

## Bunia Dossier

**“Break the Silence !”**

### **A Plea for Action on behalf of the Civilian Population of Ituri**

*“We are convinced that your action can save threatened human lives – just as your silence can sanction the impunity of the military and militias who sow death in Ituri”.*

*Justice-Plus, Association for the Promotion and Defense of Human Rights, Bunia*

#### **Bunia:**

Location: + Province Orientale, northeast D.R.Congo, capital – Kisangani.

+ Each of the 11 Provinces of D.R.Congo is divided into sub-regions. Bunia is in the Ituri sub-region in the southern area of Province Orientale.

+ In 1999 the commander of the Ugandan People’s Defense Force in D.R.Congo unilaterally proclaimed Ituri as a separate province with Bunia as its capital.

+ Bunia is located 50 kms from the border with Uganda.

Population: 300,000

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## **I. Document: “Break the Silence”**

### **1. Introduction**

**August 7, 2002:** *The city of Bunia is once again victim to bloody violence between the militias of Thomas Lubanga and those of the RCD/ML of Mbusa Nyamwisi.*

*Rival partisan factions of rebel leaders are again fighting in the center of the city endangering the lives and activities of the civilian population. Fighting again threatens Bunia, this time during the period of State exams for students who had come from the 5 territories of Ituri. These students are obliged to take their exams in a climate of unimaginable insecurity and trauma that can only have negative consequences.*

*The war in the D.R.Congo and the interethnic conflict in Ituri since 1999 seriously compromises the promotion of human rights in this region. The two so-called wars of liberation (1996-1997 and 1998 to the present) have resulted in the disruption of the normal functioning of State institutions and public services. Justice, administration, police and many other public services have lost their capability to protect guaranteed rights of individuals.*

*The interethnic conflict that has erupted in this non legal state has exacerbated the situation by provoking massive violations of rights. At the same time mechanisms to protect these rights are almost non-existent. These two facts explain the drama of human rights violations in Ituri.*

### **2. Background**

Since 1999, Ugandans have recruited and trained both Hema and Lendu to serve in the forces of the Congolese Rally for Democracy-Liberation Movement (RCD-ML), a rebel group backed by Uganda and which nominally controls this area. However at least some Ugandan officers reportedly favor the Hema.

In June 1999 Brigadier General James Kazini, then commander of the Ugandan People’s Defense Force (UPDF) in the Congo, ignored objections of the RCD-ML and illegally created a separate province of Ituri with Bunia as its capital. He named a Hema to head the new administration. The installation of the new governor coincided with an outbreak of violence between Lendu and Hema, with the Lendu and others seeing Uganda and the RCD-ML as increasingly committed to the Hema. In the months of violence that followed, an estimated 7,000 persons of both groups were slain and 200,000 fled their homes.

Investigatory commissions named by the RCD-ML and the local administration concluded that UPDF soldiers

had done little to contain violence in areas under their control and that several of them had actively helped Hema attack Lendu. Although the Ugandan government has denied these accusations, it reportedly began judicial proceedings against one captain accused of having given such assistance.

Even as the extent of the Hema-Lendu conflict became clear, UPDF soldiers continued to train recruits from both sides. More recently the Lendu trainees are said to have deserted the RCD-ML forces to fight instead in locally based militias.

At the end of 1999 the RCD-ML replaced the Hema governor of Ituri by a person from neither of the rival groups. In the following months, the ethnic fighting diminished but it revived after Col. Muzoora named a Hema as interim head of the province and placed the governor named by the RCD-ML under house arrest. The colonel later "deported" the deposed governor to Kampala (Uganda), where Ugandan authorities continue to hold him without explanation. The Lendu first attacked the Hema in Nyankunde, a village south of Bunia where Col. Muzoora had recently visited with the new Hema appointee. Lendu militia then attacked Hema in other villages south of Bunia, killing scores of people and driving some 8,000 across the border into Uganda. Ugandan troops intervened to end this fighting.

