



Situation Report

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Is Ituri on the Road to Stability? An update on the current security situation in the district

Introduction

This situation report aims to provide a snapshot of the current situation in the Ituri district in the north-eastern region of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). For the past six years this area has been torn apart by violent conflict involving six main militia groups. These groups have organised themselves along ethnic lines, pitting the two main ethnic groups of the region – Hema and Lendu – against one another in a regional war which is estimated to have killed at least 50,000 people.

The war in Ituri was for a long time merely a sidebar to the main conflict in the rest of the country. As such it was largely ignored, and efforts to bring an end to conflict in this region only began in earnest in late-2002 and early-2003 through the joint efforts of the former Congolese government and the United Nations Mission in the DRC (MONUC). Since then, numerous peace agreements have been signed, aimed at getting the parties to end the conflict and disarm. Although Ituri's six main groups signed these agreements, peace and stability have proved elusive and the atrocities and killings have continued, albeit on a smaller scale. A 1 September 2004 deadline to disarm was widely ignored, as the various groups were reluctant to take the first step in the disarmament process (for a brief description of Ituri's main groups please refer to Annex 1 at the end of this situation report).

Earlier this year however, the situation took a more serious turn. Late in February, nine Bangladeshi peacekeepers in Ituri were ambushed and killed by the Lendu Front *National Integrationiste* (FNI) during a routine patrol in Kafe, a town located along Lac Albert. The killings were immediately condemned by MONUC, the UN Security Council and the *Comite International d'Accompagnement a la Transition* (CIAT). In the aftermath of the killings, Ambassador William Swing, Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Coordinator of United Nations Activities in the DRC, issued a severe ultimatum to the leaders and rank and file of the militia groups operating in Ituri: disarm by 30 March, or face arrest.

On a positive note, this ultimatum, and the subsequent detention of numerous militia leaders (Hema and Lendu) has given the previously sluggish disarmament process in Ituri an enormous boost. To date, more than 10,000 of an estimated 15,000 militiamen have disarmed and are awaiting reinsertion into their communities.² MONUC contingents and military observers are now deployed in the principal towns throughout the district, and MONUC forces are now engaged

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regularly in what are called “cordon and containment operations” aimed at tracking down militia that have not submitted themselves to the voluntary disarmament process. MONUC is assisted by the *Forces Armées de la République Démocratique du Congo* (FARDC) whose forces in Ituri are composed of the first integrated brigade in the new Congolese army (known as the Ituri Brigade), as well as a second battalion of FARDC forces which have been gradually moving into the area since the latter half of April.³

Recent escalation and external involvement

The question of whether or not the root causes of the conflict in Ituri have been resolved is a complex and intricate one. Although the origin of the conflict is the dispute between the two main ethnic groups – Hema and Lendu⁴ – it quickly evolved into a far more complex situation in which the protection of considerable business interests (as well as regional political aspirations) became increasingly important factors.

In 1999 a small group of Hema in the area of Walendu Pitsi attempted to modify land ownership registers by bribing local officials. It is alleged that they subsequently used the new documents to evict Lendu inhabitants from their homes and land, prompting the Lendu to retaliate. The situation soon escalated as a result of the Ugandan military authorities’ nomination of a Hema as provisional governor of the Ituri district. This gave the impression that the Ugandan army present in the DRC was actively supporting the Hema in the emerging conflict, and further aggravated the affair.⁵

Although the level of animosity between the Hema and Lendu at this stage was probably greater than ever before, this does not in itself explain how the conflict grew to engulf the entire district for another six years. In addition to the fact that intellectuals from both communities stoked animosities with their extremist rhetoric, there was the even greater influence of the Ugandan army, without whose interference the conflict would have been unlikely to grow to its current magnitude.

Having officially intervened in the DRC because of their country’s security interests along the DRC-Uganda border, Ugandan army commanders quickly developed important business interests in the Ituri region, which they needed to protect.⁶ In order to do this, the Ugandan army has, at one time or another, trained and supplied almost every armed group which has operated in Ituri.⁷ In addition, it has exerted great influence over the internal politics of the various armed groups, removing and appointing leaders and provoking the emergence of splinter groups whenever it suited their interests. This interference has directly contributed to the chaos and mayhem that have reigned in Ituri since 1999.

On the other hand, the conclusion in early 2003 of the alliance between the Rwandan-backed *Rassemblement Congolais pour la Démocratie – Goma* (RCD-G) and Thomas Lubanga’s *Union des Patriotes Congolais* (UPC) is the only tangible evidence, of Rwandan interests in the Ituri region. There is anecdotal evidence to indicate that this alliance involved the training, supply and even command of UPC troops not only by RCD-G soldiers, but also by Rwandan troops. Whether or not Rwandan soldiers were themselves in Ituri, the involvement of the RCD-G added another layer of complexity to the situation.

At present there are unconfirmed reports that Rwanda continues to provide weapons to the UPC.⁸ If this is in fact the case, then it will be extremely difficult to compel the UPC to surrender voluntarily and submit to the disarmament process. It would also indicate that Rwanda is cultivating interests in the region - interests that have little to do with its own security concerns (for example, the presence of the Interahamwe militia in North and South Kivu).

Inter-ethnic conflict or a “war of bandits”?

While the groups in Ituri still maintain an ethnic identity and ideology, the perpetuation of the conflict is less the consequence of ethnic hatred than of the generalised insecurity throughout the Ituri district. In fact, most of the rank and file combatants of the various groups indicate that they joined the fighting as a result of attacks on their villages and families.⁹

The above would seem to indicate that there is some hope that stability can return if the ex-combatants are confident that they will not be threatened by one group or another, and if they are provided with viable alternatives to waging war. Most ex-combatants in the transit sites indicated that they were tired of the war and did not see any real reason to pursue the conflict. “I don’t feel any hatred towards the Lendu as a group. It is time for peace now. We have lost too much time already,” said one Hema combatant from the *Parti pour l’Unité et la Sauvegarde de l’Intégrité du Congo* (PUSIC).

