

27 September 2006

Democratic Republic of the Congo: Refugees International Requests Security Council to Authorize an Expanded Role for UN Peacekeeping Mission

Refugees International President Kenneth Bacon has sent the following letter to United Nations Security Council members requesting them to authorize an expanded role for MONUC, the UN Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. MONUC troops are making a difference, but with an expanded force and mandate they will be able to bring greater stability to the Congo in the critical post-election period.

Dear Ambassador:

I am writing to urge you to authorize an expanded role for the UN Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUC) under a new twelve-month mandate. Deployment in unstable areas, greater involvement in security sector reform, and enforcing the embargo on arms and natural resources over the next year are crucial aspects of ensuring peace and stability in the DRC that only MONUC can provide.

This recommendation springs from repeated missions by Refugees International to the DRC and the Great Lakes, the most recent in June and July 2006. During this last mission in particular, our advocates found that security is the most pressing humanitarian issue in the country. The situation has improved greatly in the past few years, largely due to the efforts of MONUC: violence in the east has eased, massacres in Ituri have stopped, and refugees and internally displaced people are beginning to return home. There is much more to do, however, before the UN intervention can be called a success: a short-term expansion of MONUC is the key to maintaining progress.

The FARDC—the new Congolese national army—is the biggest threat to the security of the population. Its underpaid and ill-trained troops are abandoned by their commanders, forcing them to live off the backs of the population and opening the door to brutal abuse, particularly rape. Beyond the threat to individual human rights, these abuses are a major cause of conflict in the DRC, as local armed groups fight back to protect their communities. Civilians also come under attack from foreign and local rebel groups seeking control over natural resources or fighting against neighboring governments. Joint operations between the FARDC and MONUC to subdue these groups have displaced hundreds of thousands since January 2006 with little strategic gain. MONUC has come under pressure to pursue such a military solution, but neither MONUC nor the FARDC has the capacity to implement it.

In addition, the Security Council recently extended an embargo on the flow of weapons and the natural resources that pay for them to and from the DRC. MONUC again does not have the capacity to monitor and enforce this embargo, despite a specific mandate to do so, due to a lack of troops, equipment, and intelligence capabilities. The embargo is

crucial to choking off the source of conflict in the DRC, but has never been respected.

The fastest and most effective way to end attacks on civilians, reduce displacement, and get people home is to increase MONUC's troops and resources. An additional battalion, at least, is urgently needed in each province of North Kivu, South Kivu, and Katanga, as well as in Ituri, with longer deployments to priority areas. MONUC has already had a substantial impact on peace and stability in the DRC, despite its small number of troops relative to the size of the problem, but it is operating at its limits. An expansion, even for just a few months, would allow it to deploy to more areas where fighting and abuses continue to take their toll on civilians. A stronger MONUC could:

Secure more roads, allowing more humanitarian assistance to reach those in need, protect civilians, and encourage returns.

Deter armed groups more effectively, putting more pressure on them to negotiate and accept peace agreements, and providing more muscle to enforce those agreements.

Provide greater assistance and support to the FARDC, thus deterring abuses and speeding MONUC's reduction and withdrawal.

Enforce the embargo on the illegal transfer of weapons and natural resources between the DRC and neighboring territories. Beyond more troops along the border and at customs points, this would require special equipment (especially for nighttime surveillance) and intelligence capabilities.

Increase assistance with disarming and demobilizing foreign and local combatants.

An expanded MONUC would have the most immediate impact in reducing displacement and vulnerability in the Nioka and Tch  areas of Ituri, in Walikale and Rutshuru in North Kivu, in the interior of Central and Northern Katanga, and in Bunyakiri, Mwenga, and Shabunda in South Kivu.

Expanding MONUC would entail not only authorizing more troops and allocating more funds. Troop contributing countries such as Bangladesh, Morocco, Uruguay, Pakistan, and Nepal, which have already endured great sacrifice in the DRC, would have to make a full commitment to implement all aspects of MONUC's mandate. In addition, MONUC requires a greater intelligence capacity to execute that mandate, which can only be provided by major Western powers such as the U.S. and Europe.

Concerted action by MONUC with the new Congolese government and other partners over the coming year can lead to a resolution of the humanitarian crisis in the DRC and the return home of millions of people. Thank you for your efforts to give MONUC the authority and resources it needs to achieve this goal.

Sincerely,

Kenneth H. Bacon
President

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