During this period leaders of the RCD-ML, locked in a struggle for power, were in Kampala at the request of Ugandan authorities, trying to settle their differences. The Congolese politicians failed to come to an agreement until the RCD-ML factions supposedly reconciled and agreed to combine with the Congolese Liberation Movement (MLC) into a new front against the Congolese government. Jean-Pierre Bemba of the MLC was supposedly to head the new group, the Congo Liberation Front (FLC). But Professor Wamba dia Wamba, head of the RCD-ML, balked at this agreement which he said was "imposed" by Uganda. In Bunia, Wamba and his group are seen as more allied to Lendu and other groups opposed to the Hema. The other RCD-ML faction reportedly celebrated the merger, seeing it as confirming the status of their leaders, one of whom is a prominent Hema.

Suliman Baldo, senior researcher at Human Rights Watch, warned of the gravity of the situation in Bunia. *"What makes these attacks so dangerous is the way the two groups are now identifying with the Hutu-Tutsi categories that figured in the Rwandan genocide. The Lendu are now thinking of themselves as kin to the Hutu, while the Hema are identifying with the Tutsi. The two groups have competed for control of the land for a long time, but these identifications and the connection they have to genocide threaten to transform the struggle into something far more devastating."* The Lendu, who number some 700,000 in the area, live primarily from their crops while the Hema, about 150,000 people, rely on both cattle raising and cultivation for their livelihood. The two ethnic groups share a similar language and have regularly practiced interethnic-marriage.

*(Excerpts - Human Rights Watch, January 2001)*

### 3. Authors of the violations of human rights

The Ugandan army (Uganda Peoples' Defense Forces - UPDF) and the army of the RCD/ML (Army of the Congolese People - APC) are found in the region. Officially responsible to assure the security of persons and their property, the military are at the origin of several killings and material destruction either directly or by complicity with civilian perpetrators.

**FACTS:** The region of Ituri has been occupied by the Ugandan Peoples Defense Forces (UPDF) since April 1998 and is torn apart by a war between the two prominent ethnic groups, the Lendu and the Hema.

Ethnic confrontations are responsible for nearly 15,000 deaths, 300,000 displaced persons, over 1,000 villages totally wiped out, and other extensive destruction.

The Ugandan army - UDPF, and the APC (Army of the Congolese People – part of the RCD/ML army of Mbusa Nyamwisi) play a determining role in the grievous burden of war that plagues the people of Ituri.

The region is acutely insecure, humanitarian action is dangerously paralyzed. Lendu and Hema militia and militia of local political leaders have created a reign of terror, their heavy armed conflicts in the center of the city sow death and destruction. Insecurity in outlying areas forces the people to remain in the city even during the fighting.

In the past Uganda gave military training to both Hema and Lendu who today fight one another.

Illegal traffic of small arms profits and enormously enriches the Ugandan generals and military commanders in D.R.Congo. Both Hema and Lendu militias benefit from these arms: A deliberate politic to divide and conquer.

Ugandan generals support local politicians against one another in exchange for large quantities of wine. Their support for Mbusa Nyamwisi and John Tibasima against Wamba-dia-Wamba in November-December 2000 paralyzed the city for three months. For all practical purposes the city of Bunia was divided in two: military on one side support Wamba; military on the other side support Mbusa and Tibasima.

Today while the people of Bunia live a veritable calvary, the same Ugandan military officers are in Isiro with Roger Lumbala. They are also at Beni and Butembo (North Kivu) with Mbusa, and at Gbadolite (northwest DRC) supporting JP Bemba. Given these facts it can only be doubted as to whether Uganda really is concerned for the withdrawal of its troops from D.R.Congo. Promises of withdrawal mean replacement by new troops.

Combats by opposing military rebels leaders have already caused abundant loss of life and property; the people bear the deadly consequences.