Civil authorities in the province also indicate that they do not believe that the ethnic dimension of the conflict continues to be a major factor. District Commissioner Petronille Vaweka says: “This was no longer an interethnic war. It had become a war of bandits. These militia preferred to use weapons to make a living. It has become a profession, to rape and loot.” She adds, “These militias know that they will be pursued and perhaps killed if they do not disarm. They have surrendered because they have been forced to, but there were also signs that the war was winding down.”¹⁰

This position is not shared by many of the intellectual leaders of the Lendu and Hema communities, whose rhetoric of ethnic hatred and division remains extreme. Representatives of both communities tell a one-sided tale of past injustices and atrocities. The Lendu version of this tale is that they have been oppressed by the Hema since colonial times and that they have never been allowed to develop. They accuse the Hema of starting and perpetuating the conflict, and are unwilling to admit that the various Lendu-led militias have also been involved in horrible atrocities.¹¹ The Hema version is similar, but extends to a theory of an international conspiracy against them, which involves the Interahamwe and various other “negative forces”.¹²

The subject of reconciliation is therefore difficult. A Lendu representative indicated that Ituri needed a neutral judge who could determine who was to blame for the conflict and the atrocities that have been committed.¹³ A Hema leader was categorical: reconciliation cannot take place; Hema and Lendu cannot cohabit and they must be physically separated.¹⁴ Even in Ituri, these views are widely regarded as extreme and are not echoed by more moderate elements of civil society, Hema or Lendu. Interestingly, neither Lendu nor Hema representatives considered any of the armed groups to be representative of their communities. “The UPC is not to be confused with the Hema community, the FAPC [*Forces Armées du Peuple Congolais*] even less. We have never adhered to the UPC.”¹⁵

The Lendu leader indicated in an interview that the Lendu community had been betrayed by the main Lendu armed group, the Front National Intégrationiste (FNI):

The notables (community leaders) wanted to interact with the FNI, but they were pursuing their economic interests and were not interested. We are disappointed in this.

This is a sentiment echoed by many others in Bunia, who do not believe that the Hema or Lendu identify with the armed groups that supposedly represent their communities. In this regard, Petronille Vaweka posits that: “These are fake

politicians. They were thirsty for power, not to help the poor peasant...there is no representation of the people in the UPC, PUSIC, FNI, etc.” She also indicates deep distrust of “intellectual” leaders of the two communities because of their extreme views. International humanitarian workers agree with this point explaining that the extreme views of the intellectuals in Bunia are not shared by the larger population especially outside of the city.¹⁶

Extension of central administration to Ituri district

The wars of 1996-1997 and 1998-2003 sapped the power of the central government to operate on the entire territory of the DRC. Nowhere is this more visible than in the Ituri district, where the armed conflict was ignored and government structures collapsed completely. Neither the *Rassemblement Congolais pour la Démocratie – Kisangani/ Mouvement de Libération* (RCD-K/ML) nor the various militia groups that controlled various parts of the district attempted to establish any kind of alternative administrative structures. Instead, these groups took advantage of existing resources, collecting customs and tax revenue for their own purposes. In addition, they exploited local resources with the assistance of their foreign supporters. The result is that even the most basic services in the district are barely able to function. Civil servants remain unpaid, tax revenue is still not properly distributed and resources for reconstruction are scarce.

Uganda and the DRC signed the Luanda agreement in September 2002, which provided for the establishment of an interim structure called the Ituri Pacification Commission (IPC) which would govern Ituri in the period following the departure of the Ugandan military and the extension of central government authority to the area. After several false starts, the commission was launched in April 2003, one month after the Ugandan army had routed the UPC from the town of Bunia. With MONUC’s help, the IPC established an Interim Special Assembly whose task it was to administer the area until the new transition government was inaugurated.

Simultaneous attempts to create a military command structure composed of all the local militias failed and the IPC was left with little real power to execute its mandate. The structure was subsequently overtaken by events, as the UPC regained control of the town of Bunia in the days following the withdrawal of Ugandan troops. Since then, there have been no real efforts to re-establish administrative control over the region. At the national level, Ituri district is currently represented by fourteen deputies in the national assembly, while the president of the senate, Monseigneur Marini Bodho, is himself from Ituri district.¹⁷

Petronille Vaweka, the former president of the IPC, and a deputy in the national assembly was appointed district commissioner in early 2005 and returned to Bunia to take up her duties. She is an extremely well-known personality in the region and seems to have the respect even of the various militia leaders. She is also openly critical of the transition government, which, she says, is not providing the area with sufficient support,

We send money to the state coffers, but we do not get anything back. The transition government is not doing anything for the district. They make promise after promise, but we do not see anything here. All the public services here are trying to start work again, but they lack the resources. We have to depend on the central government for money, but it is not coming. We need the freedom and resources to do our jobs, but we do not even have paper or fuel.¹⁸

This situation is not unique to the Ituri district. Since it took office in June 2003, the transition government has made few attempts to extend its authority beyond Kinshasa, and most of the country remains effectively ungoverned. However the situation in the Ituri district is particularly acute because the conflict here has not yet really come to an end as it has in most other parts of the country.

Recent developments

Unlike the other belligerent groups in the DRC, none of the Ituri militia groups were represented at the Inter-Congolese Dialogue in Sun City in 2002-2003 to negotiate the All-inclusive Peace Accords. This was to some extent the result of the fact that many of the militias which are active today only emerged once the process was already under way. But it is also because of the fact that the conflict in Ituri was considered a mere sidebar to the conflict at the national level. Although the conflict began in 1999 and escalated between 2002-2003, it was largely ignored by the international community as well as the main belligerents in the DRC conflict.

The RCD-K/ML is the only armed group that has operated in Ituri which did participate in the talks. However, neither the movement nor its leader, Mr Nyamwisi, truly represent the province. Mr Nyamwisi is a Nande from Beni and the bulk of his troops hail from the same region. The RCD-K/ML's participation in the Inter-Congolese Dialogue cannot therefore be considered tantamount to a representation of either Iturians or the armed groups in the region. In fact, it was during his absence from Bunia to attend the Inter-Congolese dialogue that the UPC began its campaign to oust him from the region under the banner "Ituri for Iturians".

This has a number of implications. First, unlike other armed groups in the DRC, none of the leaders of the militias operating in Ituri were ever represented in the civilian side of the transition government. To some extent, this was one of the reasons the conflict lasted as long as it did. Serious attempts to negotiate a peaceful resolution did not begin until well after the Sun City process had already begun. Meanwhile, although various militia leaders effectively relocated to Kinshasa in mid-2003, their demands to be included in the transition process were not met until this year, when various militia leaders were appointed as generals in the FARDC.

