

Everybody needs good neighbours: understanding the conflict(s) in Eastern DRC

Johan Pottier

Department of Social Anthropology, SOAS, University of London

Amplamente reconhecido como a guerra mais complexa de África, e até apelidado a Primeira Guerra Mundial de África, o actual conflito na República Democrática do Congo «tem a sua origem na onda de violência, e de deslocamentos maciças de populações, desencadeadas pelo genocídio ocorrido em 1994 no Ruanda» (APPG 2001:6). O presente artigo esboça os contornos gerais do(s) conflito(s) na RDC, em termos internacionais, nacionais e locais. Em particular, o autor propõe-se fornecer o quadro completo em que teve lugar o chamado «Diálogo Inter-Congolês» (Sun City, África do Sul, 25 de Fevereiro de 2002), examinando os contextos «locais» que se sobrepõem na RDC e onde os conflitos de geram. Concentrando-se sobre a RDC oriental, o artigo põe em relevo a natureza de alianças em contínua recomposição, e reflecte sobre os desafios que têm de ser encarados para que a paz tenha alguma chance.

Widely recognized as Africa's most complex war, even dubbed Africa's First World War, the current conflict in the Democratic Republic of Congo «stems from the wave of violence and mass-displacement unleashed by the Rwandan genocide in 1994» (APPG 2001: 6). This paper outlines the broad contours of the DRC conflict(s) in international, national and local terms. In particular, it aims to provide a full context to the Inter-Congolese Dialogue (Sun City, South Africa, on 25 February 2002) by exploring the overlapping «local» contexts in which tensions arise. Focusing on Eastern DRC, the paper also highlights the ever-shifting nature of alliances, and reflects on the challenges that need to be confronted if peace is to be given a chance.

Amplement reconnu comme la guerre la plus complexe d'Afrique, et même apostrophé comme la Première Guerre Mondiale de l'Afrique, l'actuel conflit dans la République Démocratique-du Congo «a son origine dans l'onde de violence, et de déplacement massifs de populations, déchaînés par le génocide de 1994 au Rwanda» (APPG 2001:6). L'article qui suit esquisse les contours généraux du conflit (ou: des conflits) en RDC, en termes internationaux, nationaux et locaux. L'auteur se propose plus particulièrement de fournir le cadre complet dans lequel eut lieu le «Dialogue Inter-Congolais» (Sun City, Afrique du Sud, 25 février 2002), en examinant les contextes locaux que se superposent en RDC, et où les conflits se gèrent. En mettant l'accent sur la RDC orientale, l'article met en relief la nature des alliances en permanente recomposition, et réfléchit sur les défis auxquels il faut faire face pour que la paix ait une chance.

Aims and scope

This paper outlines the broad contours of the DRC conflict in international, national and local terms, thus providing a full context in which to understand the Inter-Congolese Dialogue (ICD) that took place in Sun City, South Africa, in early 2002. Focusing on eastern DRC, the paper highlights a kaleidoscope of conflicts and ever-shifting alliances, and reflects on the challenges ahead if peace is to be restored¹.

Background: conflicts in the DRC

The current problems of the DRC stem «from the wave of violence and mass-displacement unleashed by the Rwandan genocide in 1994» (APPG 2001: 6). Following the refugee exodus of 1994, which harboured the forces responsible for the genocide (Interahamwe, ex-FAR) and made Rwanda's western border insecure, the Rwandan government masterminded the 1996 Banyamulenge/Tutsi-led rebellion in eastern Zaire in an attempt to stop the threat of insurgency. Uganda, too, backed the rebellion, as did Burundi. Known as the Banyamulenge uprising, this rebellion culminated in the speedy overthrow of Zaire's president Mobutu Sese Seko. The backers' first choice for Mobutu's replacement, Laurent-Désiré Kabila, initially appeared as the best possible alternative, perhaps even as a «beacon of hope» in the pantheon of African Renaissance leaders, but Kabila soon proved he was made of sterner stuff.

Although put in charge of the Alliance of Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Congo-Zaire (ADFL) through the mediation of presidents Museveni (Uganda) and Kagame (Rwanda), Kabila faced problems on taking up the reigns of power. First, there was the problem of the sponsors who had financed the ADFL campaign. During the campaign, mining companies from the US, Canada, Australia and South Africa had signed contracts with the ADFL. Kabila did not honour the contracts. At the end of the campaign, Kabila «played competition between these [mining] companies for more payoff, leading to tensions between [American Mineral Fields, AMF] and the Kabila regime» (Ngolet 2000: 75, based on Reno 1998). On cancelling the AMF's contracts, Kabila created tremendous frustration among the company's agents.

Second, the Kabila-Banyamulenge partnership became irreparably strained when the new leader gave in to the popular feeling among Congolese that Kabila had been enthroned by foreigners. Since popular opinion rarely distinguishes between Banyarwanda, Banyamulenge and Rwandan nationals, many Congolese demanded

Paper presented at the Conference on «War and Violent Conflicts in Africa», organised by the Centro de Estudos Africanos, ISCTE, Lisbon, Portugal, 21-22 February 2002 (revised: 10 May 2002).

¹ I wish to thank the IRIN information network for its invaluable services, as well as the Belgian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Commerce and Development Cooperation for its press reviews.

that Kabila demote his Banyamulenge comrades. Seeing «Tutsi» administrators installed at every level of civil and military administration, Congolese citizens insisted on their removal. Kabila then ordered «the Rwandans» home, while Banyamulenge were told to return to the marginalised position reserved for Tutsi since the demise of Bartholomy Bisengimana, the Tutsi adviser who under Mobutu directed the Bureau of the Presidency of the Republic from 1969 until 1977 (details in Pottier 2002). The widespread perception that Banyarwanda and Banyamulenge were all «Rwandans», one may argue, was a major cause in the renewed fighting in Congo in August 1998.

After he gave his marching orders, Kabila adopted Mobutu-style ethnic politics and substituted fellow Katangese, including relatives, for the Tutsi he had removed. The «sacked» Banyamulenge soldiers, however, defied the order to lay down their arms and in February 1998 «took refuge in Remera and Itombwe [eastern DRC] with their arsenals» (Garreton Report, 10 September 1998). Similarly, when Kabila removed Banyarwanda from his Government (among them Bizima Karaha, the Foreign Affairs Minister) and ordered high-ranking Rwandan military to return to Rwanda, few Banyamulenge/ Rwandan soldiers actually left the country. This explains why the Second Rebellion, the mutiny of 2 August 1998, began first in Kinshasa and then, within days, in eastern DRC. The mutiny aimed to depose Kabila and hand power to the Tutsi-dominated Congolese Movement for Democracy (CMD), precursor to the *Rassemblement congolais pour la démocratie* (RCD). Rebel leaders stated that Kabila had faltered on his promise to hand the province of Kivu to Banyamulenge². Rightly complaining that Kabila had never attempted to resolve the Banyamulenge identity question, the mutineers, supported by Rwanda, Burundi and some 20,000 former Mobutu soldiers liberated from rehabilitation camps, came very close to taking power in Kinshasa, but they were repelled by the timely intervention of SADC troops from Angola, Zimbabwe and Namibia. The DRC is a member of SADC. In contrast to the failure to take Kinshasa, the mutiny in the east was more successful: with the help of Rwanda and to a lesser extent Burundi, the Banyamulenge rebels («Banyamulenge» being a hold-all category) managed to control North and South Kivu in matter of days.

On a country by country basis, the reasons for the SADC intervention varied. Like Rwanda and Uganda, Angola had security interests in a stable DRC, which under Mobutu (and even under Kabila) had given sanctuary to UNITA, the main adversary of Angola's ruling MPLA. Angola's leaders, however, took several days before making up their minds. Early on in the mutiny, Angola seemed to want to support the eastern rebels, because of Kabila's tolerance toward dissident UNITA troops. Later, when these UNITA troops were seen to be siding with the Banyamulenge rebels, Angola's leader Dos Santos chose to support Kabila after all³. The irony is that

² *Le Monde*, 7 August 1998.

³ *Elsevier*, 5 September 1998.

Angola would have backed Rwanda's plan to topple Kabila⁴. Namibia and Zimbabwe, unlike Angola, could not claim to have any problem securing their borders; their motives for sending in troops were more personal. Mugabe and his family entourage had economic interests in the DRC; they benefited enormously from the contracts Kabila had signed with the Zimbabwe-based New African Investments consortium. Although challenged at home⁵, Mugabe sent 600 elite troops to help Kabila stifle the revolt. Namibia's support as an «allied force» was equally driven by personal interests and friendship on the part of its president, Sam Nujoma. These interests centred around the presence in the DRC of certain multinationals and security firms. In Namibia, too, the deployment of troops was contested⁶. Somewhat later, Sudan and Chad also sent troops to help Kabila.