Justice-Plus has steadfastly denounced the involvement of the Ugandan army in ethnic conflicts in Ituri and its deceptive and insidious support of rebel leaders in the Northeast Congo.

*"Ituri has already paid the bitter price of war, it is time to act."* Since August 7, 2002 extremely violent fighting oppose militia of Hema and Thomas Lubanga against the APC military of Mbusa Nyamwisi. They have fought several times this year. Reliable reports including those of MONUC speak of at least 100 deaths, for the most part women and children. Fifteen mutilated bodies were found in the residence of the military governor of the city, Jean Pierre Bolondo.

#### "UPDF, the arsonist / firefighter"

In the latest conflicts in Bunia, the UPDF is known for its double role of "arsonist / firefighter". Local opinion accuses them of fighting along side the militia of Thomas Lubanga, today the UPC, using armed vehicles, heavy arms, supporting the Hema militia against the APC military. The APC in turn were supported by Lendu militia.

The residence of the governor, JP Bolondo, was seized by Ugandan tanks and Hema militia. This is where MONUC recently discovered mutilated bodies. The governor allegedly sought refuge with MONUC. Certain sources say he fled to Beni.

#### 4. "Break the Silence!"

Justice-Plus calls for serious commitment to the following actions:

- International recognition of this region;
- Prevention of renewed bloodshed of innocent people;
- Prevention of massive, systematic and serious violations of International Humanitarian Law at Bunia;

*"We are convinced that your action can save threatened human lives – just as your silence can sanction the impunity of the military and militias who sow death in Ituri."*

*We beg national and international human rights organizations concerned for peace and justice, to take action and use their advocacy with the international community (United Nations, European Parliament, African Union, etc) and the Ugandan Government to stop Uganda from inciting political and ethnic conflicts in the East of the Congo, and that appropriate measures be taken to protect civilian populations."*

#### 5. "It is time to act!"

The following actions are proposed as solutions to bring peace to Ituri:

- An independent and impartial investigation by the Special Rapporteur on Human Rights in D.R.Congo of the violence that caused over 100 deaths in Bunia during the period of August 7-10, 2002.

- That those responsible for the violations of International Humanitarian Law be pursued and brought to justice.
- In accordance with to International Humanitarian Law, that Uganda, the occupying force, protect the civilian population in the territory of D.R.Congo under its control.
- That disarmament of ethnic militias (Hema and Lendu) be undertaken as soon as possible, and that they be replaced by a neutral force;
- That an inquiry be initiated into the activities of Ugandan generals and military commanders in the Congo.

*Justice Plus, Association for the Promotion and Defense of Human Rights*

## II. Dateline

### August 2002:

The resurgence of violence in Bunia was provoked by Hema militias of Lubanga supported by Uganda. Hema militia of Thomas Lubanga, former Defense Minister of Mbusa Nyamwisi and commander of a dissident faction of RCD-ML, now control the outskirts of the city. These dissidents had deserted the RCD-ML of Nyamwisi who controlled the zone and had made Bunia his general headquarters.

The center of the city remains in the hands of RCD-ML rebels under command of Mbusa Nyamwisi. The Uganda army controls the airport.

The Lendu Governor Jean-Pierre Molondu threatened to order RCD-ML military into combat against the dissident army of Lubanga.

**August 10:** After three days of fighting the city of Bunia is under the total control of the Lubanga dissident militia.

*"There is great confusion. Fighting has stopped, dozens of people have been killed. Hema militia tried to expel the governor who is Lendu and proclaimed their victory this AM. The city is now under their control. The costly UN mission, MONUC, arrived when the fighting was over."*

**August 11:** Jean-Baptiste Dhetchuvi, spokesperson for the Hema community declared that the Bunia offensive was launched to protect Hema civilians who were being attacked by Rwandan and Ugandan rebels supported by D.R.Congo. The Ugandan minister, Amama Mbabazi confirmed that Bunia was under UPDF control. The same day Jean-Louis Kyaviro, RCD-K-ML secretary-general affirmed that the killings were the responsibility of the UPDF, and stated that the RCD-K-ML troops were located some 20 kms from Bunia.