This decision was widely criticised by human rights groups, which saw it as a means of rewarding militia leaders who were known to have committed grave human rights violations. Human Rights Watch condemned the appointments of five of the militia leaders, notably, Thomas Lubanga, the founder and leader of the UPC-L, Floribert Kisembo, the leader of the breakaway faction of the UPC, known as UPC-K, Jerome Kakwavu, the leader of the *Forces Armées du Peuple Congolais* (FAPC), Bosco Ntaganda a commander of the UPC-L faction and Germain Katanga, a leader of the *Front National Intégrationniste/Forces de Résistance Patriotique en Ituri* (FNI/FRPI). Although it is certainly true that these leaders should be prosecuted for human rights violations, the same can be said of many of the people who currently hold senior posts in the transition government and the FARDC.

Yet, the Ituri militia leaders are the only leaders of armed groups who have been actively pursued for their crimes. Following the killing of the nine Bangladeshi peacekeepers, the UN Security Council issued a statement demanding that the transition government take immediate action to arrest those responsible of crimes committed in Ituri. This appeal was seconded by the *Comité International d'Accompagnement a la Transition* (CIAT).¹⁹ In a communiqué issued in Kinshasa on 7 April, the CIAT "condemned with the greatest vigour, the assassinations and tortures committed in the last few days, on the orders of the military hierarchy of the UPC - Lubanga and notably the commanders Bosco Ntaganda and Bosco Liganga against combatants who had chosen to render their weapons..."²⁰. It also called on the transition government to "launch, without delay, arrest warrants, national and international, notably against the above-mentioned leaders."

In late March and early April, Thomas Lubanga, the leader of the UPC, Floribert Ndjabu, the leader of the FNI, Germaine Katanga, the military leader of the *Forces de Résistance Patriotiques en Ituri* (FRPI) and Chef Mandro Kahwa, the leader of

Parti pour l'Unité et le Sauvegarde de l'Intégrité du Congo (PUSIC) were all arrested on charges of involvement in the killings of the nine Bangladeshi peacekeepers. They are now in prison awaiting trial. In addition to their reported involvement in the ambush on the Bangladeshis, they are almost certain to face additional charges of human rights violations in the future. John Tinanzabo, the secretary-general of the UPC was also arrested in mid-April, one day after he declared that the UPC was renouncing the armed struggle. According to Thomas Fiama, the deputy prosecutor-general in Ituri district, Mr Tinanzabo, as well as Chef Kahwa are also being pursued on specific charges of crimes that they committed in the past, rather than for general charges of leading an armed group.

That the transition government responded by arresting key militia leaders is certainly a positive development, and has helped MONUC's efforts in the region. However, it should not be seen as indicative of a firm and definitive resolve on the part of the transition government to establishing peace and stability in Ituri. As will be explained below, this is even less a sign that the transition government is becoming more pro-active in dealing with the myriad military and security problems which persist in other parts of the country.

In this instance, the transition government acted quickly and decisively because none of the main actors in the transition stand to lose in cracking down on the Ituri militia leaders. At the same time, the transition government was able to score important points with the international community by responding to its demands for action. This is a stark contrast with the transition government's unwillingness to deal decisively with the crisis in the Kivu provinces last year. In that case, there was far more at stake for the various parties in the government, and taking concrete action was therefore far more risky and complex. As a result the situation in the Kivus was ignored and allowed to fester, a process that still continues to a great extent today.

That many of the leaders of the Ituri militias are currently being sought by the judiciary is to a great extent a function of the fact that they did not participate in the national peace negotiations where they might have been able to negotiate positions in the transition government. This is a reality which is certainly not lost on the militia leaders who continue to pursue the conflict in Ituri. By late April, there were still a number of senior commanders who had not yet disarmed. These include Mr Kisémbó of UPC-K, and Bosco Ntaganda and Bosco Lingaga of the UPC-L, whose precise whereabouts are unknown.

For those who have not joined the process, there is little incentive to surrender. Leaders such as Ntaganda and Liganga understand what fate awaits them and, for the moment, seem to feel confident that they can withstand the military pressures from MONUC and the FARDC. If they are indeed still receiving weapons supplies and logistical support, it is unlikely that they will give up the armed struggle. This represents a serious threat to the disarmament process and stability in Ituri. Although the Ituri region is currently centre stage in the DRC, there is a risk that it will once again be overshadowed by the national transition process, delays in elections and events in the Kivus. It will therefore be up to MONUC, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the *Comité National de Démobilisation et Réinsertion* (CONADER) to maintain the momentum of the process in the region.

MONUC's New Concept of Operations

To address the security situation in the eastern part of the DRC, MONUC established its Eastern Divisional Headquarters in Kisangani to act as the command and control structure and to oversee tactical operations in the east. This HQ became operational on 24 February 2005 and is responsible for the Ituri operations as well as MONUC's operations in the provinces of Orientale, Maniema, Katanga, North and South Kivu.

MONUC has a Chapter VII peacekeeping mandate in Ituri district as well as in the provinces of North and South Kivu. In Ituri, the concept of operations is to deploy MONUC forces in order to establish control over the area, conduct cordon and search operations, protect civilians, support the demobilisation process, prevent the movement of weapons and maintain a constant reaction capability.²¹

MONUC launched several operations aimed at enhancing the security of the region prior to the incident on 25 February in which nine Bangladesh soldiers were killed. These operations focused primarily on the areas around Fataki, Soba, Mahagi and Djebu. On 24 February, MONUC conducted a cordon and search operation at Ariwara, disarming 116 *Forces Armées Populaires du Congo* (FAPC) troops and confiscating 118 weapons. On the same day in another operation in Datule, 30 FNI militia were arrested.

After the incident in which the Bangladeshi soldiers were killed, a task force consisting of Pakistan, Nepalese and South African soldiers supported by Indian attack helicopters launched a cordon and search operation in Loga with the aim of dismantling the headquarters of the *Front des Nationalistes et Integrationnistes* (FNI, a Lendu group). During the operation, between 50 and 60 FNI militia were killed.²² These operations sent a clear message to the militia: MONUC and the FARDC were serious about taking severe action against them – a message further brought home by Ambassador Swing's 13 March ultimatum referred to above.