The events of August 1998 were something of a re-run of the first rebellion. Just as «Rwandans» had spearheaded the ADFL campaign, so the Second Rebellion was orchestrated from within Rwanda in support of the «sacked» Banyamulenge/Tutsi/Rwandan (from here on «Banyamulenge») military officers and administrators. The motive, once again, was Rwanda's (and Uganda's) need for a regime in Kinshasa that would bring economic and political stability. Uganda's border security had not improved since Kabila seized power; the Ugandan ADF rebels, supported by the regime in Sudan, still operated freely in North Kivu. These rebels often organised cross-border raids alongside ex-FAR and Interahamwe troops. Ugandan troops arrived in eastern DRC within ten days of the start of the rebellion.

There were other aspects to the *déjà-vu* situation: internal contradictions, and the ambivalent position of local Mayi-Mayi militias. Being neither entirely home-grown nor entirely foreign, the DRC's Second Rebellion was right from the start marked as having opposed tendencies within its fold. The chief contradiction involved the chair of the *Rassemblement congolais pour la démocratie* (RCD), Ernest Wamba dia Wamba, who opposed the rebellion's militarist tendency (Mamdani 1998). Wamba, a Congolese professor of history at Dar es Salaam University, and the RCD military top made it clear that their priorities differed. When the Second Rebellion got under way, there was only a military system in place; political leaders like Wamba dia Wamba and Arthur Z'ahidi Ngoma (former UNESCO employee) appeared on the scene some two weeks later. As a scholar committed to political reform and transparency, Wamba did not hide that «there was still a rift between us [political reformists] and the military wing of RCD»⁷, but he hoped «that those in favour of political liberation of the people would eventually gain advantage in the movement» (cited, Mamdani 1998).

⁴ NRC Handelsblad, 1 September 1998.

⁵ NRC Handelsblad, 1 September 1998.

⁶ In Namibia, the mining issue has sparked fierce debate. In March 2001, the Namibian Congress of Democrats (CoD) questioned the country's (i.e. Swapo's) involvement in the DRC, especially in relation to «blood diamonds» (see *The Namibian*, 2 March & 15 March 2001).

⁷ NRC Handelsblad, 3 September 1998.

For his part, the RCD commander in Goma referred to the possibility that the military might become dissatisfied with Wamba's insistence on putting reform before conquest.

The tension between Wamba and the militarists would never be resolved, and led to a predictable split. We first hear of the split on 6 April 1999 when it is reported that RCD president Wamba has moved from Goma to Kisangani because of «a certain malaise»⁸. Wamba supporters who joined his breakaway group included Mbusa Nyamwisi (RCD Chairman), Jacques Depelchin (former academic and RCD rapporteur) and Lunda Bululu. Nyamwisi, who later challenged Wamba for the leadership of the breakaway group (referred to as RCD-Kisangani or RCD-ML), said the militarists were opposed to a united front against Kabila. Those who remained with the RCD (soon to be renamed RCD-Goma) then accused the Ugandan military of splitting their movement and encouraging Wamba's faction to join forces with Jean-Pierre Bemba's MLC. Bemba's rebel movement, relatively new, had been launched from within Uganda with Museveni's support allegedly to counter Rwanda's growing influence within RCD⁹.

After Wamba's ousting, the RCD movement appointed Emile Ilunga as its new leader. (Jean-Pierre Ondekane and Moise Nyarugabo stayed on as first and second vice-presidents.) The change at the top caused Deo Safari, DRC embassy official in Nairobi, to comment that Wamba's departure «casts a shadow on the negotiation process». RCD's new leaders, he added, were «puppets» of Rwanda's then vice-president Paul Kagame, who was «hiding behind the rebellion to achieve his plan to occupy our country»¹⁰. In the following days and months, Wamba dia Wamba supporters, backed by Ugandan troops, got involved in shoot-outs with RCD-Goma, whose territory stretches up to Kisangani. Running battles continued until early June, when we get the first hint of an MLC (Bemba) merger with RCD-Kisangani (Wamba), through the mediation of Uganda. It is reported that some 30 ex-FAZ generals (Mobutu generals) were in Kampala at the time ready to join the merger¹¹.

Looking ahead to the IC Dialogue of early 2002, we note that the rebel factions in eastern Congo are always interested in the prospect of new political alliances. Wamba «left» the RCD because he was, at least initially, in favour of a rapprochement with Bemba (MLC). When he decided against merging, Wamba became marginalised within his own movement; he was succeeded by Mbusa Nyamwisi, who signed a merger agreement on 1 January 2001. The agreement, however, was never successful and fizzled out in a matter of months.

⁸ IRIN, 6 April 1999, referring to *The East African*. A subsequent report by the Brussels-based International Crisis Group (ICG) argued that those who prefer a negotiated political settlement (Wamba and friends) were willing to accept Kabila as president of a transnational government [report on www.crisisweb.org].

⁹ *Het Belang van Limburg*, 13 April 1999. A Belgian-trained millionaire, Bemba has made his fortune in high-tech communications.

¹⁰ IRIN, 20 May 1999.

¹¹ IRIN, 1 June 1999. MLC stands for *Mouvement de Libération du Congo*; RCD-ML for *Rassemblement Congolais pour la Démocratie – Mouvement de Libération*.

Confusing local wars: Mayi-Mayi, Banyamulenge and «negative forces»

Having sketched the broad contours of «the big war», we must now examine the highly complex situation in eastern DRC, where «local» and cross-border conflicts are enmeshed. In this situation, the restlessness of Mayi-Mayi and other armed groups (a.k.a. «negative forces») is a particular source of mayhem and confusion. This confusion, I argue, was there right from the onset of the Second Rebellion when it emerged that «the Mayi-Mayi» was a highly diverse category. The confusing contradiction in August 1998 was that certain Mayi-Mayi groups in South Kivu sided with the rebel/Rwandan movement, much like they had done in late 1996 (Pottier 1999), while others did not. Around Bukavu, certain Mayi-Mayi troops (and ex-FAZ) joined the RCD rebels; in other parts of Kivu, Mayi-Mayi and RCD rebels clashed head on.

Contradiction and confusion reached a climax in early 1999 when tension broke out between Rwandan leaders and «the Banyamulenge» they had supported since the launch of the ADFL campaign. In the wake of this tension, it was reported that some 100 Banyamulenge in South Kivu had been slaughtered by Mayi-Mayi allegedly «in the pay» of Rwanda. The claim, widely heard in Uvira¹², ran counter to the more common scenario in which Mayi-Mayi attacked RCD/Rwandan military convoys transporting precious minerals towards Rwanda¹³. The latter type of attack frequently led to the retaliatory mass killing of suspected Mayi-Mayi and the civilians thought to harbour them. In the first quarter of 1999, RCD troops in South Kivu killed thousands of civilians in cold blood, often wiping out entire communities¹⁴.

Confusion regarding the loyalty of certain Mayi-Mayi troops, and regarding the relationship between Banyamulenge and Rwanda, persisted and grew when anonymous sources in eastern DRC informed the media of a strategic plan according to which «Banyamulenge» and the Rwandan military had come to «an agreement concerning the division of power in Kivu. The plan involved the killing of all foreign missionaries, intellectuals and businessmen ... These killings were to coincide with the staging of faked hostilities between Banyamulenge and the Rwandan Tutsi [in charge of eastern DRC], who would then be 'forced' to leave the Congo. This would give Banyamulenge the opportunity to demonstrate to Kabila ... that they [were] truly Congolese and worthy to participate in any future peace talks»¹⁵.

At this point, diplomats were busy preparing for a peace summit in Lusaka.

But real tension between Banyamulenge and Rwanda also existed by now. This confirmed that «the Banyamulenge» were indeed not a unified group. It was thus

¹² *De Volkskrant*, 24 March 1999.

¹³ *Le Soir*, 23 March 1999.

¹⁴ *La Libre Belgique*, 25 March 1999; *De Morgen*, 25 March 1999.

¹⁵ *Het Belang Van Limburg*, 13 April 1999; IRIN, 24 March and 31 March 1999.

that Müller Ruhimbika launched the *Forces Républicaines Fédéralistes* (FRF) and accused Rwanda and the RCD of not defending Banyamulenge interests. On 10 December 2001, Umueseso, a Kigali weekly, interviewed Ruhimbika. He spoke of a split community in which the major division was between those «seeking jobs ... and those in favour of a solution [to the Banyamulenge problem] which does not involve Rwanda». The two wars in the Congo, he said, were «the Kagame-Kabila one, which is an economically motivated war, and the ethnic one opposing Banyamulenge and their [Congolese] neighbours»¹⁶. In short, neither Banyamulenge nor Mayi-Mayi were homogenous entities – a fact that added significantly to the local complexities found within «the big war».