**August 12:** Human rights activists and the international press speak of pillaging and armed aggression against the Lendu. Uganda is supporting the Hema. The city is divided in two.

An apparent calm exists in Bunia, but tensions persist after heavy fighting that had lasted several days. A correspondent: *“Even though the center of the city is calmer than last week, people are afraid and the market place is closed. Despite UPDF promises to control ethnic militia and remove them from the city, they continue to threaten people in certain neighborhoods.”*

Bunia has a population of about 300,000 and is situated less than 50 kms from the Uganda border.

The “new” authorities used the local radio to reassure the people: *“We ask everyone to assume normal activities. Markets and commerce are to resume today. All public function employees should return to work. Schools must resume courses today, Monday.*

*Let anyone who would resort to violence be warned. All weapons of any kind must be handed over to the nearest authority. Anyone disobeying these orders will be severely punished.*

*Congolese living in Ituri are safe, free, this is their home. The departure of the military governor, Jean-Pierre Molondo, should not cause concern, his safety is guaranteed.”*

The Ugandan newspaper, New Vision, reported that President Museveni ordered the “immediate and total withdrawal of UPDF soldiers from D.R.Congo”. The 53<sup>rd</sup> battalion would leave Bunia to protect the border between D.R.Congo and Uganda *“to guarantee that the ethnic fighting in Ituri does not enter Uganda.”*

**August 13:** The president of Uganda called on the UN to increase their presence in Bunia that is under Ugandan control in order to decrease ethnic conflicts in the region. President Museveni affirmed that his country would withdraw their military leaving only *“a limited force in Bunia and on the Ruwenzori Mts until the DRC government takes control of all these zones.”* Ugandan troops reportedly began withdrawal from Gbadolite (north west DRC) and Beni (northeast DRC) on August 12.

**August 14:** According to a UN report, over 2,000 persons may have been killed and more than 10,000 families have fled the fighting. The exact death toll is impossible to obtain because MONUC cannot enter the region. Amos Ngongi, the official UN representative for D.R.Congo went to Kampala (Uganda) to try to meet the principle protagonists and to ascertain the precise role played by Ugandan military who had participated in the fighting and perhaps in the massacres.

The province of Ituri where the gold mines of Kilio-Moto are located is reportedly controlled by the RCD-ML of Mbusa Nyamwisi. The diamond mines are located further north and are under the control of the RCD-National of Roger Lumbala as is the city of Isiro and its airport.

The Ugandan army is strongly present in the region despite promises of retreat, and are accused of under-handed support of different factions, particularly Hema militia.

(The Hema now organized as militia are Tutsis related to Uganda. The Lendu are cultivators of Sudanese origin who have fought with Rwanda Interahamwe).

Despite agreements between Kinshasa and Kampala and promises of military withdrawal, the Ugandan army participates in fighting against pro-governmental forces. As for MONUC and its observer mandate, it can only count the dead and travel between the war lords.

*LeSoir – Belgian newspaper*

**August 14:** RCD-K-ML of Musa Nyamwisi supported by the Lendu fled the city of Bunia, as has the governor of the region, Jean-Pierre Molondo. At first supportive of Nyamwisi, Uganda has been supporting the Hema militia for the past week. RCD-K-ML asserted their intention of re-capturing the city of Isiro and its gold mines located 200 kms west of Bunia under RCD-N control for the past seven months.

Numerous businesses and homes have been pillaged and/or destroyed. Despite having had to interrupt their activities and penury of supplies, most humanitarian groups do not find the situation deteriorated to the point of requiring evacuation.

Amos Ngongi, Special Representative of Kofi Annan in the Congo, went to Kampala (Uganda) to discuss a peace process with Ugandan authorities. He is expected to remind the Ugandans of their international responsibilities in Bunia. As occupying force, Uganda is obliged to guarantee the security of the civilian population, according to international law.

