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Democratic Republic of Congo: Mission findings

The human cost

K., a 25-year-old Nande civilian, has been in an IDP camp since 10 May, after members of the Hema-dominated *Union des patriotes congolais* (Union of Congolese Patriots, UPC) - militia forced their way into his home. The militia-men asked each of the some 20 people in the house what ethnic group they belonged to and then used sticks and daggers to beat and stab one woman and three men to death, all of them civilians. The remaining men were then taken out of the house, given sticks, and made to advance in front of the UPC soldiers as human shields. As the UPC advanced, they entered nearby houses and systematically macheted and stabbed to death non-Hema civilians. In the course of two hours, K. witnessed the cold-blooded slaughter of some 50 people.

Tens of thousands of other Ituri civilians have fled the province altogether over the last year. On 6 May alone, some 6,000 Bunia civilians, including many Hema, accompanied the withdrawing Ugandan army to the Ugandan border. Others, including many from the Lendu, Bira and Alur ethnic groups, fled south to North-Kivu province, in particular to the towns of Oicha and Erengeti

L., a 35 year-old Hema woman who fled east from Bunia on 10 May, was stopped and taken prisoner by Lendu and Ngiti militia in the village of Bavi on 11 May. The militia were systematically singling out people whom they suspected of being Hema and seeking confirmation of their suspicions from a local witch-doctor (*féticheur*). After the witch-doctor denounced L. as a Hema, they took all of her clothes except for a single garment and imprisoned her overnight in a metre-deep waterlogged pit in the ground with two other older Hema women. These two women, one of whom was called Edroni, were later taken out of the hole and hacked to death by Ngiti militia using hand-axes. L. herself managed to escape and reach Uganda.

Limited scope - and hence limited effectiveness - of the French-led multinational force

Bunia is host to two international military presences: the MONUC, and an Interim Emergency Multinational Force (IEMF) led by France and mandated by the United Nations to remain in Bunia until 1 September.

Since its deployment in on 6 June, the IEMF, which has been almost universally welcomed by the civilian population of Bunia, has contributed greatly to improving the security situation in Bunia itself, in particular around the airport and the MONUC headquarters in town. However, despite day-time and night-time armoured patrols through the town centre, as well as occasional reconnaissance missions beyond Bunia to outlying areas, the IEMF has not attempted to fully secure all the districts of Bunia, and still less to bring greater security to other regions in Ituri, with the result that many abuses have continued.

At the end of June, in the Saio district of Bunia, a 45-year-old Bira woman and her 13-year-old daughter were woken from sleep by a group of young UPC militia-men, who demolished a door to force their way into the house. Once inside, they looted and destroyed property and accused the mother and daughter of hiding Lendu combatants in their home. They then attempted to abduct the daughter. When the mother tried to intervene, both she and her daughter were brutally raped side-by-side by two of the militia-men, not far from their home. Both mother and child suffered injuries as a result of the attack.

Without a meaningful international military presence outside Bunia, appalling massacres have been continuing unchecked throughout the province. On 22 July in the town of Nizi to the north of Bunia, some 22 civilians were massacred by Lendu and Ngiti militia. Many of the corpses, riddled with bullet holes, had been butchered with knives and machetes -- internal organs and genital organs had been cut from the bodies.

On 15 July an alliance of Lendu and Ngiti militia and elements of the Nande-dominated RCD-ML (*Rassemblement congolais pour la démocratie - Mouvement de libération*, Congolese Rally for Democracy - Liberation Movement), an armed group which is given direct military support by the Kinshasa government -- attacked the town of Tchomia on the shores of Lake Albert. Tchomia, which is under the control of a Hema-dominated armed faction called PUSIC - *Parti pour l'unité et la sauvegarde de l'intégrité du Congo* (Party for Unity and the Safeguarding of Congo's Unity). In the course of around ten hours of intense fighting, some 80 people, including many civilians, were killed and dozens of others were taken hostage by the attacking militia, some three-quarters of whom were child soldiers. Around 200 houses, accounting for around one fifth of the town, were destroyed. This latest attack on Tchomia followed an even more devastating confrontation on 31 May, when RCD-ML combatants again attacked Tchomia and deliberately targeted the hospital, killing some 34 people there, mainly Hema and Alur, including women and children. The overall death toll of around six hours of fighting was reportedly some 300 people. The only civilians remaining in Tchomia today are those who are too poor to pay the \$3US dollars required to take a canoe ride across Lake Albert to the comparative safety of neighbouring Uganda.

Responsibilities of regional governments

The Kinshasa government, through its support for the RCD-ML, continues to be directly implicated in the bloodshed in eastern DRC. Despite their official withdrawal from eastern DRC, Rwanda and Uganda also continue to provide support to the armed factions operating in Ituri. Uganda has supported PUSIC and the *Forces armées pour le Congo* (Armed Forces for the Congo, FAPC) - of Commander Jerome Kakwavu, whose stronghold is in the north-eastern Ituri towns of Aru and Mahagi. Both Uganda and Rwanda have at different times supported the UPC of Thomas Lubanga. The UPC has also entered into a formal alliance with the RCD-Goma, the main Rwandese-backed armed political group in eastern DRC, which has continued to wage war in the province of North-Kivu, in spite of the ceasefire supposedly in force. All of these groups have been responsible for gross human rights abuses.

As recently as mid-July, Chief Kahwa, the leader of PUSIC, was again present with his militia in the Bundibugyo district of western Uganda, where tens of thousands of Congolese have taken refuge. The ostensible purpose of his visit was to recruit Hema refugees into the ranks of PUSIC. It is inconceivable that the Ugandan authorities were unaware of his presence there, given the substantial Ugandan army deployment in the district, close to the towns where most of the refugees are concentrated.

Failure of MONUC

MONUC was originally deployed to the DRC to monitor the implementation of a ceasefire accord signed in Lusaka, Zambia, in 1999. Small numbers of MONUC personnel have been present in Bunia for a number of years. MONUC has played a facilitating role in the holding of peace talks between warring factions and in the distribution of humanitarian aid, it has conducted sporadic investigations into human rights abuses committed during the conflict and it has monitored and reported on many of the violations of the nominal ceasefire

However, a hostage to its weak mandate and often lacking the necessary equipment, personnel and international political backing, MONUC's record in promoting the security of the civilian population has been little short of disgraceful. The organization has on occasion stood by as civilians have been killed, sometimes within direct view of MONUC compounds. When in mid-May the UPC issued threats over the radio against civilians in Bunia's IDP camps, MONUC rightly denounced this as a flagrant violation of its mandate under Chapter VII of the UN Charter to 'protect civilians under imminent threat of physical violence'. But the reality is that MONUC has consistently failed to implement this crucial element of its mandate - with the most devastating of consequences for the civilian population

.Amnesty International holds that countless deaths and the displacement of tens of thousands of civilians could have been prevented had MONUC intervened effectively after the withdrawal of Ugandan troops from Bunia on 6 May. MONUC must have been acutely aware of the inevitability of further ethnically-targeted slaughter if it failed to intervene: there can simply be no excuse for MONUC, and more generally the United Nations Security Council, not to have ensured that it had the necessary reinforcements in place in early May in order to be able to prevent the bloodshed.

The weakness and lack of resolve of MONUC was further underscored in a humiliating incident on 18 July when a MONUC-led convoy attempting to travel from Bunia to the North-Kivu town of Beni was stopped some 30km south of Bunia by around a dozen Lendu child soldiers, ranging in age from 8 to 16. Despite being well-armed and disposing of several armoured vehicles, the MONUC convoy failed to impose its will on these child soldiers and instead returned to Bunia.

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