To further complicate the picture, some Banyamulenge and Mayi-Mayi factions were also actively seeking peace. IRIN reported on one such initiative: «The rapprochement between Banyamulenge from the Gitoga area and Mayi-Mayi from the Kalungwe area came after a meeting on 17 February brokered by the Banyamulenge NGO Groupe Milima. The NGO, in a statement sent to IRIN on Friday [23 April 1999], claimed that a Mayi-Mayi commander Thomas Ndagazwa said he had been 'plunged into a pointless war'. The meeting, between the traditionally hostile communities, was made possible as a result of members of Ndagazwa's family living safely in Banyamulenge controlled area, the report said. Groupe Milima also announced another peace meeting in Lubuga in late March between Banyamulenge, Babembe, Bafulero and Banyindu communities»¹⁷.

But not all encounters raised hope. Some Mayi-Mayi caused such immeasurable terror and suffering that entire populations, Banyamulenge as well as so-called autochthones, fled in despair. This happened, for instance, in late May and early June 1999 when a group of Mayi-Mayi advanced on Uvira causing thousands to flee across Lake Tanganyika¹⁸. This Mayi-Mayi group reportedly fought alongside Burundian rebels from the *Forces pour la Défense de la Démocratie* (FDD), who frequently clashed with RCD troops¹⁹.

In North Kivu, too, the run-up to the Lusaka agreement of 1999 was marked by several internal conflicts. Despite the rapprochement between some Mayi-Mayi and Banyamulenge in South Kivu, it was reported for North Kivu that Mayi-Mayi «warlords» were «recruiting ex-FAR and Interahamwe in the province», a trend which weakened the position of traditional chiefs²⁰. Here, too, Mayi-Mayi attacked not only RCD/Rwandan military convoys, but also Congolese Hutu.

¹⁶ IRIN, 19 December 2001. *Forces Républicaines Fédéralistes* (FRF), the Banyamulenge group opposed to the presence of Rwanda and Uganda, had already declared it is working towards peace through dialogue with Kivu elites regarding the still-to-be-resolved nationality issue of Banyamulenge and Banyarwanda. If such a dialogue could succeed, the FRF said, «The Kivus [would] once again be united and strong in order to victoriously oppose the aggressor-occupiers» (IRIN, 23 February 2001).

¹⁷ IRIN, 23 April 1999.

¹⁸ IRIN, 2 June 1999.

¹⁹ IRIN, 27 May 1999.

²⁰ IRIN, 6 May 1999.

Other conflicts-within-the-conflict included a dispute over land rights between Lendu and Hema near the town of Bunia, i.e. in the zone controlled by RCD-Kisangani. This so-called ethnic conflict left 7,000 dead and 180,000 displaced over a period of just six months. According to Amnesty International, Hema armed groups carried out «a campaign to drive Lendu from their homes in the Ituri region, which is rich in mineral wealth»²¹. When the fighting flared up again in January 2001, Amnesty accused Uganda of stage-managing the conflict for the sake of mineral resource extraction.

Amidst all this suffering, displacement and confusion, international efforts got under way in 1999 to broker a cease-fire. The efforts resulted in the July 1999 Lusaka peace accord, the corner stone for the later Inter-Congolese Dialogue.

The 1999 Lusaka Accord: moving closer to peace?

The first international peace initiative came when Libyan president Colonel Gaddafi brokered an agreement involving Kabila and Museveni. Signed in Sirte in April 1999, but without any of the rebel groups represented, the accord was no more than a first small step or, as Uganda's Foreign Affairs Minister called it, «*simply a statement of our desires – what we would like to happen in Congo*»²². Next, the rebel groups and their foreign backers met in Kabale, Uganda, following a failed attempt by Kenyan president Arap Moi to switch the peace talks to Nairobi. Although Bizima Karaha (RCD) announced that «*The differences we have are small*»²³, RCD-Goma pulled out of these talks and demanded that the ousted Wamba dia Wamba, now heading the rival RCD-ML, not participate in the negotiations²⁴. RCD-Goma resented Wamba's declaration of an autonomous province in Ituri District (Province Oriental), which it regarded as an act of «balkanisation». Wamba's faction took a different view. Political council rapporteur Depelchin declared: «*Our understanding is that each group can sign [in Lusaka]. That was the agreement*». Depelchin asked the facilitator of the Lusaka meeting(s) not to fall into the trap set by RCD-Goma, who was trying to create a *fait accompli*²⁵. The squabble coincided with Laurent-Désiré Kabila objecting to the rebels being signatories to a ceasefire draft document, because they did not represent sovereign states.

²¹ Press release by Amnesty International, quoted in IRIN, 25 January 2001. See also Human Rights Watch, February 2002.

²² IRIN, 21 April 1999.

²³ IRIN, 12 June 1999.

²⁴ IRIN, 1 July 1999.

²⁵ IRIN, 1 July 1999.

Just days before the Lusaka Agreement was due for signing, Bemba (MLC) announced the capture of Gbadolite following a fierce battle with Kabila troops, Sudanese forces and Interahamwe²⁶. It seemed that the rebel groups, whether or not they intended to sign, had their minds set firmly on territorial gains. RCD-Goma vowed to take Mbuji-Mayi and push on to Kinshasa. The objective, commander Ondekane said, *«remains the liberation of the whole country»*²⁷. RCD-Goma was confident about the Lusaka talks, but warned that Kabila must stop coming up with *«fanciful conditions»*. Meanwhile, reliable reports confirmed that Rwandan soldiers were being trucked into Bukavu, where they divided *«into two convoys: one northwest towards Bunyakiri and the other southwest in the direction of Walungu»*²⁸. Peace was discussed without any let up in the hostilities between rebel groups and DRC government forces.

What about the so-called *«negative forces»*? Excluded from the peace talks, Mayi-Mayi let it be known that they would not honour any ceasefire agreement made *«in Lusaka 'as long as the autochthonous people [were] ... under foreign occupation and aggression'.* In a statement received ... by IRIN, the 'politico-military council' of the Forces Mayi Mayi – Forces d'autodéfense populaires (FAP) said the DRC's problems should be handled by the Congolese themselves. The statement also warned that any attack against rebel groups, which it described as 'freedom fighters' combating the Burundian, Rwandan and Ugandan governments would be *'tantamount to attacking Forces Mayi-Mayi and the latter would not hesitate to fight back'*. The statement furthermore condemned the rejection by 'some participants' at the Lusaka talks of the 'rational and principled Sirte accord' in favour of a 'pro-West-Mandela-Tutsi-minority sponsored plan'. The statement was signed by Mayi-Mayi commander Dunia Lwengama and 'member of the politico-military council', Litambola Tambwe Vincent²⁹.

Litambola Tambwe was possibly referring here to a plan Thabo Mbeki had proposed when suggesting that *«the belligerents themselves should be the peacekeepers and 'police themselves' once a ceasefire and troop standstill is agreed, but under the authority of the OAU»*³⁰. This plan, which indeed sounded like a victory for the Rebels/Tutsi/the West, proved acceptable to no one.

Despite appeals by the EU and the US to the governments of Rwanda and Uganda, asking them to *«use their influence»* on RCD and MLC to convince them to sign, the Lusaka agreement was reached without rebel signatures. One day after the signing, Rwanda and DRC already traded accusations of a ceasefire violation, while the MLC rebel faction moved towards Zongo and caused 4,000 refugees to flee to the Central African Republic. Soon Bemba (MLC) would complain that Kabila's forces

²⁶ IRIN, 2 July 1999.

²⁷ IRIN, 12 April 1999.

²⁸ IRIN, 3 June 1999, referring to MISNA (the missionary news agency).

²⁹ IRIN, 5 July 1999.

³⁰ IRIN, 10 June 1999.

were bombing Gbadolite (now the headquarters of MLC), and other places like Kabinda in Kasai-Oriental and Ikela in Equateur.