At present, MONUC continues to execute aggressive cordon and search operations aimed at forcing recalcitrant militiamen and leaders to disarm and demobilise. The result so far has been significant: prior to the launch of MONUC's robust actions and the setting of the ultimatum, only 2,000 militia had been demobilised.²³ By late April, this figure had risen to 11,394.²⁴ It should be noted however, that perhaps because of a lack of precise and reliable information on developments on the ground, these operations have created a degree of controversy. In Ituri and elsewhere, allegations abound of abuse of force by MONUC soldiers and the use of inappropriate armament and ammunition against civilians. In several of the cordon and search operations, there have been a sizeable number of civilian casualties, many of them women and children. In addition, there has been destruction of private property with the result that owners have demanded to be paid reparations by MONUC.²⁵ Nevertheless, it is this author's opinion that although MONUC has been criticised for killing civilians during its operations, the attitude of the general public towards the peacekeepers is fairly positive. Many praise MONUC for its efforts to disarm the militias and say that it has finally helped to bring stability to the region.

Overview of the DCR Process

The disarmament and community reinsertion process (DCR) is a demobilisation process specific to the Ituri district. This process is part of the Congolese government's *Plan National de Désarmement, Démobilisation et Réinsertion* (PNDDR), which is a national programme aimed at all ex-combatants. The DCR process was designed as a sub-plan to respond to the particular situation in the Ituri district in a timely manner. Like the PNDDR, the DCR process includes three partners: CONADER which is a government body, the UNDP and MONUC. The lead organisation is the UNDP, which is responsible for everything from the organisation and maintenance of the transit sites at which the combatants demobilise, to the design and implementation of the projects aimed at supporting demobilised combatants once they have surrendered their weapons and returned to their communities.²⁶ According to MONUC's mandate, it is responsible for providing security at the transit sites set up for the ex-combatants. In reality, MONUC is playing a somewhat larger role, helping not only with transport of ex-combatants to and from sites, but also with the provision of water and fuel to the sites.²⁷

In order to be accepted at the sites, adult combatants must meet a number of criteria. The basic principle of the process is one weapon, one combatant. Persons under the age of 18 who enter the sites are not required to give up weapons in order to be certified as ex-combatants. CONADER has also put in place rules for the disarmament of larger weapons. In exchange for:

- One machine-gun, two combatants are accepted into the site;
- One ATK rocket launcher, two combatants are accepted into the site;
- One 60mm mortar, two combatants are accepted into the site;
- One 82 mm mortar, three combatants are accepted into the site;
- One 75/106mm canon, three combatants are accepted into the site;
- One 107mm rocket launcher, six combatants are accepted into the site;
- One AA12/37mm, four combatants are accepted into the site;²⁸
- 500 rounds of ammunition, one combatant is accepted into the site;²⁹

Weapons and ammunitions collected at the transit sites are registered by UNDP and CONADER staff and stored in safe warehouses. Eventually they are transferred to MONUC storage sites, where MONUC again takes down the registration numbers of the weapons, and determines which are no longer functional. Weapons declared dysfunctional will then be destroyed; the remainder, including ammunition, are transferred to the FARDC.

UNDP is currently operating seven transit sites located in Bunia, Aru, Mahagi, Kasenyi, Nyize, Kpandroma and Aveba. When a combatant arrives at the site, he or she is immediately disarmed, and then receives a kit containing clothes, shoes and basic foodstuffs. The former combatant also receives a once off sum of US\$50 for transport to and from the site. He or she then goes through a sensitisation process aimed at assisting the return to a civilian life. This involves a civics lesson in which combatants are taught principles such as: respect for human life, the property of others, national laws, and the socio-cultural values of others; to live honestly and to forgive and tolerate others; to love and serve the country and to avoid tribalism and regionalism; to adopt negotiation as the only form of conflict resolution and to avoid any type of violence, including sexual violence.³⁰

This process takes between four to five days. With the exception of the transit site in Bunia, the ex-combatants are housed and fed in the transit site for the duration of the demobilisation process. In addition to the sensitisation process, the ex-combatants are registered – a process that includes a debriefing interview in which the combatant identifies himself and the armed group with which he fought. He also indicates whether he would like to return to join the FARDC or whether he would like to return to civilian life and, if so, what type of work that he would like to do. Because many ex-combatants are not necessarily from the region in which they enter a transit site, the ex-combatant specifies the community to which he would like to return. At the end of this process, the ex-combatant undergoes an iris scan which is incorporated into the identification card which he then receives and which he must produce in order to receive subsequent assistance.

Upon their departure from the camp, ex-combatants are provided with an exit kit containing food provisions for five people for one month. This is designed to allow them to feed family members who may be with them. In principle, the combatant should then return to his community and enter into the next phase of the process: reinsertion, for which UNDP is responsible. In this phase, UNDP is to provide each ex-combatant with seed money for a micro-project, such as carpentry or tailoring, to be administered by a non-governmental organisation.

This model for reinsertion of ex-combatants has been applied in many other post-conflict situations. While in Ituri it may be successful, it depends to a great extent on how quickly UNDP can deliver. This is a crucial part of the entire DCR process.

Most ex-combatants are extremely poor and have little to which to return. Their communities have been destroyed by the conflict, and like the rest of the population they have lost family members and property, and do not have the possibility of restarting their lives where they left off. For this reason, the timeliness of the projects is the most important factor in the post-disarmament phase of the DCR process. UNDP has acknowledged that it is behind in the preparation of projects for ex-combatants. Furthermore, the directors of the transit sites only arrived in mid-March and there have been delays in identifying projects.³¹ This means that ex-combatants are more or less left to fend for themselves until such projects can be identified and the administrative procedures to get them started are in place.

This delay is a source of great concern for other humanitarian agencies operating in Ituri. Many have expressed frustration that UNDP did not sufficiently plan for this phase of the process in spite of the fact that the actual DCR programme started in September last year. They also express concern about the sustainability of the DCR process if ex-combatants are not reintegrated and given a stake in the process as soon as possible.³² In this climate of uncertainty, this delay is a major obstacle. While the number of combatants who have disarmed indicates that the DCR process does have critical momentum, it is certain that the various movements are hedging their bets and still have weapons stashed away. Whether individuals chose to use them is at least in part a question of how satisfied they are with the post-demobilisation process, which is meant to provide a viable and compelling alternative to a return to arms. In addition, there is some risk that combatants will grow more reluctant to disarm if they see that those who have are left to fend for themselves – the process could therefore lose momentum. Finally, it is a simple question of trust: combatants have responded to a call to disarm – albeit under pressure – and have been told that they would be assisted once they do. If this trust is broken because the goods are not delivered in a timely fashion, then that trust too is broken and it will be almost impossible to recover it should the conflict start up again.