**August 15:** Over 100 civilians died in fighting near the border with Uganda which has worsened an already precarious humanitarian situation. The UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) said that looting included nearly 14 tons of food destined for the people.

A long-running feud over land has been fuelled by divisions within the RCD-ML, which theoretically controls Bunia, and by the wider war that has raged in the country since 1998 despite a series of peace negotiations.

Aid agencies working in the region are calling for emergency aid to supplement severely inadequate supplies in Ituri.

Two sections of Bunia are unreachable because of continued fighting. Nearly all medical personnel have abandoned the city's three health centers. According to preliminary tolls, fighting has displaced nearly 10,000 families over the past two months. Three weeks ago aid agencies had begun distributing emergency aid to some 4,000 displaced families, but the operation was interrupted by the resumption of fighting in Bunia.

On Tuesday, Ugandan President Yoweri Museveni appealed to the United Nations to boost the number of peacekeepers it has in Bunia.

**August 15:** Statement by the President of the UN Security Council on the situation in Bunia:

Members of the Council condemn the fighting and massacres in Bunia and call for an immediate end to this violence and that those responsible be brought to justice.

Members of the Council commend the United Nations Organization Mission in the Congo (MONUC) for its actions in the region and its efforts to stabilize the situations.

Members of the Council encourage Uganda, until its forces are entirely withdrawn from DRC territory, to continue to meet its obligations impartially, in accordance with the Protocol to the Geneva Convention and the Protection of Civilians in Warfare, in the territories where its forces are present.

Members of the Council urge the international community to provide humanitarian assistance to the Bunia area.

**August 16:** Nairobi, Kenya - An aircraft carrying 14 mt of humanitarian aid consisting of food and non-food items as well as medicine left Kinshasa, bound for Bunia.

The aid consignment was donated by the international aid agency, MEMISA-Belgique, the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the DRC Ministry of Health, while transport costs have been shared equally among UN agencies and MEMISA-Belgique. However, (UN) OCHA said on Friday that it was still trying to procure water purification tablets.

A relief operation that had begun on 25 July for some 4,000 families displaced by previous combat in the region had to be suspended due to the most recent fighting.

**August 21:** Network of Organizations of Human Rights and Christian Civic Education – RODHECIC

RODHECIC informs the national and international community of important information it has received concerning the present conflicts in the Ituri region.

On January 22, 2002 the RODHECIC Secretariat had denounced the politic of divide and conquer practiced by the Ugandan army in territories under its control in East D.R.Congo. At that time RODHECIC denounced the support Uganda extended to both sides of the antagonists in the political struggle by RCD-ML leaders who multiplied militia in the region in total contempt for the security of the population. When the rival factions were constituted, the perpetuity of Ugandan presence on Congolese soil was guaranteed.

Chronology of events: By August 2 the city had been *divided into four factions*:

1. APC – Mbusa Nyamwisi who controlled all the administration area including the governor's residence;
2. The Hema militia of Thomas Lubanga controlled the market place and the cities of Bunia and Mudzi Pela;
3. The Ugandan army UPDF constituted a buffer zone between the two forces;
4. The Lendu militia controlled the surrounding villages.

This was the foreboding situation of impending chaos. But the Ugandan army who are considered the masters of the area did not stop the massacre of the civilian population. On the contrary killings took place and continued to take place in presence of UPDF military who did nothing. Since August 5, 2002 kidnappings and executions took place in broad daylight by Hema militia. Over 50 persons were executed in a period of three days. Anti-personnel mines were laid in certain places by a group of young Hema called Alcaïda II. Three people were killed by these mines near the military camp Ndoromo. On August 8 eight people were killed including a radio news reporter, and an entire Lendu family – parents and children. This was followed by selective pillaging of three neighborhoods.