The Lusaka Agreement: key points

The accord may be summarised as follows (quoting IRIN on 21 July 1999):

- Military hostilities and acts of violence against civilians must end within 24 hours of the signing of the accord;
- A Joint Military Commission (JMC) is to be established within one week. The commission will include two representatives from each of the belligerent parties who sign the Accord. Its duties will include *«investigating reported ceasefire violations, working out mechanisms to disarm militia groups, verifying the disarmament of Congolese civilians, and monitoring the withdrawal of foreign forces»*.
- The UN will deploy an «appropriate» peacekeeping force, which will *«take necessary measures to ensure compliance [with the accord], collect weapons from civilians, and schedule and supervise the withdrawal of all foreign forces, in collaboration with the JMC and the OAU»*.
- The following «armed groups» are to be disarmed: the Rwandan ex-Far and Interahamwe, the Ugandan Allied Democratic Forces (ADF), the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) and West Nile Bank Front (WNBK), the Ugandan National Rescue Front II (UNRF II), the Former National Ugandan Army (FUNA), the Burundian *Forces de Défense pour la Démocratie* (FDD) and Angola's UNITA.
- Forty-five days after the agreement is signed, the DRC government, RCD, MLC, unarmed DRC opposition groups and Congolese civil society must enter a 6-week period of open political negotiations to culminate in the setting up of a new political dispensation in the DRC. Subsequently, the national army is to be restructured to include the armies of DRC, RCD and MLC.
- In addition, hostages and prisoners of war are to be released/exchanged, the DRC state administration is to be reestablished, the rights of ethnic groups within the DRC are to be protected, the security concerns of the DRC and its neighbours are to be addressed.

The circumstances surrounding the signing of the Lusaka Agreement, marked by continued military provocation and exclusions from the negotiating table, gave little hope the accord would be implemented. Moreover, the confrontations became more self-funding. This happened both on the side of the rebels and their backers, and on that of the so-called «invited» troops from Zimbabwe, Namibia and Angola. Self-

funding became possible thanks to the relentless plunder of the DRC's natural resources.

As space does not allow an elaborate discussion of the illegal exploitation of the DRC's natural resources, let me quote from IRIN's summary of the investigative report by the UN panel that Kofi Annan appointed following a request by the Security Council. IRIN: «*The report lists five key minerals – coltan, diamonds, copper, cobalt and gold – as being exploited by foreign armies in the DRC in a 'systematic and systemic' way. It noted that plundering, looting, racketeering and criminal cartels were commonplace in occupied territories. The panel warned that the cartels, with their worldwide connections and ramifications, 'represent the next serious security problem in the region'. It said the private sector played a 'vital' role in the exploitation of resources and the continuation of the war, and that a number of companies had fuelled the conflict directly by trading arms for natural resources, while others had facilitated access to funds to purchase weapons. 'Top military commanders from various countries needed and continue to need this conflict for its lucrative nature and for temporarily solving some internal problems in those countries, as well as allowing access to wealth', the panel said. It recommends, among other things, that the UN security Council immediately declare an embargo on the import and export of certain minerals from or to Burundi, Rwanda and Uganda until their involvement in the exploitation of the resources is 'made clear, and declared so', by the Council, and that any country breaking the embargo should face sanctions*»³¹.

Coltan, short for columbite-tantalite, is a rare ore prominent in the electronics industry, which uses tantalum capacitors. Coltan is used not only in the manufacture of electronic components (for armaments and aeronautics), but also in «*light-bulb filaments, nuclear reactor parts, superconductivity research, and as constituents in corrosion-resistant metal alloys*»³². Coltan, moreover, is used in mobile phones and Playstation 2. At the turn of the millennium, coltan joined diamonds, gold and oil in strategic importance. For years its price had stood at US\$30 a pound, before soaring to US\$210 in December 2000 and then stabilising at US\$155³³. By the end of 2000, Rwanda exported between 150 and 255 tonnes of coltan, as against a maximum of 100 tonnes before the 1998 war began³⁴. Coltan is often funneled through Bukavu, where middlemen operate, before it reaches Kigali or Kampala *en route* to destinations in Europe and the US. Congolese coltan is exported from Rwanda by Rwanda Metals, a Kigali-based company which is effectively a Rwandan army front. In December 2000, RCD-Goma granted SOMIGL, a.k.a. the Great Lakes Mining Company, monopoly rights for the mining of coltan. The international trade used to begin with a trip on a Sabena flight to Belgium. When Sabena stopped its coltan flights, largely because of a public

³¹ IRIN, 17 April 2001.

³² *The International News, Pakistan*, 23 December 2000.

³³ *The Independent*, 21 March 2001.

³⁴ www.digitalcongo.net/actualité, 6 November 2000.

awareness campaign by Belgian NGOs under the slogan «No blood on my mobile», exports continued for a while via freighter aircraft from Goma to Ostend³⁵. Further down the line, Cabot Performance Materials (Boyertown, USA) and HC Starck (Germany-USA) are alleged to be the chief international companies involved in buying tantalum³⁶.

Commenting on the RCD's decision to take holdings in mining companies and declare a monopoly on exports through SOMIGL, the movement's Secretary-General, Azarias Ruberwa, told AFP: «We're not interested in the nationality of buyers but only in obtaining money for our movement. We realise the need to have companies to finance ourselves as other rebel movements do». The launch of SOMIGL resulted in accusations that backer Rwanda, through the presence of its army in eastern DRC, had intensified the looting of Congo's mineral resources; an accusation Ruberwa shrugged off as part of the civil war propaganda. This was also the view of Rwandan government spokesman Joseph Bideri, who told Reuters: «Rwanda is not benefiting materially from any Congolese resources whatsoever. Our budget this year [2000] was a shoestring budget, worse than last year's. If the government was getting money from Congo minerals, our budget would not be as miserable as it is»³⁷.

When the UN Panel of Experts released its report on illegal mineral extraction in the DRC, the accused vehemently denied their involvement. For Rwanda, this «biased» report amounted to a negation of the genocide. Its presidential envoy to the Great Lakes, Patrick Mazimpaka, said of the report: «It is as if they are saying the Interahamwe militia are not there. There are as many as 40,000 Interahamwe... [The content of the report] is ... equivalent to saying that the genocide never happened in Rwanda»³⁸. For Uganda, the report was «gossip». Uganda threatened to withdraw from the Lusaka accord³⁹. In the end, though, Uganda agreed to continue to consider withdrawal, but would «examine the wisdom of maintaining a presence in Buta and Bunia»⁴⁰. Museveni slammed the report. After he «looked into the books», Museveni stated: «It is true that prior to 1995 Uganda's exports in gold were reported as below one tonne. Less than one tonne. Starting with 1995, our gold exports went to nearly four tonnes... The reason was because of liberalisation here»⁴¹. Museveni then set up the Porter Commission of Inquiry, which in November 2001 exonerated the Ugandan president, his family, his government and several top military officers of the charges brought by the UN Report.

RCD-Goma reacted by claiming that coltan benefited the population of eastern DRC. In an interview with BBC Radio 4 (17 July 2001), Nestor Kyimbi, chief of RCD's mining department, had this to say:

³⁵ Radio 4 transcript, p. 9.

³⁶ www.digitalcongo.net/actualite/00-11-06-usa.shtml.

³⁷ Quoted in *The News International, Pakistan*, 23 December 2000.

³⁸ Quoted in IRIN, 18 April 2001.

³⁹ IRIN, 1 May 2001.

⁴⁰ IRIN, 8 May 2001.

⁴¹ Quoted in IRIN, 10 May 2001.

KIYIMBI (VIA INTERPRETER):

When I tell you we have exported forty tons of coltan, you can make the calculation, and for \$4 per kilo you realise how much money has come into the government treasury. And the RCD, it has some public obligations to cover and it is thanks to this money that RCD is able to cover them. For instance, the RCD has to restore roads, also we have to pay the salary of more than 30,000 civil servants, and we have some social departments such as schools and hospitals, and we can work in those hospitals thanks to the money coming into the treasury.

But Kiyimbi failed to convince his interviewer.

JENKINS (INTERVIEWER):

According to the figures Mr Kiyimbi gave us, the taxes alone on forty tons of coltan would raise \$1.6 million. But total coltan exports from Eastern Congo have been reported in the trade press as being around ten thousand tons a month – worth around \$2 billion. If hospitals have seen any of this money, there is no sign of it⁴².

Radio 4 interviewed a hospital doctor and administrator in Goma. He said: «*The war in Congo, even if it started for political motives, it seems to me that it is now for economic reasons. The different armed groups are here more to steal and loot the Congo and take its riches out of the Congo*»⁴³.

The controversy over Rwanda's presence in the DRC has also caused a split British politics. After visiting the DRC in August 2001, the UK's All Party Parliamentary Group on the Great Lakes and Genocide Prevention pointed a finger at Rwanda and laid down conditions for the continuation of international aid to the Great Lakes region: «*Attacks on Rwanda between 1995-1998 by Interahamwe and ex-FAR militias based in Eastern DRC, and the failure of the DRC government to prevent them, justified Rwanda's initial intervention in DRC. However, Rwanda's security justification is now in doubt. Rwanda's military bases – in common with all other foreign armies in DRC – appear to be more closely linked to the positioning of mineral mines than rebel forces. British and European bilateral aid policy in the Great Lakes Region must be linked to cessation of illegal exploitation of natural resources and implementation of the Lusaka Accords. Certification schemes should be introduced, where appropriate, to address the exploitation of natural resources*» (APPG 2001: 3; emphasis in text).