In the transit camp in Bunia, groups of combatants hang about waiting to be interviewed or to go to a sensitisation session. When asked about what they are doing there, many reply that they are not sure. They have surrendered their weapon and now they are waiting to be given food they say. In the site in Bunia, many of the ex-combatants walk distances of up to 25 kilometres a day to arrive at the site and then have to return home at night because they do not have a place to stay in Bunia. On the way, they are harassed by the FARDC who accuse them of massacring their colleagues.³³

Many of the ex-combatants in the Bunia camp are either from UPC (led by Thomas Lubanga) or the PUSIC led by Chef Kahwa Mandro and Floribert Kisembo, both of which are dominated by the Hema. They joined the fighting, they say, because their villages were being burned by the Lendu and they wanted to defend their families. While they were fighting, they were not paid, but they did have food. “I joined the war because I was a nurse and the hospital I worked in was burned down....I want my micro-project to be a pharmacy and I would like to go back to studying,” says Kihika, a 26-year-old combatant from PUSIC who had just arrived in the transit site that morning. Like many of his companions, he insists that he does not want to go back to fighting. “I have already lost so many years. I do not want to start again. Seven years of war is a lot. We have not achieved anything.”

On the subject of the problems between the Hema and the Lendu, most seem conciliatory, but it is unclear how sincere this is. What does seem clear is that the rank and file that are in the camp have little to do with the direction the conflict has taken, and that most of them joined the groups they fought with in response to the growing insecurity around them. None of them has ever met any of the leading figures in their movements. Many indicate that the presence of MONUC throughout the province reassures them: “If there is peace, we can demobilise.

MONUC's presence helps."³⁴ The same tendency is reflected by Lendu combatants of the FNI.³⁵

The ex-combatants in the camp in Bunia indicate that they are aware of the various programmes that are meant to help them adjust to civilian life. They more or less understand the process, but express doubts about whether it will happen.³⁶ They do not indicate that they intend to take up arms if they are not assisted, but it is clear that they do expect some sort of assistance.

Integration of ex-combatants into the FARDC

Ex-combatants who express the desire to be integrated into the FARDC rather than to rejoin civilian life are placed under the responsibility of the *Structure Militaire d'Integration* (SMI), which is under the jurisdiction of the FARDC.³⁷ The first step in the integration process is to transfer them from the transit sites to FARDC military integration centers, preferably outside of Ituri district, such as Kisangani, Kitona or Kamina. Here they undergo an evaluation process to determine whether or not they are eligible to join the FARDC. Those who are declared ineligible will be considered as civilians and, as such, they are entitled to assistance from UNDP.³⁸ According to one CONADER official, a total of 700 ex-combatants have so far expressed the desire to be integrated into the FARDC. Although the structures are in place, logistical problems and scarce resources mean that the transfer of these ex-combatants to the integration sites is frequently delayed. Such delays mean that these ex-combatants are left to fend for themselves during this period. The FARDC does not currently appear to have the necessary means to ensure that this process is executed in a timely manner and frequently appeal to UNDP and MONUC for assistance in the transport of these ex-combatants to the integration sites. When possible these requests are accommodated (although this is not officially part of either MONUC or UNDP's brief).³⁹

Children associated with armed group (CAAGs)

To date a total of 3,468 CAAGs have entered transit sites in Ituri. CAAGs who are accompanied by family members will be allowed to return home to their families. Those who are unaccompanied will be placed with host families for a transition period. A number of structures including MONUC, UNICEF and international NGOs will be responsible for the follow-up and support for the CAAGs.⁴⁰

Problems with the disarmament process

A certain number of questions and concerns seem to arise regularly. Particular concerns are transport to and from the sites, in particular of combatants who are not located near one of the seven disarmament sites. Often such groups appeal to MONUC for assistance, which is accorded when possible. Occasional delays at transit sites also pose problems. When combatants are turned away from a site because it is full, they are left to their own devices. Sometimes these combatants have travelled considerable distances in order to arrive at the site and have neither shelter nor the means to get food while they are waiting to access the site. This leads to confusion and dissatisfaction on the part of the combatants.

The question has also been raised about whether or not combatants who surrender weapons which are not firearms will be accepted at the transit sites. This question was raised by the deputy defense commissioner of the FNI in Mongbwalu, Raymond Kisani during a meeting with the visiting CONADER/MONUC DCR team. Although there is no transit site in Mongbwalu, 90 FNI combatants surrendered their weapons to the Pakistani contingent deployed to the town on 18 April. An additional 360 combatants had been registered but were not considered as disarmed as they did not surrender any weapons. Mr Kisani appealed to the team to accept combatants who surrendered knives and arrows, arguing that the FNI did not operate only with firearms. In response, Captain

Nguz, a CONADER representative explained that the criteria was clear and that nothing other than firearms would be accepted. He also indicated that the fact that the FNI faced this problem was to a certain extent its own fault, as they chose not to meet the initial disarmament deadline set for 1 September 2004. At that stage, the CONADER was willing to accept combatants into the DRC based on the armed groups' submission of lists of their troops rather than just on the basis of one combatant one weapon. The issue remained unresolved, and several people who attended the meeting subsequently expressed scepticism about the legitimacy of Mr Kisani's appeal. A common interpretation was that Mr Kisani was merely attempting to get disarmament certification for as many local FNI combatants as possible without having to give up the group's stock of weapons.

Disarmament statistics

By late April a total of 7,926 combatants had disarmed, while a total of 3,468 children associated with armed groups had entered the seven transit sites.⁴¹ The largest number of combatants to disarm were the multi-ethnic FAPC who began disarming prior to MONUC's 1 April ultimatum. The total number of disarmed FAPC combatants reached 3,322 by 25 April.⁴² Most of the FAPC combatants disarmed at the transit site in Aru, and it is believed that the bulk of the FAPC forces have disarmed.