The Secretariat of RODHECIC demands:

1. The Security Council to put pressure on Uganda to withdraw its army from D.R.Congo. Reason: It is an established fact that since the Ugandan army is in Congo territory they are the source of grave human rights violations.
2. The establishment of a neutral international inquiry to ascertain the facts concerning the distinct confrontations in Ituri and that those responsible be punished.

*Kinshasa, Secretariat  
Network of Organizations of Human Rights and  
Christian Civic Education (RODHECIC)*

**August 22** - The United Nations envoy to the Democratic Republic of the Congo said that ongoing conflicts in the eastern city of Bunia are not simply ethnic in nature, but rather that they are motivated by underlying political and economic interests.

*"Everyone is convinced that this is not only an ethnic problem, but also a political matter fuelled by economic interests,"* Ambassador Amos Namanga Ngongi, UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan's Special Representative to the D.R.Congo, told a news conference in Kinshasa.

The latest round of fighting erupted on 6 August when ethnic Hema militias, supported by the Ugandan army and the Union des Patriotes Congolais (UPC) - a dissident faction of the rebel Rassemblement Congolais pour la Démocratie-Kisangani-Mouvement de Liberation (RCD-K-ML) - seized control of most of Bunia and took charge of the local government. Humanitarian sources have reported that over 110 civilians were killed in the most recent hostilities.

Uganda has since announced that it would withdraw all its remaining troops from the Congo. An agreement to this effect is due to be signed by Ugandan President Yoweri Museveni and President Joseph Kabila, following negotiations brokered last week by Angola.

According to the Accord, 2,500 Ugandan soldiers are currently in the Congo, namely in the northwestern city of Gbadolite, and the eastern cities of Bunia, Beni and Butembo. Bunia is located less than 50 kms from the Ugandan border.

*"In Gbadolite and Beni, the problem [of insecurity] is not present. Withdrawal could be done within a couple of days. However, in Bunia discussion must be held with D.R.Congo and Uganda to see how a competent administration could be established. The RCD-K-ML, the de facto administrative authority of the region, does not have the ability at present to ensure the safety of the civilian population."* Ngongi called on all parties implicated in the conflict to assume their responsibilities. He said he had received assurances from Uganda that all militias had been expelled from Bunia and that Ugandan forces were in control of the city.

Deploring the absence of a competent police force to protect civilians, Ngongi reported that MONUC had taken steps to reinforce its presence in Bunia, and was currently studying the possibility of training a civilian police force to ensure the safety of the local population.

**August 22:** The army of Jean Pierre Bemba pillaged the mission and catholic hospital near Mungbere (140 kms east of Isiro) taking everything, including solar panels that are the sole source of electricity. At present the hospital can no longer function. The assault by the Bemba militia corroborate the situation of raids by the two rival armies to which the civilian population has been condemned for months. The conflict between the MLC and the RCD-ML (also called RCD-Bunia) under Nyamwisi gives no truce to civilians. Bemba's troop movements have been seen headed toward Dungu, about 200 kms northeast of Isiro. Local people have already begun to seek refuge in neighboring villages.

R'rdda Bela, president of the Lendu community of Kinshasa asked the UN to initiate an inquiry mission in Ituri to clarify the humanitarian drama. The Lendu community demanded the arrest of Thomas Lubanga who defended the events in Bunia and the subsequent massive reinforcements of Ugandan military in Ituri.

**August 25:** Kinshasa - A conference on peace perspectives in Ituri was initiated in Kinshasa by the Minister of Human Rights, Ntumba Luaba who had just returned from the region. Present were representatives of the government, about 100 delegates of the 9 ethnic communities concerned, members of the UN Mission (MONUC), civil society, religious

confessions and the diplomatic corps. No representatives of the rebel movements were present. The purpose of the meeting was to bring together concerned communities to discuss possibilities of a peaceful settlement in a non-confrontational encounter.