The APPG accepted the critique that the UN report on the illegal extraction of natural resources (April 2001) had been «*unbalanced and flawed in some areas*», yet it confirmed that its broad findings were credible. Reflecting on the numerous eyewitness reports it had collected during the visit, the APPG called for a vigorous response:

⁴² Radio 4 transcript, p. 6.

⁴³ Radio 4 transcript, p. 6.

«The All Party Group has been encouraged by the Prime Minister's [Tony Blair's] mention of three million conflict-related deaths in Congo at his Party Conference speech on October 2nd 2001. If the deaths of 7,000 innocent civilians in America [referring to the 11 September terrorist attack on New York] warrant the enormous response of the international community in the military and economic sphere – and they do – then surely the deaths of 2.5 million civilians in the Congo warrant an equally vigorous response» (APPG 2001: 5).

But Britain's Secretary of State for International Development, Clare Short, disagrees. A firm supporter of the Kagame regime, Short maintains that Rwanda has every reason to be in the DRC. I quote from the Radio 4 programme transmitted on 10 July 2001:

SHORT:

This country [Rwanda] is trying to reconstitute itself. The UK is trying to help it to reconstitute itself and prevent another genocide.

JENKINS:

But Amnesty International reports massive human rights violations, atrocities by the Rwandan forces and their allies, the rebel government in Congo against civilians in pursuit of mineral resources.

SHORT

That's false ... Rwanda is in the DRC to protect itself from the forces of the genocide, has signed up to the Lusaka agreement which says that the international community will help to disarm those forces and Rwanda will withdraw, has pulled back, has led that process. (Radio 4 Online, p. 9)

These strongly partisan phrases did not deter Short's interviewer, who concluded very much along the lines of the (then yet to appear) APPG.

On 20 November, the UN published an addendum to its April Report, in which the panel of experts confirmed that Uganda and Rwanda (but not Burundi) continued their extraction work and profiteering through sophisticated channels. The addendum reported that the Rwandan military «continued to collect and channel profits from trade in natural resources through a sophisticated internal mechanism», while the «commercial networks put in place by Ugandan military commanders had allowed them to continue their exploitation activities despite the withdrawal of a significant number of troops»⁴⁴. The addendum also accused Zimbabwe, Namibia and Angola. Reacting to the report, the DRC Information Minister, Kikaya Bin Karubi, rejected the allegation that «invited countries» could be involved in looting. These partners, Karubi said, were involved in signed, legitimate business agreements. As Rwanda's former colony, Belgium came out fairly cleanly, which the Belgian Foreign Ministry ascribed

⁴⁴ Addendum to the Report of the Panel of Experts on the Illegal Exploitation of Natural Resources and Other Forms of Wealth of DR Congo. Published by the UN Security Council on 13 November 2001. Available on www.reliefweb.int/w/R...

to the «*high degree of transparency*» which exists in the Belgian enterprises that operate in the DRC, as in Belgium itself.

The year 2001: renewed hope for the inter-Congolese dialogue

Coltan aside, 2001 will be remembered for the assassination of Laurent Kabila; the succession of his son Joseph, who brought renewed hope for peace; the many promises of international troop withdrawal; the making and unmaking of alliances among the rebel groups; the UN report on the exploitation of natural resources in the DRC; the escalation of violence, displacement and human rights abuses, especially in eastern DRC where the political scene was becoming exceedingly complex; and the arrival of the UN mission to the DRC (MONUC), which began to disarm some «negative forces». Towards the end of 2001 it was clear that the inter-Congolese Dialogue, so much talked about since the signing of the Lusaka Accord in 1999, could not be separated from the often perplexing complexities *within* Kivu. The dialogue had yet to start in earnest.

When Joseph Kabila took charge of the DRC, the repercussions of his father's murder were felt particularly by people originating from the provinces of Maniema, North Kivu and South Kivu, where scores of people were arrested and imprisoned⁴⁵. In eastern Congo, Laurent Kabila was by now remembered for a short regime that in its ruthlessness matched the Mobutu era, and for his refusal to cooperate with the UN during its investigation of the 100,000 «disappeared» Hutu refugees. Raised in Rwanda, where he also trained as a soldier, Joseph Kabila, «*immediately stated his commitment to peace through the Lusaka Accords... [and] accepted Sir Ketumile Masire [former president of Botswana] as facilitator of the inter-Congolese dialogue*». He took swift steps to reform the cabinet and «*called for openness and an end to the era of nepotism. He embraced talk of trade liberalisation and an end to state monopolies, opened dialogue with the IMF and the World Bank, and invited humanitarian agencies to assess the situation in the Congo*» (APPG 2001: 7).

In eastern DRC, the year 2001 began with an escalation of violence between Hema and Lendu, a case of so-called tribal warfare much influenced by Uganda's interest in minerals. Uganda intensified the conflict because of its continuing support to Hema warriors. Agreeing that the Ugandan army exacerbated the tension, the UN special rapporteur on human rights in DRC, Roberto Garreton, stated on 19 January 2001 that «*the Hema had entered areas inhabited by Lendu and arbitrarily executed 150 of them*». Human Rights Watch, too, indicted Uganda of meddling in the rivalries.

⁴⁵ IRIN, 6 February 2001. *La Libre Belgique*, 8 February 2001.

Lendu then retaliated with mass murder, possibly assisted by Interahamwe and Ugandan ADF rebels⁴⁶. Although fuelled from the outside, local conflicts like that between Hema and Lendu would make peace more difficult to achieve.

The year 2001 is best described as marked by two political tendencies. On the one hand, it emerged that alliances between rebel groups were never stable and that rivalry among rebel leaders was rampant⁴⁷, on the other, the world witnessed some sustained efforts by rebel leaders, particularly by Jean-Pierre Bemba (MLC), to bring local political factions and interests into the fold of the rebel movements. The former tendency, the apparent futility of attempts to build durable alliances between rebel groups, was demonstrated in January 2001 when MLC and RCD-ML merged to form the *Congolese Liberation Front* (CLF/FLC). Led by Bemba, with Mbusa Nyamwisi as its first vice-president, the merger immediately proved contentious: not only was there rivalry between Bemba and Mbusa, but Wamba dia Wamba refused to sign and temporarily quit RCD-ML. On 18 August 2001, however, the merger having failed, Yoweri Museveni intervened to broker a compromise agreement and Wamba returned to sign⁴⁸. This happened just two days before a crucial preparatory committee meeting of the IC Dialogue in Gaborone.

Not deterred by the fragile relationship with other rebel leaders, Bemba lost no time trying to enlist the services of some of his area's «negative forces». Thus, in early 2001, Bemba approached certain Mayi-Mayi groups to engage them in patrolling the country's eastern borders. Some diplomats explained this rapprochement as an effort by Bemba to make up military strength in light of the anticipated departure of foreign troops, in this case Uganda⁴⁹. There was no parallel to this rapprochement in South Kivu, although one group of Mayi-Mayi there, the newly formed *Mouvement de la Renaissance du Congo-Mayi-Mayi* (MRC-MM), informed IRIN «that its forces could help serve as a buffer along the DRC border with Uganda, Rwanda and Burundi in accordance with the Lusaka peace accord and taking into account the security concerns of the neighbouring countries. The group said it should be included in all national and regional discussions on the DRC issues, including the Lusaka peace process. In the same statement, it also denied that its troops were fighting alongside DRC government forces. 'We want to stress once and for all, that we are independent of Kinshasa and of any other player in this conflict», the statement said. It warned that 'no durable solution [to the conflict] will be found without us'»⁵⁰.

The MRC-MM offer to patrol the eastern border may have been a teaser, but it mirrored (and preceded) Bemba's agreement with «Mayi-Mayi militia in Butembo»

⁴⁶ IRIN, 27 March 2001. See also Human Rights Watch 2002.

⁴⁷ If the puzzle of rebel alliances was complex, some events across the Atlantic were no less intriguing. In February 2001, it was reported that Nzanga Mobutu (Mobutu Jr) was having talks with US vice-president Dick Cheney. Nzanga Mobutu was the guest of former president George Herbert Walker Bush, which suggested that some old CIA alliance might be kept alive. Report on www.digitalcongo.net/actualite/01-02-13-nzanga.shtml.

⁴⁸ IRIN, 23 August 2001.

⁴⁹ IRIN, 29 March 2001.

⁵⁰ IRIN, 14 February 2001

to end mutual hostilities⁵¹. Of course, the latter agreement meant that new local hostilities could now surface: the Mayi-Mayi from Butembo broke with the pattern of previous alliances and declared that Interahamwe, ex-FAR and Ugandan ADF were the new enemies.