This is followed by a total of 2,958 combatants from the FNI who entered the sites primarily at Kpandroma and Mahagi; 1,862 from PUSIC who concentrated in Kasenyi and Bunia; and a further 1,374 from the UPC-L who concentrated in Nyizi and Bunia. The armed group that has barely disarmed at all is the UPC-K, of which only 60 combatants have participated in the disarmament process.⁴³

**Table 1:
DCR Summary as of 25 April 2005**

Armed Group	Men	Women	Male CAAGs	Female CAAGs
FNI	1,528	13	1,083	334
FAPC	2,558	126	452	186
FPDC	61	0	19	0
UPC/L	1,167	10	173	24
UPC/K	53	1	4	2
PUSIC	1,593	2	266	1
FRPI	405	38	752	112
FNR	261	3	46	3
Others	105	2	9	2
TOTAL	7,731	195	2,804	664

Source: DCR team, Bunia, April 25, 16:00

Deployment of FARDC to the Ituri district

The first integrated brigade of the FARDC – known as the Ituri Brigade - is composed of soldiers from the *Forces Armées Congolaises* (FAC, the former government forces)⁴⁴, the *Mouvement pour la Libération du Congo* (MLC), the RCD-G, the RCD-K/ML, the RCD-N and elements of the former Mayi Mayi militia. Although there are other brigades and FARDC units composed of elements from various former belligerent groups, the Ituri Brigade is the only existing unit which has been through an organised process of integration and also the only one to benefit from training by the Belgian military.

From the start of the process, the intention was to deploy the Ituri Brigade to Ituri district, and the brigade arrived in August last year.⁴⁵ Led by Colonel Ekuba, who

hails from the former Congolese army, the brigade is now deployed in several areas in the district: Tche, Kafe, Bogoro, Aru, Irumu, Kole and the greater Bunia area.⁴⁶ In a number of areas, the Ituri Brigade has started joint patrols with MONUC – in April, the two forces began collaborating on joint “cordon and control” missions aimed at rooting out reluctant militia. The most recent such mission was in mid-April, when MONUC and FARDC forces launched an operation in Katoto, where the UPC remains active.

A second FARDC brigade is currently gradually being deployed to Ituri. This brigade is composed largely of soldiers from the RCD-K/ML led by Mbusa Nyamwisi, who is now the minister for external commerce in the transition government. The RCD-K/ML controlled Bunia as well as parts of the district on two separate occasions, and was eventually ousted by the UPC. In addition to RCD-K/ML troops, the brigade is composed of ex-Mayi Mayi elements as well as ex-FAC elements from Katanga.⁴⁷ The presence of former RCD-K/ML troops in the new brigade has the potential to become a problem given their history in the area. During its time in power, the RCD-K/ML repeatedly switched alliances between Hema and Lendu, playing off leaders against one another and creating rifts in both communities.

During the Inter-Congolese dialogue in Sun City and before the RCD-ML was ousted from Bunia by the UPC in 2003, Nyamwisi had fostered close ties with the Kinshasa government. The Kinshasa government was interested in acquiring more influence in the region, and used the RCD-ML to attain this goal. At a time when the UPC was gaining strength, the Kinshasa government supplied weapons, training and FAC uniforms to RCD-ML troops and their Lendu, and Ngiti allies.⁴⁸

People in Bunia have expressed concern about this issue: “In the second mixed battalion there are a lot of *Armée Patriotique du Congo* [APC, the army of the RCD-K/ML] soldiers who fought here...Has their spirit changed, have they been reeducated?”⁴⁹ Ms Vaweka, the district commissioner expressed similar concerns: “I do not have too much confidence in the second brigade. It was integrated, but it has not been trained. They themselves are militia members. If we are not careful this will lead to a new source of insecurity.”⁵⁰

There is also some risk that elements in the transition government may act independently to take advantage of the current situation and attempt to establish control over mineral resources in Ituri, using the newly-deployed FARDC troops as their own quasi-militia group. Although there is no evidence of this dynamic as yet, the intended deployment of the second FARDC brigade to the northern town of Aru – a mineral-rich area previously controlled by the FAPC has raised some questions.⁵¹

Meanwhile, of additional concern are widespread reports of growing indiscipline in the ranks of the FARDC, who are irregularly paid and poorly supplied.⁵² Military authorities on the ground indicate that even when the FARDC are paid, the amount is insufficient to allow a soldier to eat three meals a day. Consequently there are increasing reports that the troops are beginning to prey on the population in order to sustain themselves. “The FARDC and the police are very welcome in Bunia, but if they do not have their pay, they will become worse than the militias. We used to see them going to the markets to buy food. Now we do not see that anymore. To drop soldiers into the population without means, that is a failure.”⁵³

Ignored by the central government for years, and sidelined in the Congolese peace process, the extension of central government authority to Ituri since the transition government took office in June 2003, has been more or less limited to the deployment of military and police forces. If these forces now become predators on the local population, they could well antagonise ex-combatants and combatants alike. If this situation worsens, it could represent a very serious

threat to the tenuous stability in Ituri. Humanitarian agencies operating in the region also express concerns about the fact that FARDC troops are not properly paid and supplied and question their ability to handle the difficult security situation in the province: "This is the best-educated brigade in the country and still there are many problems..."⁵⁴

An incident in late April amply demonstrates how quickly things can slide into chaos. FARDC troops deployed into the southern Ituri town of Kakaba, an area controlled by the Ngiti ethnic group which is grouped in the *Forces de Résistance Patriotiques en Ituri* (FRPI).⁵⁵ Because of a misunderstanding, an Ngiti soldier fired shots at FARDC troops, who returned the fire. The situation quickly deteriorated and led to an all-out battle between the two groups. Ultimately, MONUC intervened in an attempt to halt the fighting. Before this happened, however, a panicked FARDC appealed to an international humanitarian organisation for help in evacuating the families of FARDC soldiers from the nearby town of Bagoro.⁵⁶ The FARDC on their own would have been unable to restore calm. The dynamic is changing rapidly, and there are concerns that for reasons of inefficiency, as well as increased predatory behaviour, the FARDC will evolve into a new threat to the region: "If things continue like this, the FARDC will have to be considered an armed group of their own."⁵⁷

In addition to harassing the civilian population, there are also reports that the FARDC have been molesting ex-combatants who have already deposed their arms. Several ex-combatants indicated that during such incidents, the FARDC soldiers told them that they are exacting revenge for the killing of several Congolese police officers in May 2003.⁵⁸ While these incidents are difficult to verify, it is very likely that there may be some resentment on the part of the FARDC soldiers who did not benefit from the type of support the ex-combatants are due to receive from UNDP - although they too have been fighting for the past seven years. This type of resentment is likely to be even more pronounced among the troops of the second brigade which has not yet been trained; in contrast, the soldiers of the Ituri Brigade were given the choice of whether or not they wanted to continue in the military. Either way, this is a dangerous new dynamic in an already volatile situation.