A Hema representative spoke of the existence "of a project of genocide and ethnic purification". Lendu representatives accused the Hema of massacres and asserted that Ituri is theater of an operation orchestrated by Uganda who was using radicalization of ethnic confrontations to prepare the division of Congo territory. Rwanda and Uganda had already been accused of using the conflict to serve their own interests in order to pillage the natural resources of the region, at the price of the deaths of thousands to people.

The meeting was not regarded as a success but is considered the first step in a process. Further meetings are to be held in Bunia and other localities in Ituri in September.

Humanitarian organizations in Bunia appealed to the UN office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) for urgent food and medical aid for persons displaced by the fighting and the wounded. In the last fighting 14 tons of food had been pillaged.

**August 27:** Heavy fighting resumed in the area of Dungu, 200km Northeast of Isiro between troops of the MLC of Jean-Pierre Bemba, and the RCD-ML, known also as RCD-Bunia led by Mbusa Nyamwisi. Four months of fighting brought defeat to the Nyamwisi's RCD-ML (RCD-Bunia) which fled toward Uganda.

The military offensive aimed at guaranteeing MLC control of rich gold and diamond deposits. A further political implication has been cited: Bemba's frustration with Kinshasa. In this perspective he is allegedly trying to assure himself the dominion of a vast area of the territory, with the intention of having a major role in the phase of negotiations.

**August 28:** The city of Dungu was captured by Jean-Pierre Bemba and the men of the MLC. Four months of violent fighting between the MLC of Bemba and the RCD-ML, known also as RCD-Bunia) of Mbusa Nyamwisi ended with the defeat of the RCD-ML, who fled toward the Ugandan border. People who had fled their homes have no intention of returning at the moment. The situation remains unsure.

**August 30:** The government of Kinshasa demanded the immediate and unconditional liberation of Ntumba Luaba Lumu, Minister of Human Rights, and the other members of his delegation who had been detained by a local authority in Madro, Ituri territory, Province Orientale (northeast D.R.Congo), 12 kms from Bunia. He had gone to Ituri to persuade local political leaders and traditional chiefs to join current efforts underway at a conference in Kinshasa so that the people would again have peace, calm and tranquility.

*"The Government of the Republic, who is enemy of no faction among the rival protagonists of Ituri, invite those who took the hostages to wisdom, self-restraint and patriotism to advance the cause of peace in their district. The Government challenges them to do all possible to protect the dignity and physical well-being of the Minister and the members of his delegation who must be freed rapidly and unconditionally."*

**La Voix des Sans-Voix (VSV):** The Voice of the Voiceless for Human Rights denounced the arrest of the Human Rights Minister who had gone to Bunia on a 24 hour mission as part of the Congolese government effort begun in April 2002 to restore peace to the Ituri territory. He had been sent to bring back to Kinshasa complementary local personalities to participate in a peace conference to be held in Kinshasa August 26-31, 2002. They were released on Sunday, September 1.

The VSV strongly condemned *"the taking of prisoners that could re-ignite the fighting when methods are being sought to reconcile the daughters and sons of Ituri and establish lasting peace in this region."*

The VSV reiterated their concerns voiced in June 2002 for an impartial, efficacious and lasting resolution of the Ituri conflict.

### **September 2002:**

**September 3:** The head of the United Nations Organization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUC) hailed the release of the country's top human rights official while cautioning that the lack of security in the region remains a source of concern that must be addressed. Mr. Ngongi said in a statement that the incident again raised the problem of increasing insecurity in Bunia and the surrounding area.

**September 3:** Kampala, Rwanda - The New Vision newspaper of Rwanda reported that over 300 refugees mainly from Bunia have entered Uganda through Kango in the western Ugandan district of Nebbi. The Congolese entered Kango between August 19 and 30 to escape fighting. There was fear that the refugees may starve because there is no adequate food in that area.

**September 4:** The UN peacekeeping mission expressed concern over recent advances by rebel troops and the Rwandan Patriotic Army (RPA) into territory recently vacated by the Ugandan army.