The rapprochement between Bemba and some Mayi-Mayi was repudiated by other Mayi-Mayi, notably groups loyal to General Padiri, head of the *Parti de Résistance Nationale* (PRN), also known as the «real Mayi-Mayi». Padiri explained that all rebel groups and movements were now positioning themselves to «legitimise» their campaigns⁵². (This is good analysis.) Other Mayi-Mayi leaders agreed with Padiri's views and also opposed Bemba, e.g. Mayi-Mayi «from the village of Curondo in Butembo». This group, which for a while held some CLF officials hostage, was referred to by Bemba as «causing confusion», although Bemba appeared confident that the group would cooperate in the end⁵³. Bemba had more trouble with Mayi-Mayi in his territory when another group, the *Résistance Nationale de Lumumba* (RNL), kidnapped expatriates working for DARA-Forest, a Thai-Ugandan company. The hostages' release, initially conditional on the immediate withdrawal of Rwandan, Ugandan and Burundian troops, was later achieved following a well publicised intervention by François Lumumba, eldest son of Patrice Lumumba, the murdered Prime Minister. François Lumumba praised the Mayi-Mayi fighters for not demanding a ransom; their aim had been to show the world that there was illegal looting going on in the DRC⁵⁴. By the middle of the year, the ever-shifting kaleidoscope of alliances came into focus after Mbusa fell out with Bemba: Mayi-Mayi opposed to Bemba, and other anti-Bemba groups, joined Mbusa's faction of RCD-ML. When Bemba and Mbusa troops clashed, the Ugandan army had a pretext for re-deploying its Ruwenzori forces in the north-eastern towns of Kanyabayongo, Butembo, Beni and Bunia⁵⁵.

Bemba's «legitimising» agenda led to the creation of the *Union of Congolese Forces for the Integral Respect of the Lusaka Accords and the Holding of the Inter-Congolese Dialogue* (UFAD). This union aimed to bring together armed and unarmed opposition groups, including Etienne Tshisekedi's UDPS and Joseph Olenghankoy's FONUS⁵⁶. Later in the year, Bemba declared that the war had ended, that he had sent most of his Ugandan soldiers home and was now turning his rebel movement into a political party opposed to Kabila. Upstaging his RCD-Goma rivals, Bemba demanded the immediate withdrawal of *all* foreign troops from the DRC⁵⁷. Bemba was gaining the upper hand, as would be confirmed by the outcome of the Inter-Congolese Dialogue.

⁵¹ IRIN, 29 March 2001.

⁵² IRIN, 3 April 2001.

⁵³ IRIN, 17 May 2001.

⁵⁴ IRIN, 30 July 2001.

⁵⁵ IRIN, 11 June 2001.

⁵⁶ IRIN, 4 May 2001. FONUS stands for *Forces Novatrices pour l'Union et la Solidarité*.

⁵⁷ IRIN, 29 August 2001. *Jeune Afrique*, 5 September 2001.

The making and un-making of alliances on the ground, it must be stressed, occurred against the backdrop of declarations of intended troop withdrawal. Such withdrawals were planned in accordance with UN Resolution 1341, which demanded that the Lusaka signatories draw up disengagement plans by 15 March 2001 and «plans for a total withdrawal» by mid-May. Rwanda was first to announce it would withdraw 200km from Pweto, Katanga province, in the direction home. (But RCD troops would stay!) Paul Kagame, however, followed this up by saying that although he was withdrawing troops, Rwanda reserved the right to defend itself should Kabila take advantage of the pullout⁵⁸. Also calling back some battalions, Uganda too put forward conditions for full withdrawal. Uganda's Foreign Minister, Eriya Kategaya, said: «We can pull out, but when we leave what kind of DRC will we be leaving behind? Are the conditions that brought us to the DRC initially still the same?»

No foreign power was in a hurry to leave the DRC. With the exception of Namibia, every foreign force found a valid reason to prolong its presence and war. Rwandan-backed RCD warned that the war would resume if Kabila did not end his support for the «negative forces» in the east⁵⁹. Kagame reiterated that the withdrawal of «all foreign forces [would] be very much facilitated by how the disarmament of the Interahamwe [was] addressed»⁶⁰. For their part, the SADC allied forces also responded that they would «not rush» the withdrawal of their troops⁶¹.

Rwanda in particular seemed disinterested in pulling out. When RCD-Goma failed to withdraw from Kisangani, having several times disrupted the activities of MONUC⁶², the Congolese government accused Rwanda and RCD-Goma of planning for a «secessionist state» in eastern DRC⁶³. The anxiety was fuelled by the «reinforcement of Rwandan military positions around the city of Kisangani», where demilitarisation was hotly contested. RCD-Goma's resolve not to demilitarise Kisangani was reinforced when Kabila appointed a governor for the city: withdrawing meant accepting the appointment, meant handing the town to Kabila⁶⁴. Rwanda, too, felt the need to stay in Kisangani as it was now threatened by ALIR, a new «negative force». Made up of ex-FAR and Interahamwe, ALIR was preparing a major attack on Rwanda. Uganda, meanwhile, restated its intention to withdraw from most parts of the country by the end of 2001, but would «maintain a symbolic presence in Buta and Bunia on the request of the UN and other allies, as well as maintain some troops in the Rwenzori Mountain areas»⁶⁵.

The DRC was most sceptical about the RCD's claim that Rwanda was withdrawing from eastern Congo. Its commissioner for relations with MONUC alleged that

⁵⁸ IRIN, 20 & 22 February 2001. Also, *Le Soir*, 22 February 2001 and *La Libre Belgique*, 3 January 2001.

⁵⁹ Quoted in IRIN, 30 May 2001.

⁶⁰ IRIN, 25 May 2001.

⁶¹ IRIN, 5 June 2001.

⁶² IRIN, 10 July 2001. Also, *Le Soir*, 28 July 2001 and *Jeune Afrique*, 29 June 2001.

⁶³ IRIN, 17 July 2001.

⁶⁴ IRIN, 19 July 2001.

⁶⁵ IRIN, early August 2001. See also Human Rights Watch 2002..

Uganda and Rwanda were both keen to restart the war. Of the Rwandan presence he said: «Deep within Kivu and Katanga regions, Rwandans are occupying positions formerly abandoned by the Forces Armées Congolaises (FAC) in line with the disengagement plan, jumbo jets and military aircraft are making regular return flights, depositing weapons, ammunition and war equipment along the Pweto-Kakulu, Pweto-Kisadi and Pweto-Kasamba roads»⁶⁶.

After RCD-Goma launched a recruitment drive in mid-August, leader Adolphe Onusumba told Kofi Annan: «We conquered Kisangani at the cost of blood, so one cannot come and say we should leave the town [of Kisangani] – and then we leave the town to vultures. Such behaviour would be irresponsible on our part»⁶⁷. Annan received a similar statement from the Uganda People's Defence Forces (UPDF): we shall keep troops in Bunia and on the slopes of the Ruwenzori «until a peace agreement is reached within the framework of the Lusaka peace process»⁶⁸. On another occasion, RCD-Goma's spokesman Kin-Kiey Mulumba said: «We are willing to demilitarise provided MONUC tells us what it plans to do in the event of an attack on the city by the Interahamwe militiamen who are nearby or by a brigade of [DRC President] Kabila's troops»⁶⁹. The Kivu population might have had enough of this pointless war, but the RCD-Goma rebels were in no hurry to wave goodbye to the Rwandan troops that supported them. As Human Rights Watch warns, the «uninvited» belligerents, and the rebel groups they support, «have no interest to see an end to the current situation in eastern Congo. There is a level of violence they can tolerate because the violence is targeting civilians ... The end result is that Congolese will continue to die as [leaders] line their pockets with gold and diamonds»; these leaders have a «colonialist mentality»⁷⁰. Globalisation, especially the worldwide interest in coltan and other precious minerals is the chief mechanism which sustains the conflicts.

In 2001, Congolese people were also preoccupied with the thorny issue of who would take part in the IC Dialogue. In June, the DRC government stated that Mayi-Mayi were not «negative forces», but «Congolese nationals who are fighting against the slavery of their compatriots, who are being violated and massacred on their own territory, controlled and looted shamelessly by the troops of aggression and occupation»⁷¹. Joseph Kabila had already made the point when visiting London earlier in the year⁷². The point was picked up by RCD-ML, which in September talked to Mayi-Mayi militias with a view to incorporating their position(s) into the IC Dialogue. One reason for the rapprochement was that Mayi-Mayi were responsible for insecurity and human rights violations in the territory RCD-ML controlled. It was better to be good neighbours. RCD-ML claimed to be working hard to access a wide range of views (from women, elders, youth, traditional leaders, church leaders...) regarding the conflict and future of the

⁶⁶ IRIN, 10 August 2001.