Conclusion

There is no doubt that the disarmament process in Ituri district has made considerable progress in the last two months. A total of 11,394 adult combatants and children associated with armed groups of an estimated total of 15,000 had been disarmed and registered at transit sites throughout the district by 25 April 2005. To a great extent, this success is the result of more robust engagement by MONUC forces in the district and of the firm ultimatum issued by MONUC's SRSG Ambassador William Swing in March. Security has been re-established in the district capital of Bunia and, to some extent, in outlying areas. For the moment the disarmament process is maintaining momentum, and the number of combatants who surrender their weapons can be expected to increase steadily.

Nevertheless, while the number of combatants who have disarmed would indicate that the process does have critical momentum, there are very real concerns that only some of the weapons in Ituri will have been surrendered once the process is over. The widespread feeling is that combatants all have more than the one weapon, which they hand in at the transit sites.⁵⁹ According to Vaweke,

*...there are a lot of weapons in Ituri. People may have between three to four weapons back at their homes. This is why we need to give people jobs and get them involved in the development of the area.*⁶⁰

While convincing people not to fight is certainly the most desirable outcome of the process, the fact that people continue to hide weapons is an indication not only that confidence in the process is still shaky, but also that many are still hedging their bets. Although MONUC is continuing to conduct cordon and search

operations aimed at capturing combatants who refuse to disarm voluntarily, it does not have the resources to mop up all the weapons in the district. Meanwhile, the FARDC indicate that they will conduct house-to-house searches for weapons. However, not only is this time-and-resource-consuming, but it could easily result in the outbreak of new fighting between the militias and the FARDC.

Despite some success, the stability of the region is tenuous. A number of issues could still undermine the process. A primary concern is the support ex-combatants are due to receive from UNDP after they have disarmed. This process has met with serious delays, leaving ex-combatants without immediate alternatives to earn a livelihood. This could lead to widespread dissatisfaction and disillusionment with the process.

The continuing military activities of the UPC-K and its refusal to disarm are an additional serious concern. This not only acts as a disincentive for combatants of other armed groups to disarm, but it could also antagonise ex-combatants who still have access to weapons.

Although the presence of the FARDC's Ituri Brigade is generally welcomed, these troops do not enjoy sufficient logistical and material support to properly sustain themselves in the region. Increasingly FARDC soldiers are looking to the civilian population for food and, if proper support is not forthcoming, it is likely that these troops will become increasingly predatory. The deployment to the district of a second brigade which includes troops associated with one of the main ethnic groups involved in the war in Ituri could also ignite further conflict.

Moreover, the transition government in Kinshasa has little at stake in the resolution of the situation in Ituri. It is therefore not expected to commit additional resources to establishing peace and security in the district. There is also a risk that, as long as the administrative structures of the district remain weak and without adequate resources, the FARDC commanders and troops may themselves become engaged in the exploitation of the region's vast mineral resources. This would have disastrous consequences for security in Ituri.

Finally, the regional dynamic of the conflict in Ituri remains unresolved. It is unclear how Uganda and Rwanda will react to the dismantling of their proxy forces in Ituri district. Although Uganda's direct involvement in the region has been heavily scaled down since the withdrawal of its troops in April 2003, the UN panel on the arms embargo in the eastern DRC has documented its continued involvement in the plundering of the district's resources. Although Rwanda's implication in the province was never as intense as that of Uganda, it had and may still have close links to UPC factions.

Who's who in Ituri?

Union des Patriotes Congolais (UPC)

Thomas Lubanga is the leader and one of the founding members of the UPC. Mr Lubanga formed the UPC after falling out with the RCD-K/ML in which he held the position of minister of defense. The UPC is led by the Gegere - Hema from the northern part of Ituri – and purports to represent the interests of the Hema/Gegere communities. With the help of the Ugandan army, the UPC seized control of Bunia from the RCD-K/ML in August 2002. It later fell out with Uganda and subsequently concluded an agreement with the Rwandan-backed RCD-G which included provisions for military and political cooperation. As a result, Uganda ousted the UPC from Bunia in March 2003, two months before it withdrew its forces from the Ituri region. In the wake of the withdrawal, the UPC again seized control of the city, sparking heavy fighting and massive human rights abuses. Mr Lubanga was offered the post of general in the FARDC, but has since been arrested on charges of involvement in the killing of the Bangladeshi peacekeepers. Two of the UPC's military leaders - Bosco Ntaganda and Bosco Liganga remain at large and in command of UPC troops. The UPC's links with the RCD and Rwanda reportedly also remain intact, with the latter reportedly continuing to provide military assistance to the UPC.⁶¹

Parti pour l'Unité et la Sauvegarde de l'Intégrité du Congo (PUSIC)

Pusic was formed by Chef Kahwa Mandro in February 2003 after he and Mr Lubanga fell out. PUSIC is dominated by Hema from the southern part of the Ituri district. Mr Kahwa was arrested in Bunia in early April, also on charges of involvement in the killing of the Bangladeshis.

UPC-K

The UPC-Kisembo is a splinter group formed by Floribert Kisembo, a former senior member of the UPC, in December 2003 after he failed to oust Mr Lubanga from power. Like other Ituri militia leaders, Kisembo was appointed to the position of general in the FARDC in 2005. He currently remains at large and his whereabouts are unknown.

Front National Integrationniste (FNI)

The FNI is a Lendu militia grouping led by Floribert Njabu. At various times the FNI has had alliances with the Ugandan army as well as the RCD-K/ML and the Kinshasa government. Njabu was also arrested following the killing of the nine Bangladeshi soldiers and is currently in prison in Kinshasa. The military leader of the FNI, Etienne Lona, surrendered in Bunia shortly thereafter. The FNI is the largest of the Lendu militia groupings.

Forces de Résistance Patriotique en Ituri (FRPI)

The FRPI is led by Dr Adirodo and composed of Ngiti who are Lendu from southern Ituri. The FRPI are a distinct group, but have a close alliance with the FNI in their battle against the UPC.