Addressing a news conference in Kinshasa UN special envoy Amos Namanga Ngongi, said he had asked Roger Lumbala, leader of the rebel Rassemblement Congolais pour la Démocratie-National (RCD-N) to order his

troops to halt their advance towards Beni and Bunia. Both these northeastern cities had been previously occupied by the Ugandan-backed RCD-K-ML.

Uganda, which also supports the RCD-N, recently withdrew nearly 2,000 of its soldiers from locations including Beni. However, two Ugandan battalions remain in Bunia to safeguard civilian security following violent clashes there last month.

According to the UN mission MONUC, advances by RCD-N have the objective of recovering territory lost to RCD-K-ML in March and April while the inter-Congolese dialogue was being held in Sun City, South Africa. Lumbala was the head of the RCD-K-ML's department of internal affairs before forming his RCD-N breakaway faction.

Ngongi confirmed recent accusations made by DRC Defense Minister Irung Awan that about 1,000 Rwandan forces occupied the town of Kasuo, near the city of Lubero, 150 km north of Goma. *"There have been RPA troop movements toward Lubero, an area under control of the Ugandan-backed RCD-K-ML. I hope that the Rwandan troops will not continue towards other locations in Ituri"*.

Rwanda has reportedly told MONUC that its army is in a counteroffensive against forces of the Interahamwe (Rwandan Hutu extremist militias) and the ex-FAR (Forces armées rwandaïses, Rwanda's former army), both heavily implicated in the 1994 genocide.

**September 6:** MLC troops of Jean-Pierre Bemba and those of his ally Roger Lumbala culminated their military strategy with the capture of the strategic mining center of Watsa (300 kms east of Isiro and northwest of Bunia). They had already seized 4 other cities in the region, and were expected to continue to Watsa to assure exploitation of important deposits of gold and diamonds of the area. According to reports the RCD-ML (also called RCD-Bunia) troops of Mbusa Nyamwisi are now out of the region. In their advance toward Watsa the MLC particularly targeted the Nande people, the ethnic group of Nyamwisi.

**September 9:** At the closure of the peace conference held in Kinshasa with Lendu and Hema representatives there was no agreement concerning the withdrawal of Ugandan troops from the Ituri region. The Lendu spokesperson, Thewi Batsi urged immediate withdrawal from the city of Bunia and stated that *"true peace will automatically come when there will no longer be any Ugandan troops that support the Hema in Ituri."* The Hema spokesperson, Pilo Kamarati called the Ugandan presence an assurance of security and said that *"Uganda sustains calmness."*

Despite their differences all ethnic groups of the region signed a final communiqué demanding the departure of Uganda and their replacement by government police force. No agreement was reached on a time line. Human Rights Minister Ntumba Luaba-Lumu who presided the meeting

indicated that *“the accord between both presidents foresees the progressive retreat of Ugandan troops and the progressive installation of our police force and administration in order to avoid a vacuum.”*

**September 9:** RCD-N leader Roger Lumbala said the RCD-N (Congoese Rally for Democracy-National) is determined to go all the way in its battle against Mbusa Nyamwisi's RCD-ML. *“We were attacked by RCD-ML troops. The international community was informed of the attack but did not act to prevent it. We have decided to hunt down the RCD-ML soldiers in the strongholds from which they organized these attacks, that is in Beni and Butembo near the Ugandan border in the east of North Kivu province.*

Both rebel groups are supported by Uganda. The RCD-N is based in Bafwasende and Isiro, some 210 kilometers (130 miles) northeast of Beni.

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*Information published in **great lakes – central africa** is received from different sources: documents and reports published in D.R. Congo, the Great Lakes region and Europe; reports from local human rights groups, civil society, church groups, non-governmental organizations, and concerned persons; articles from African and European publications; personal contacts and correspondence. Frequency of publication is determined by information received. Topics are chosen in response to requests from the Great Lakes region, and are frequently compiled from several sources. In many instances individual attribution must be withheld.*