⁶⁷ Quoted in IRIN, 4 September 2001.

⁶⁸ IRIN, 6 September 2001.

⁶⁹ IRIN, 6 September 2001.

⁷⁰ HRW's Suleiman Baldo in an interview with IRIN, 29 November 2001, reacting to the UN addendum on the illegal extraction of natural resources in eastern DRC.

⁷¹ Quoted in IRIN, 4 June 2001.

⁷² IRIN, 21 March 2001, referring to the latest country briefing by the Economic Intelligence Unit, EIU.

DRC. Pursuing its own «legitimising» agenda, RCD-ML pushed for a federal government that would promote a free-market economy in the name of good governance⁷³.

The participation of Mayi-Mayi at the IC Dialogue was strongly opposed by RCD-Goma. Accusing Kabila of supporting Mayi-Mayi and Interahamwe attacks, rebel leader Onusumba appealed to Zimbabwe's president Mugabe for a sensible word in Kabila's ear. Onusumba threatened to launch an «all-out military assault» should the situation not improve. Mayi-Mayi participation was blocked also by the Banyamulenge organisation Shikama Peace Initiative (SPI), whose president Francis Shyaka argued that Mayi-Mayi participation would be an act of sabotage. The SPI argued that all Mayi-Mayi should be «neutralised, disarmed and tried» because of their «responsibility for the crimes against humanity carried out against tens of thousands of Banyamulenge and Tutsis from North Kivu»⁷⁴. By the end of the year, however, it transpired that RCD-Goma had done a U-turn on its position towards Mayi-Mayi; it had talked to certain Mayi-Mayi factions led by Anselme Enerunga. RCD-Goma justified: «We are willing to pay any price for peace in Congo, even if that includes integrating the Mayi-Mayi into our forces»⁷⁵. But these talks were held on RCD-Goma terms: RCD-Goma would not tolerate any direct Mayi-Mayi participation in the peace talks⁷⁶. On hearing this news, Enerunga replied: «If we are not allowed to participate, if our demands are not taken into account, it will be illusory to think of any kind of peace». And so it went on.

By the time the IC Dialogue in Addis Ababa ran into the ground, there was renewed fighting in eastern DRC; the main belligerents, including the DRC government, were not prepared to compromise. As the Brussels-based International Crisis Group (ICG) put it: «President Joseph Kabila and his backers refuse to consider power-sharing through the dialogue with anti-government rebels without guarantees of Rwanda's and Uganda's full withdrawal from DRC. At the same time, the rebels and their sponsors, including Rwanda and Uganda, refuse to consider full withdrawal until a transition government is established through the dialogue and their security is guaranteed. As a result, low intensity conflict remains the preferred option for most of the external actors»⁷⁷.

It was a stalemate. Power struggles continued, especially within RCD-ML⁷⁸, and serious talks were yet to commence. The peace talks then switched to Sun City, South Africa, where they commenced in late February 2002.

The human cost of the political stalemate is that the population has been decimated, both directly through killings and indirectly through disease and malnutrition. The decimation has been slow but steady. Following its visit to the DRC, the UK's All Party Parliamentary Group on the Great Lakes concluded in August 2001

⁷³ IRIN, 11 September 2001.

⁷⁴ Quoted in IRIN, 25 September 2001.

⁷⁵ Secretary-General Azarias Ruberwa, quoted in IRIN, 26 September 2001.

⁷⁶ The talks were now scheduled to start in Addis Ababa on 15 October 2001. They would be cancelled due to poor organisation and a shortage of funds.

⁷⁷ Quoted in IRIN, 19 November 2001.

⁷⁸ The struggle involved Mbusa (president), John Tibasima Atenyi (vice-president) and the returned Wamba dia Wamba.

that «the conflict since 1998 [had] precipitated a humanitarian disaster estimated to have claimed 2.5 million lives» (APPG 2001: 6). It was also a war, like many others in Africa today, in which women suffered disproportionately. IRIN referred to a report by UNOCHA: «The fact that the conflict was taking place 'within the daily environment', without distinction between combatants and non-combatants, had led to heavy population displacement and put a heavier burden on many women to guarantee the survival of their children in a chaotic situation, [the report] said. The mono-parental system imposed by such displacement was 'a source of permanent tension', and it was to be feared that extended conflict would have longlasting side effects in the establishment of a culture of violence and the extension of domestic violence, it added»⁷⁹.

The humanitarian situation in eastern DRC is gruesome. Releasing primary findings of a study in five provinces, the International Rescue Committee (IRC) has estimated that 200,000 deaths must be attributed directly to violence⁸⁰. The IRC also believes that one in every eight households has experienced violent death since the start of the war in August 1998. About 40 percent of those killed are women and children. «This emergency», the report concludes, «is perhaps worse than any to unfold in Africa in recent decades»⁸¹.

A WHO/UNICEF report also shows that the vulnerability of Congolese households has increased «in all senses of the word, and nowhere so evidently as in health where common preventable and treatable conditions such as malaria, measles, malnutrition, respiratory tract infections are killing, and access to any kind of health care has plummeted». The report exposes how Congolese women are «paying an extraordinary price ... This year, over 42,000 will die in childbirth alone»⁸². Another study, by the Association Centre Femmes et Enfants pour la Paix, ACFEP, claims that in the first half of 2001, Rwandan Interahamwe and Congolese Mayi-Mayi were responsible for 2,300 rapes in Shabunda alone. The association stresses that «in addition to rape, these women are victims of sexually transmitted diseases, perhaps HIV/AIDS, unwanted pregnancies and wounds»⁸³.

Give peace a chance?

The inter-Congolese dialogue, February-April 2002

On the eve of the IC Dialogue, eastern DRC remained steeped in turmoil and renewed uncertainty when the recently formed RCD-National, headed by Roger Lumbala, allied itself with Bemba's MLC. Together, the two factions moved into

⁷⁹ IRIN, 9 March 2001; See also www.reliefweb.int/w/rwb.nsf/WCE?OpenForum.

⁸⁰ IRIN, 3 May 2001. See also www.intrescom.org.

⁸¹ IRIN, 10 May 2001. See also Amnesty International, June 2001.

⁸² Quoted in IRIN, 6 July 2001.

⁸³ Quoted in IRIN, 21 June 2001.

RCD-ML territory and captured Isiro in December 2001, Watsa in mid-January 2002 and Bafwasende on 26 January 2002. (Adding to the confusion, early reports spoke of a joint MLC/RCD-Goma attack⁸⁴.) The advance by MLC/RCD-National resulted in extensive violence and displacement. It was widely believed that Bunia, capital of the resource-rich Ituri region, would be Bemba's next target. In February 2002, civilians in northeastern Congo were also caught up in the crossfire when rivals MLC (Bemba) and RCD-ML (Mbusa Nyamwisi) resumed hostilities. Elsewhere, civilians bore the brunt of clashes in which MLC and RCD-ML teamed up to fight Mayi-Mayi. Alliances seemed increasingly devoid of any rationale other than sheer opportunism.

The IC Dialogue proper began without the participation of Bemba (MLC), who stayed in a nearby hotel. Bemba's main concern was that several of the opposition parties invited were in fact *«bogus groups and allies of president Joseph Kabila»*, which was a recipe for outright civil war. Facilitator Masire's office, it was said, had been manipulated. Eyebrows were raised also over the choice of the six Mayi-Mayi representatives, who, it was alleged, had been handpicked by the Kinshasa government, RCD and MLC. The International Crisis Group (ICG) commented: *«you cannot expect genuine Mayi-Mayi leaders to be happy. You can only expect more violence»*⁸⁵. There were other problems too. RCD-Goma's secretary general, Azarias Ruberwa, objected to Masire's decision to increase the number of RCD-ML delegates from 9 to 16. Meanwhile, the war also dragged on. Very disruptive was the attack by Rwandan and RCD-Goma forces on Moliro by Lake Tanganyika, which, RCD said, had been provoked by DRC government soldiers. A senior MLC representative agreed and regarded the provocation as a ploy by Kinshasa to derail the peace talks.

Despite its shaky start, the IC Dialogue ran for 52 days and produced some results. On 19 April 2002, an agreement was signed by the DRC government, MLC, RCD-ML, RCD-N, six Mayi-Mayi representatives, 19 opposition party representatives and 45 representatives of civil society. The agreement was welcomed by the UN Security Council for its *«significant progress»* and the promise that it *«could facilitate the [DRC's] political transition and help to consolidate the regional peace process»*⁸⁶. The agreement was also welcomed by Belgium, France and the UK (who issued a joint statement in support), and by Zimbabwe and Uganda, both key players. Jean-Pierre Bemba, it became clear, had emerged as the great victor. He is related to the family of the late Mobutu Sese Seko and appears to have the loyalty of many members of the former ruling class.