Forces Armées du People Congolais (FAPC)

Led by Jerome Kakwavu, reportedly a rwandophone from North Kivu province, the FAPC are a multi-ethnic force which is based in the northern town of Aru. The FAPC has switched alliances on many occasions, siding with the RCD-ML, the UPC and the Ugandans at various times. Kakwavu was one of the militia leaders who was accorded a post as general in the FARDC, a position he now occupies. The FAPC was the first group to start voluntary disarmament prior to MONUC's declaration of the 31 March ultimatum.



Forces Populaires pour la Démocratie au Congo (FPDC)

The FPDC is composed mainly of Alur and Lugbara from the northern towns of Mahagi and Aru. It was formed to counter the UPC and is headed by Thomas Unen Chan, a former member of the Zairean parliament.

- 1 Stephanie I. Wolters is a freelance journalist and currently writes the Economist Intelligence Unit's DRC Quarterly Country Report. Between 2001 and 2003 Stephanie was Chief News Editor of MONUC's Radio Okapi in the DRC. The author would like to thank João Gomes Porto for his comments, suggestions and editing support.
- 2 15,000 is an official MONUC estimate of the number of militiamen operating in Ituri. Other estimates range between 15,000-25,000.
- 3 This is the only brigade in the FARDC which has been through the reintegration process. The brigade was trained in Kisangani by Belgian military and was deployed to Ituri in August 2004.
- 4 In general terms, and prior to Belgian colonisation, the Hema (mainly pastoralists) and the Lendu (mainly agriculturalists), co-existed peacefully. During colonial times however, the Belgians favored the Hema over the Lendu, giving them senior administrative posts and better access to land. Even after independence, the Hema occupied senior administrative posts, owned large tracts of land and controlled business interests in the province. Although there were occasional outbreaks of violence between the two communities over fishing rights and land, these were usually quickly resolved, and never reached the level of violence as experienced in the last years. In this regard see Human Rights Watch report on Ituri, July 2003, Vol. 15, No 11, p 18.
- 5 Ibid.
- 6 Uganda's official explanation for its military presence in the DRC was that it needed to secure its borders against the Allied Defense Forces (ADF), a Ugandan rebel group which was known to operate from eastern DRC.
- 7 Human Rights Watch, op cit, p 6.
- 8 Interview, Bunia, April 2005.
- 9 Interviews with combatants, Bunia, Mongbwalu, April 2005.
- 10 Interview, Bunia, April 2005.
- 11 Interview with Lendu intellectual, Bunia, April 2005
- 12 Interview with Hema intellectual, Bunia, April 2005. "Negative forces" is the term applied to the loose grouping of Interahamwe militia and Congolese Mai Mai.
- 13 Ibid, Lendu intellectual.
- 14 Ibid, Hema intellectual.
- 15 Interview with Jean Chrysostome Bujo Buki, president of civil society in Ituri, Bunia, April 2005.
- 16 Interview with humanitarian representative, Bunia, April 2005.
- 17 Initially the district had fifteen representatives, but one seat was lost to another district when one deputy, Petronille Vaweke, was appointed to the post of district commissioner in early 2005.
- 18 Interview with Petronille Vaweke, Bunia, April 2005.
- 19 The CIAT is composed of the representatives in the DRC of the five permanent members of the security council and of Belgium, Canada, South Africa, Angola, Gabon, Zambia, the EU, AU and MONUC.
- 20 CIAT communiqué, April 7, 2005, on www.monuc.org
- 21 Henri Boshoff, military analyst, Institute for Security Studies.
- 22 Ibid.
- 23 Ibid.
- 24 This figure includes adult combatants as well as children associated with armed groups (CAAGs).
- 25 Letter from private individual in Katoto addressed to MONUC demanding \$30,000 in damages for the destruction of a home which had been forcibly occupied by UPC militiamen who had vacated the premises at the time of the destruction of the house.
- 26 Interview with UNDP representative, Bunia April 2005.
- 27 Interview with MONUC representative, Bunia, April 2005.
- 28 Information flier with conditions for disarmament, Conader.
- 29 Meeting of FNI and Conader/MONUC DCR team, Mongbwalu, April 2005.
- 30 Lesson at the Bunia transit site for ex-combatants, April 2005.
- 31 Interview with UNDP, April 2005.
- 32 Interview with representatives of humanitarian agencies, Bunia, April 2005.
- 33 Interviews with UPC-L and PUSIC combatants, Bunia transit site, April 2005.
- 34 Interview, Bunia transit site.
- 35 Interview with FNI combatants. Mongbwalu, April 2005.
- 36 Interview with UPC-L and PUSIC ex-combatants, Bunia April 2005.
- 37 Interview with CONADER representative, Mongbwalu, April 2005
- 38 Interview with UNDP official, Bunia April 2005.
- 39 Interview with UN representatives, Bunia, April 2005.
- 40 Information provided at the FNI/DCR team meeting in Mongbwalu, April 2005.
- 41 DCR summary as of 25 April, 16:00 hours, MONUC

- 42 Figures per group comprise adult combatants and children associated with armed groups. For exact breakdown, see box.
- 43 Ibid, DCR summary.
- 44 This is the term used for the Congolese army from the time that Laurent Kabila seized power in May 1997 until the formation of a transition government in June 2003.
- 45 Interview with military authority in Bunia, April 2005.
- 46 Interviews with MONUC and military authorities, Bunia, April 2005.
- 47 Interview with military authority in Bunia, April 2005.
- 48 Human Rights Watch, Report on Ituri, July 2003, Vol. 15, No 11, page 8.
- 49 Interview with religious authority, Bunia, April 2005.
- 50 Interview in Bunia, April 2005
- 51 Interview in Bunia, April 2005.
- 52 Interviews in Bunia, April 2005.
- 53 Interview with religious representative in Bunia, April 2005.
- 54 Interview with humanitarian representative, Bunia, April 2005
- 55 Ngiti are Lendu from southern Ituri. 1,307 FRPI combatants have been to transit sites, of which 846 are children associated with armed groups (CAAGs).
- 56 Interview with humanitarian representative, Bunia, April 2005
- 57 Ibid.
- 58 Interview with ex-combatants at transit site, Bunia, April 2005.
- 59 Interviews in Bunia, April 2005.
- 60 Interview in Bunia, April 2005.
- 61 Interview in Bunia, April 2005