of view (confrontation and competition) as well as the poor capacity of understanding the stakes of peace and security in the Great Lakes Region.

An internal pluralism exists in that respect. There are some of them who think that they have a mission in this world: just like Martin Luther King who has " done his utmost to achieve a better world ". There are also " modernist trends " that maintain that the finality of the theologian's work is to rebuild a synthetic model of Christianity in the present cultural categories. As Weber says: the reason for adhering to the religious beliefs is to be sought from the reasons of the social individual placed in such or such context for embracing them. There is a need of continuity and consistency between the believer's life and the citizen's.

There is finally the wish that the trends which are more open to the social and cultural reality can impose themselves by the relevance of their teaching. That need for reinforcing the conformity of the faith institutions with the social reality will allow them to reinforce their members' capacities so that the latter could become responsible for their life and destiny.

The Goma Conférence in January 2008: A last chance solution hampered by the issue of FDLR

Aloys TEGERA, Pole Institute, GOMA (DRC)

In January 2008, was held in Goma a conference aimed at putting an end to the war in Eastern Congo. This conference has some antecedents. The recapture of Musjaki locality in December 8, 2007 by the rebels loyal to General Laurent Nkunda reinforced the feeling of humiliation among the population and the army which had been thwarted three times by the insurgents: in Kanyabayonga in December 2004, in Sake in December 2006 and in Mushaki in December 2007.

The Goma conference seems therefore to be a strategy for the Congolese state to recover its influence while carrying out apparent negotiations with the insurgents in order to rule out the idea of power sharing and to dilute the military victory of Laurent Nkunda by an inflation of the other invited armed groups by dealing with them with the same importance. This conference was also full of grievances of ethnic communities one against another and gave rise to the ideas of hate and exclusion against the Banyamulenge Tutsis and the Banyarwanda from Northern Kivu.

This Conference was nevertheless a first opportunity in its kind, in the sense that it allowed to negotiate directly with the armed groups. It led to the signature of the commitment act of immediate cease fire, to the creation of a mixed technical committee, to the disarmament and to the confinement of the armed groups and to the occupation of the territories which were formerly under the armed groups' control by MONUC.

This Commitment Act signed on January 23, 2008 constitutes a relief for the Congolese people from the Eastern region on the one hand and an interesting working framework on the other. Its successes and its failures depend on its own signatories.

FDLR are in this perspective highlighted as a thorny issue that undermines the results of the aforesaid conference. They are in the Kivu region as a stage towards the reconquest of the power lost in Rwanda.

How to make them leave RDC is the hunting question for the Congolese from East. FDLR require an inter-Rwandan political dialogue to define the bases for a political consensus: including their security, their military and political integration.

But these conditions, which have been rejected by the Rwandan authorities who demand their surrender unconditionally, cannot be imposed from the Democratic Republic of Congo. As it is inconceivable to make the dialogue inter Rwandans a prerequisite from a third party country, the integration of FDLR within FARDC is also difficult. Their number is not even precisely known and they would heavily inflate the ranks of the Congolese army.

In view of the current situation, the FDLR issue is far from being resolved. RDC is without an army capable to track down FDLR. Not only can the Government of Rwanda not be imposed to negotiate with them, but also its military implication to track them down would mean stirring the already crystallized identities.

The promises of an elite troop by USA in order to help towards the disarmament and the repatriation of those forces are taking a long time to materialize.

And to cap it all, the elected authorities of Kinshasa reveal themselves more and more unable to secure the Eastern Congo and to put an end to the FDLR issue once for all.



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