But the agreement was rejected by RCD-Goma (which controls one third of the DRC), Rwanda and the US. The Rwandan government called the agreement *«a non-starter»*. For RCD-Goma, it was a *«private agreement»*, illegal and unrealistic. A spokesperson for RCD-Goma commented: *«it [is] not possible in our country to do any-*

⁸⁴ *Tanzania Guardian*, 30 January 2002.

⁸⁵ Quoted in IRIN, 22 February 2002.

⁸⁶ Quoted in IRIN, 25 April 2002.

thing without us»⁸⁷. Rwanda's special envoy, Patrick Mazimpaka, told the BBC the agreement would simply «lead to another war». (But it was rumoured that some senior figures in RCD-Goma might be prepared to accept the agreement.) Significantly, several Congolese opposition parties also failed to sign. These included Etienne Tshisekedi's UPDS (*Union pour la Démocratie et le Progress Social*), Antoine Gizenga's PALU (*Parti des Lumumbistes Unifiés*), Joseph Olenghankoy's FONUS (*Forces Novatrices pour l'Union et la Solidarité*), François Lumumba's MNC-L (*Mouvement des Nationalistes Congolais*) and a cluster of smaller parties (G4) led by Mbwebwe Kabamba. In short, while one can speak of «significant progress», peace could still be a long way off. The facilitators in the IC Dialogue had no illusions. Chief facilitator Masire expressed scepticism by stressing that the power-sharing agreement had been reached outside the framework of the ICD; it was a «partial agreement». South African president Thabo Mbeki concurred: the less-than-inclusive agreement might fail if it did not attract sufficient international support.

At the time this article was completed (10 May 2002), it was reported that Tshisekedi was trying to form an alternative government through an alliance involving the parties opposed to the IC Dialogue agreement. This alliance, according to RCD-Goma, had the backing of South African president Mbeki, several diplomats and members of the UN Security Council. Such international support would ensure that the Sun City agreement was not «a done deal» and that the door to further negotiations remained open. Nonetheless, it was also rumoured, but dismissed by RCD-Goma, that its own president, Adolphe Onusumba, had been sacked for endorsing the IC Dialogue agreement⁸⁸. This news came after confirmed reports of a mutiny among RCD-Goma troops led by Commandant Patrick Masunzu, whose 1,000-strong Banyamulenge force, mostly from South Kivu, had taken up arms against the Rwandan soldiers (between 5,000 and 7,000) stationed in the highlands of eastern DRC. RCD-Goma's pro-Kigali elements, among them security chief Bizima Karaha, described Masunzu's followers as «criminals and thugs»⁸⁹.

Conclusion

The mutiny by Banyamulenge from South Kivu, and RCD-Goma's response, begs the question of how Rwanda justifies its presence in the DRC. On the face of it, in official discourse, Rwanda is in the DRC to prevent genocide. But there is more. Beneath the preventive perspective lies an equally «deep» psycho-political reason why Rwanda has no moral problem being in eastern DRC: its leaders regard the region (or at least part of it) as legitimately belonging to Rwanda. To appreciate this

⁸⁷ Quoted in IRIN, 23 April 2002.

⁸⁸ IRIN, 8 May 2002, referring to an article published in *L'Observateur*.

⁸⁹ IRIN, 3 May 2002.

reason we can return to late 1996, when the Rwandan Hutu refugee camps were attacked by Banyamulenge and Rwandan (RPA) troops. At this point, Rwanda's then Foreign Affairs minister, Anastase Gasana, and Rwanda's then president, Pasteur Bizimungu, confronted the international press with a map of the region which depicted a «Greater Rwanda». Although the two dignitaries denied that Rwandan troops were operating on Zairean soil, Gasana gave the press an «instant lesson» in history by arguing that the colonial powers gathered in Berlin in 1885 had inflicted lasting damage on the region: in drawing up borders, the Europeans had severed a part of the Rwandan population. Bizimungu «confirmed» this by invoking a pre-colonial «Greater Rwanda» which included the highlands where Banyamulenge lived and where, he claimed, they had lived in harmony with their Bahunde neighbours (see Willame 1997: 97 for a more detailed account of this imagined «Greater Rwanda» polity; also Vlassenroot 2000). Bizimungu's lesson in history stressed – correctly – that the colonial powers had violated the border situation twice: a first time in 1885, a second time in 1910. US journalist James McKinley Jr reported on the lesson in history: «Waving placards and maps depicting the Rwandan kingdom of the 19th century, Mr Bizimungu pointed out that the Tutsi now living in Zaire had been part of an ancient Tutsi kingdom. Their lands became part of Zaire in 1910, he said, when European powers redrew the map».

«[Banyamulenge] are in their homelands', [the president] said, 'and if someone wants to uproot them, if someone wants to disown them, let that country [i.e. Zaire] disown the land as well'»⁹⁰.

Clearly, president Bizimungu had a point, but he was also quite imaginative. While he stated correctly that Rwanda had lost North Kivu and Idjwi as a result of the 1910 convention, he conveniently forgot that the Banyamulenge homeland was in South Kivu (not North Kivu), where a sizeable community of Tutsi cattle herders from Rwanda (later known as «Banya-Mulenge») had come to settle following a dispute with the Rwandan *mwami* (Depelchin 1974: 68). These genuine Banyamulenge may have been Rwanda's «relatives», as Bizimungu put it, but their departure from Rwanda was likely to have been caused by discontent. The problem with the perception of a «Greater Rwanda» is that fixed territories and boundaries did not exist at the end of the 19th century. The political map in those days had been a question of spheres of influence rather than rigid boundaries. The engagements of Rwanda's central court with peripheral areas had run the gamut from full occupation with complete administration in some areas, through to instances where tribute was paid, to situations best described as outright raiding (Vansina 1962: 90-91; Pottier 2002 for further details).

The situation today is not dissimilar. The authorities in Rwanda will not so easily be persuaded that it will soon be safe to leave eastern DRC and restore home rule.

⁹⁰ New York Times, 29 October 1996.

Bibliography

- ALL PARTY PARLIAMENTARY GROUP ON THE GREAT LAKES AND GENOCIDE PREVENTION [APPG], 2001, *Report on a Visit to Democratic Republic of Congo, 2 – 6 August 2001*, London, House of Commons.
- AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL, 2001, *Rwandan-controlled eastern DRC: Devastating Human Toll*. London, AI, June.
- Jacques DEPELCHIN, 1974, *From Pre-Capitalism to Imperialism: A History of Social and economic Formations in eastern Zaire*, Stanford, Ca., Stanford University, PhD dissertation.
- Roberto GARRETON, 1998, «The Situation of Human Rights in the Democratic Republic of the Congo», *UN Report by the Special Rapporteur for the Great Lakes Region of Africa*, Presented on 10 September 1998, New York, United Nations.
- HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH, 2002, *Uganda in Eastern DRC: Fueling Political and Ethnic Strife*, February 2002.
- Mahmood MAMDANI, 1998, «Why foreign invaders can't help Congo», *Electronic Mail & Guardian*, 2 November 1998.
- Francois NGOLET, 2000, «African and American Connivance in Congo-Zaire», *Africa Today*, vol. 47, (1), Town, Publisher, pp. 65:85.
- Johan POTTIER, 1999, «The 'Self' in Self-Repatriation: Closing down Mugunga camp, Eastern Zaire», in Richard Black and Khalid Koser (eds), *The End of the Refugee Cycle? Refugee Repatriation and Reconstruction*, Oxford, Berghahn Books, pp. 142:170.
- Johan POTTIER, 2002, *Re-Imagining Rwanda: Conflict, Survival and Disinformation in the late 20th Century*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.
- RADIO 4 ONLINE, 2001, Transcript of a programme transmitted on 10 July 2001. Downloaded from www.bbc.co.uk/radio4, London, British Broadcasting Corporation.
- William RENO, 1998, «Mines, Money and the Problem of State Building in Congo», *Issue*, vol. XXVI, (1), TOWN, Publisher, pp.14:17.
- Jan VANSINA, 1962, *L'évolution du royaume rwanda des origines à 1900*, Bruxelles, Academie Royale des Sciences d'Outre-Mer.
- Koen VLASSENROOT, 2000, «Identity and Insecurity. The Building of Ethnic Agendas in South Kivu», in Ruddy Doom and Jan Gorus (eds), *Politics of identity and Economics of Conflict in the Great Lakes Region*, Brussels, VUB University Press, pp. 263:288.
- Jean-Claude WILLAME, 1997, *Banyarwanda et Banyamulenge: Violences ethniques et gestion de l'identitaire au Kivu*, Bruxelles, Institut Africain – CEDAF; Paris, L'Harmattan.