

May 31, 2003

## Stopping the Genocide in Congo

### New York Times Editorial

In 1995, a contingent of 400 lightly armed Dutch peacekeepers stood by while Serbs massacred some 7,000 Muslim men and boys in Srebrenica, Bosnia. The United Nations, which had promised security, betrayed Srebrenica by failing to send enough men and crippling them with restrictive rules of engagement. The U.N.'s failure shocked the world's conscience at the time. Today, the same thing is happening in eastern Congo.

War in the Democratic Republic of Congo has lasted four years, involved a half-dozen African nations and killed more than 3 million people. In the district of Ituri, home to 4.6 million, the U.N. promised to guarantee security as a peace process was put into place. But a small contingent of peacekeepers has been able to do no more than watch as civilians are massacred. A new force approved yesterday by the Security Council is a real improvement, but may not be strong enough.

Congo's war is being played out in miniature in Ituri, where 60,000 people have been killed and half a million displaced since 1999. The warring parties in Ituri are militias backed and armed by the governments of Congo and neighboring Uganda and Rwanda. In April, peace talks in the region made progress. Ugandan forces controlled Ituri, and there was a temporary peace. But on April 26, the Ugandans pulled out, as specified in the peace accords. The U.N. promised to secure the zone but sent only 712 soldiers, who are allowed only to guard U.N. property and escort humanitarian workers. Interethnic massacres have so far killed about 400 people.

Yesterday the U.N. Security Council authorized the deployment of a French-led force of 1,400 new soldiers, most of them French but others from African and other nations. The soldiers will be able to use force to protect civilians but will not be able to leave Bunia, the capital. Yet much of the population has fled to the countryside, and massacres are occurring there. We worry that the troops may be too few and have too limited a mandate to do what is needed: stop the killings, end the flow of weapons from neighboring countries and disarm the militias. The French-led contingent and its new powers are also temporary. When Bangladeshi soldiers arrive in September, they will come with a weaker mandate, leaving them unable even to protect civilians in the capital.

A strong U.N. force is just one part of the necessary response. The United States, European countries and South Africa must all increase the pressure on Congo, Uganda and Rwanda to carry out the peace accords and stop arming proxy militias. Ituri is one of the most violent and byzantine regions of a dangerous and complex war. There is no peace to keep. In such situations, peacekeepers run great risks, and the U.N. should not send them lightly. But when genocidal massacres are occurring, the world has a duty to step in.

Copyright 2003 The New York Times Company